



THE EDGE OF EQUINOX

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Prologue

The Edge of Equinox

The Ancients and the Elders

Tir na Nog's expanse of hills and valleys glistened in the morning dew. The mysterious center of wind, water, earth and sky swirled and glowed as the sun rose and kissed its skyline. There were few sleeping in this land of antiquity. Powerful chariots already were being run on the ledges by the cliffs of the ocean's edge, and fires had been built so that the air had an aroma of crackling pine scent mixed with wood.

Females figures in armored clothes were meditative on the shoreline beside the water. Others, awash in breeze and light coverings, moved about the rocks on the hills with intention, in dance. Cities in the horizon were seen and glowed with precious metal. Their houses roofs were made of feather natch.

All colors were in play in this dawn worship. The degrees of blues hummed, sharpened by the outline of the figures in acrobatic motions. Some were on the grasses of the planes, and others were leaping in bounds high towards the clouds. Children, waif like in appearance, danced and jumped around the fountains and waterfalls that were abundantly splayed across the landscape of this arena.

One waterfall, flanked and decorated by green trees and stones of deep grays and blues, echoed a shadowy reflection of the figure of a woman. From the mist surrounding where the water crashed to the rocks, she emerged. To describe the full beauty of this woman would otherwise extend beyond normal description, as she was not human. The birds surrounding her sang a heavenly song, swiftly their colors moving from branch to branch around her hair, which flowed as a halo

effect, golden and glistening in the sun. She raised her hands, as if to praise an unknown deity. The mist from the water surrounded her, and she seemed to lift in the music of the surrounding forest. The air was heavy with a sweet honey like aroma, and the multi colored flowers grew unbridled where she walked.

This was Tir na Nog, and this was Danu, mother of the land of youth, embodying earth and its fruits. Like her name, she walked with the movement of water, and she shone with the light of the youth, although she was older than the air itself. The mist was beside her almost as an embrace, strengthening to those who were fortunate to be in her presence.

Danu was strength and love to her people, the people of the Tuathe de Dannan. The island of Tir Na Nog was an ecclesiastical existence, a place only the most valued of gods and some mortals were able to remain. Mag Mell, the river of honey, was a path towards the island, but even this famous passageway had been removed from the lips of the mortals after time. With the coming of St. Patrick, Tir na Nog had been reduced to legend and fairies to the people of Ireland. The grandmothers had told their stories of when the sun would shine on the ocean, the passage of Mag Mell would return, but it remained but a legend in the days of ships now. To those who still believed, there were the fields of gold, the music and harmony of the light people, the land of immortality, and the true fountain of youth.

Not without its warriors, however. The land boasted the most mighty, brave and skilled of those fighters, all trained from a young age to defend the ancient world in the art of the fight. The weapons used by these warriors were individually forged, none alike. Male and female counterparts moved in motion in the ancient moves of stance and practiced ritualistic poses to perfect their art.

Even Danu, the most peaceful mother of this land, walked with a spear in the land of the Otherworld. There were still enemies of the people of light and youth, and she was the greatest of the warriors to carry one. Hers had been forged of the silver gold on the feast of luna by the goddess , her crown crafted to be reversed to a golden helmet in the need of defense. The green meadows before her beckoned, and the wind whirled about her in obedience.

As she walked, the mist followed her. She moved towards the hilltop and stood in the wafting breeze, absorbing the power of its intensity. The air was heavy with the smell of orchards, and it pleased her to be part of the harmonies of nature. She looked to the eastern sky, and took great joy in the meeting of the sky and the sea, and the sun that was rising upon it. With the sun on the seascape enlightened the path of the Mag Mell, the only way to Tir Na Nog. The days that brought such a path were varied and few more and more, as the Otherworld faded from the inner workings of the human's paths.

She was interrupted by the clopping of horse's hooves behind her, and she turned to revel in the sight of young Maeve, coming to greet her, cloaked lightly in a turquoise brushed robe, trimmed lightly with silver threads, reflecting as a blade in the glinting light.

"Hello Maeve," she said, as the younger woman came to her. Maeve, her dark, deep eyes glowing with promise, bowed respectfully. Danu continued.

"Can you bring me news of the celebration? Will the people be gathering soon to celebrate the feast of Lunasa? We must prepare for the ripening of fruit harvest, and especially the middle tree of the isle."^[1]_[SEP]Maeve rose from her genuflect. She averted her eyes from looking directly at Danu, as such a signal might show disrespect.

The ammonite shells around the neck of Maeve shone in the morning sun, and so bright was it, it formed a halo around her head.

“Yes, Danu, the Tuathe de Dannan are preparing for festival, and great is the power of the equinox. Praise to those that give us this celebration,” Maeve said, and she stood tall, absorbing the sun energy.

“But, Danu,” she continued, “there is unrest in the house of Peel. The younger son, Mordrach, has requested word with you and the king. He seeks to celebrate with the forged weapons of the ancient Credne, of the Tre dee Dana, but my lady, he speaks to move outside of Tir na Nog. Will you speak with him?”

Mordrach. Danu had always had misgivings about this child, now an adult, and she breathed out a heavy sigh. Son of the Morrigan, looking beyond the island’s blessings.

“Yes, he may seek my presence today, Maeve of the Lir. I will entertain the thoughts of young Mordrach.”

Maeve bowed and retreated, with great reverence, “I will tell him you are willing.” She moved away from the mighty Danu, averting her eyes respectfully.

As Danu turned from Maeve and looked out over the skyline and city dwellers of Tir Na Nog, she felt her heart heavy. She did not want to challenge the young Mordrach. He had high capacity for knowledge and was gifted in seeing towards the future, but he was prone to argument, especially with the elders of the ancients. Many had said he retreated to the well often, drinking from the immortal spring and then chanting the ancient runes from the darker underworld dwellers. She was not immune to the danger of these actions and the possible consequences to not only Mordrach, but the disturbance of the people and the peace of Tir na Nog.

The well of Tir Na Nog came into view, as she walked toward it. Danu was its keeper, as she was the island’s mother. Hers was a deep and persistent watch to insure the protection of the ancient

well. It was forested deep in the middle of the island, surrounded by lush trees, fields of animals unknown to the human worlds, and the armed druids. Over the well was an overhanging tree, it's silver apples bowing towards the water, which was visible to the eye. The opening of the well was wide and surrounded by stones of such from moon rock to darkest graphite, and the water had an opulence equivocated by a mirror. As Danu came into view of the well, she saw the druids, hiding, and nodded to them as they bowed her path towards the water.

"Druids," she called to them, "is it true that the young Mordrach of Peel is here at the well often?"

One diminutive form darted out from a rustle of ferns beside her, bowing his assent towards her.

"Great Danu, it is true that he visits the well," the druid answered her, continuing, "he is the child of Morrigan sisters, and reminds us that he is here to drink of the water by right. He looks into the water after and chants ancient runes, lady, none that I have heard from this space. It is a strangeness to the druids, and many of the younger ones are frightened by his words, so unlike those of Tir na Nog."

Danu nodded to him, speaking, "I thank you, Cumber, for the information. I will speak to Mordach on his words and has to why he uses them by the well of knowledge and immortality." The druid's eyes blinked rapidly, and his gestures spoke of his thanks, but then of his fear as he looked behind Danu.

"I would think, Danu, that you would come to me first," a steely voice behind her glinted.

Danu turned, the mist surrounding her growing thicker and protectively shielding her by her consternation at the voice. She raised her sword that was served as both a scepter and blade in front of her, the reflection blinding in itself, forcing the recipient to shield his eyes and retreat from the glare.

“Do you not genuflect before Danu, Mordrach of Leer? Your insolence will not be tolerated,” she boomed in a towering voice, the echo of which could be heard by all those surrounding.

Mordrach, tall and dark, sword in hand, fell to his knees, his head bent towards his chest, appropriately.

“There is no disrespect towards the great Danu, I assure you, lady. My sincerest and deepest apologies for my irreverent nature,” and he waited on bended knee for her to approve of his ascent.

She quickly beckoned him up, and he rose. Taller than most the Tuathe de Danann, he kept his hands in front of him, his long, dark hair framing a face that was chiseled in its artistic beauty, alternatively very much a face of the Tuathe people. His eyes, however, did not hold the lightness and humor of the people of Tir Na Nog. His was a brooding, intense look, a look that waited for the beholder to acknowledge its depths.

Danu was reminded of a cheetah from the plains where the humans hunted in the desert. He waited for her to speak, but she continued to look down at him, as she was much taller than he, and needed to feel his aura to continue.

He had dark green surrounding his head, and light green about his torso, and surrounding this as a whole was a deep purple.

“Your surrounding light speaks of war and distrust, Mordrach. What is troubling you during the equinox, speak, son of Morrigan and house of Leer,” she stated.

“I walk a lonely road, Danu,” he said, apologetically, “as you know, I am a seer. I feel the need outside of Tir Na Nog to speak to the human people of the water that will bring them greatest knowledge and immortal life as we have here. May it be that I can find my way to these people who need my help.”

Danu listened to his smoothly stated words and his deep, infectious voice, and she watched him as he kept his eyes averted from her gaze.

He kept his sword lowered and behind his back, but she noticed his grip on it was strong as he was speaking to her. She sighed. He fostered distrust in her in every action.

“Mordrach, do you not know that humans cannot visit the well of Tir na Nog? Only those that have their own hint of immortality from the human race are invited to walk Meg Mell and come across to this blessed land. What is the use of these people being invited if they are not able to tread this path?”

“With all given respect, great Danu,” Mordrach artfully replied, “do the people not need dreams and aspirations? They are a people who lack vision.”

Danu listened to his ready and easy response, while looking at the hidden druids that surrounded the open well.

“You would do well to know that the druids have told me you speak the chants of the elders of Tir Na Nog, of those before Tuathe de Dannan came to inhabit this land. You speak dark, brooding chants. What is the purpose of these songs? Why do frighten these good druids and children who tell me of your doings? What is your purpose to bring up the hidden words of hunger and pain from the ancients? “

Mordrach was silent, looking down, and then, looking towards the horizon, spoke in haunting tones.

“Would you have me ignore the voices I hear to bring news of Tir Na Nog to the people outside of the Otherworld?”

Danu raised herself even taller, and spoke clearly to Mordrach, reverberating the air with her speech.

“The chants of the ancient underworld dwellers bring danger to those peoples. Your intention is not that of harmony, Mordrach, and it sends a message not from the Otherworld. You may not cross the Mag Mell, especially during the Equinox feast...the disturbance will be felt greatly among us,” she boomed, impatiently yet gently swerving from him.

“They war outside the Otherworld. Would not my knowledge of the island of immortality assist the human race? “and as he spoke, it was as if the air around him grew dusky. His complexion was shaded, secret in its obscurity.

She turned again, and spoke in sorrowful tones.

“The shadows of their wars and fighting stem from the influence of the ancient dark arts that still are present there. Feeding them more of these without the knowledge obtained from Tir Na Nog will make them angrier and more obscurely focused on the disharmony elements. Do not nurture this growth, Mordrach. It cannot be given to a people already blind to the light. No, you may not leave.”

Mordrach seemed to brood in silence, and crouched down low beside the well, which glistened in its depth of knowledge.

“As you will have it, Danu,” he murmured. [1]She continued, “You would do well to celebrate the collide tonight, and join in the harmonies, can you come to the great fire this evening?”

“I will. Yours in Tuathe de Danann, Danu, “ and he was gone in a swirl of what seemed like wings and gusts.

“You would do well to be with those who love the land and the elders here, Mordrach. I fear for those whom you bring the knowledge of the springs of youth, it disrupts the balance already,” she mused, looking after him with worry. She touched the circlet around her head, and caressed the underside of pointed golden armor thoughtfully. It sparked beneath her touch.

Later that evening, all of Tir Na Nog had gathered, winged fairies, druids, the elders and those of the land were present to watch the ceremony. Danu's voice addressed them all, speaking over them all with arms extended.

“Just as the wildfire in the natural world burns away the dead of the land, fertilizing it to grow, making way for new beginnings, we gather together for courage and for the passion of our love of harmony in Tir Na Nog. We gather in prayer and in hope, and we join our thoughts to those in the Inner-world, as we tread the fires for the peace and balance of both worlds,” she stated, and waved her arms high over her head, the mist and the wind rising to blow down upon they who stood in front of the long line of burning coals before her.

“Trust in your own power and you transformation of what can be,” she boomed, and young and old, the people of Tir Na Nog began to walk over the burning flames, singing the ancient songs of the mists and of the water that surrounded the island. The water rose in the waves surrounding the island, but the walkers were not harmed and they continued, singing, towards the ocean, towards the passage of where the Mag Mell would join the shore, where flames would burn auburn on reflection of the sea. They walked into the water from the flames, and there were those who danced on the shoreline, singing and raising their hands in celebration to the equinox. The stars in the sky seemed to shoot in an endless spray of the dance of harmony. The fire was brought to the ocean's edge and the people continued with their musical dance beneath the equinox's sky.

Danu smiled, and felt the joy of the people. She watched over them all, gathering her strength from the new beginning.

A screech halted all, and on the separate side of the fire stood Mordrach. By his side stood a thin, spindly woman, of angular proportions, and beside her, a creature somewhere resembling a mix off half dog, half otter, a “water hound”. This creature was large and dark with orange flippers and a horrifying screech that broke through the celebrations like a ripping knife.

The people stopped, and all gaiety was halted. The stars even stopped in their circle of the sky, and horrific wails started coming from the children.

Mordrach, his spear held before him, changing hauntingly as he lifted himself skyward. There had appeared a singular wing behind him, and he continued the chanting as he looked down upon the people.

Danu moved quickly and effortlessly in front the people, blocking them with her largeness. Her bright surrounding light was blinding, and the people moved away from her as she willed.

“Mordrach,” she hissed, “what is the meaning of this evil? Why are you disrupting the people of this harmony?” She sheltered the people behind her with water and light, enclosing them in the sound and the island’s coastline.

“I will leave this place, Danu,” he bellowed, and he rose higher, meeting her height with his own levitation.

“I will bring the powers of the old ones to the people of the inner world! I will teach them to learn and obey the greatness of the elders of the under dwellers. The knowledge that you have all ignored for centuries here. The knowledge that will bring power to them and myself, and all those who wish to live forever in the human race,” he rasped towards her, swooping closer to her light filled presence.

She brought her hand quickly to her head and flipped the coronet of jewels backwards and over. It efficiently evolved into a helmet, the spikes traveling in front of her ears, and she could feel

the air cool around her. Her sword flew from behind her to her hands by her calling it, and the amulet on the top of it glinted blue, green and diamond like in the starlight that.

Mordrach swung his arm towards the sky, and with his movement the wind burst into discord around him, wailing. His wing beat slowly and seductively as the heat from the fires below him rose in its fanning. He was high above them all, surrounded by dark mist, fire and moonlight. He dove downwards towards Danu, the heat being close to her protective shield of mist, and she moved her sword towards him. Lightning like, he chanted unknown words, and grasped the sword in a parry like movement with fire ensconced arm outstretched. He grabbed the jeweled end of it, and quickly broke off the jeweled handle, grasping it to his head like a crown.

Danu, shocked, called back the sword towards her, but the amulet handle remained in his hands. He turned it towards the moon, where the light, mirror like, reflected onto the water where the sunlight of Mag Mell would strike in the morning. It laid open a moonlit path, lightning like, crackling, over the water, and he held the glanced at Danu, racing towards the path. The angular woman and the sea dog followed him, racking the musical stars in an electric rip in the harmony, and raced across the path over the water.

Danu and the people of Tir Na Nog watched him in horror as he ripped open the jeweled expanse of the night sky. He turned, holding the amulet to his chest, his dark wing behind him, and bellowed to them all, “Three times the sisters will curse all of Tir Na Nog. I will bring the old world to the inner world. I will take over and destroy the Tuathe de Dannon! You will see, I will move mountains to take the earth over, where I am king, king over all, with mercy towards none. Your worlds collide and I will rule over all. I destroy all of Tir Na Nog and revive the ancients. Beware, great Danu and you children of the light!” and he rose as he spoke.

Danu summoned the remaining edge of the sword and sent its energy and spear end towards Mordrach with all the force she held. She sent with it the fire from beneath her, and it hissed towards him as he edged away from the Otherworld and towards the Mag Mell. Her spear hit the edge of the sword he had stolen, and it shook the amulet loose from his grasp. She swooped low down under it, and caught the piece, now only with two stones in it, that of the blue and green. The diamond stone shone in Mordrach's palm, and he threw his head back, laughing, as he left the world of Tir Na Nog over the ocean, the diamond glinting in the equinox.

"Beware, Danu. I will return, and you will fear me over all the Tuathe descendants" he hissed in a serpent-like sounding wail, and he was enveloped in darkness and night, and the people cowered below Danu's great shadow. She did not waver, and waited for him to be vanished. She finally turned her back to the gaping chasm in the sky and spoke not only to herself, but to her people.

"You shall return," she murmured, "but there are warriors in every land, Mordrach, who look for the light of the peace people. It is you who should beware," and she turned toward the Tuathe de Dannan and leaned to protect them from the screeching line across the sky, her own powerful aura of sun and moonlight mixed, holding the amulet towards her heart with great power and purpose.

Chapter 1 – Moving In

Chapter One: Moving In

Present day/Mandel Hill, New Jersey

The clear brush of summer's sun outlined the trees against the cornflower blue sky. It was unseasonably cool, and Jack was glad for it. Carefully putting his end of the couch down, he brushed the back of his arm against his forehead, wiping sweat and dirt away with frustration. Stopping to breathe, he surveyed the two in front of him and stepped back. Jack's father let out a cry from the center back of the couch.

"Taking a break there, son?" he choked out, and dropped the couch on his foot.

"Goddammit.... Son of agoddammit!" he croaked, and began hopping around, holding his foot while he leaned against the porch railing. Continuing with explicative, he glared accusingly at Jack, who smothered a laugh. He then stopped, concerned, and ran up the steps to assist his obviously challenged parent.

"Dad, I am so sorry, are you okay? Oh, my god, are you alright?" he queried, watching his father continue to rub his foot and take off his shoe to investigate the damage done.

"HELLO, I AM on the other side of the couch!" yelled Jack's brother, Andrew, his eyes indignant as he carefully placed his part of the furniture on the deck. He placed an arm on the doorframe, leaning his six-foot frame against it. He showed no concern for his father or the couch, just annoyance at the entirety of the situation.

"What is up with you two?" Andrew muttered, whipping his phone out of his back pocket and scrolling casually through it. His irritation was masked by his interest in whatever he was posting at the moment.

“Sorry. A need for inhaling,” Jack retorted back at him, and he took a moment to inhale more than oxygen. It was a scene he wished he had his camera for, and his 16-year-old mind reached towards the many facets of moving day other than the actual physical move. Which had so far been a comedy of errors, as far as Jack was concerned. His brownish, wavy hair fell into his eyes, and he pushed it in a hurried fashion aside, watching them both.

Native of California, his father was a renowned biotechnologist for the University of Berkeley, and had been asked to teach at N.Y.U in June. In a whirlwind of activity, he, his mother (also serving on the Berkeley faculty for cultural anthropology) had made a move out to the suburbs of New Jersey known as Mandel Hill. What swarm of insane activity that followed had been indescribable, and they were in the midst of packing, unpacking, moving, and carrying for a good three weeks. And now, they were here, in New Jersey, at an old Victorian house on a secluded street. It had been a flash of relocation, and Jack stood still, soaking up the summer sun on the wide planked porch that spoke reminiscent of inhabitants from earlier years.

The house choice still bewildered Jack, and the 200-year-old well in the front boasted secrets no person from the west coast could have even fantasized over. There was an apple tree and a plum tree in the back yard, and swing that breezed back and forth in beside the large bay window off the porch. There was definitely a charm about it, and when they had recarpeted the stairs, little boxes of cash and star-spangled campaign pins from the McKinley election framed the time frame of its earlier inhabitants. Nothing like the contemporary, completely up to date house that had been the family’s home for 15 years previous.

It was a complete 360 for everyone, and Andrew made it known that he was not in favor of it, specifically in his senior year of high school. His sports career was in shambles, so he said, and he couldn’t wait to go back to California for college asap.

Jack was also jarred over the school issue, and socially, it was a nightmare. His group of friends, contrasting to his brother, had been a small and carefully chosen group from the chemistry club. He knew that money was tight with his parents both working university jobs, and therefore tried not to complain as much as his brother. Alternative to Andrew, he was driven early on to be exclusive in his academics. Andrew was kicking the door frame of the house, and their mother came out, her hair piled on her head and pinned with two pencils.

“What’s up gentlemen? How are my laborers doing?” and she laughed wiping her hands.

“Hey, Mom, “ answered Andrew, putting away his phone and sidling up to her, he formed a mouthpiece with his hands towards her ear.

“Andrew here. HELP! SOS. STARVING ANDREW. Dealing with numb nuts one and two, and desperately needing sustenance. Mayday, Mayday. Like food. Possible that anything is happening in the kitchen that has to do with food? Cause I am DYING here with these guys.”

She laughed again, and pushed him away, grinning at their father.

“ I think I am going to order pizza, because I keep getting caught up putting things away. It’s like...” She trailed off, tilting her head, twirling yet another pencil in her hand.

“YES, PIZZA!” Andrews pulled his arms in to his chest in victory.

“Like what?” Jack pushed the end of her unfinished sentence forward.

She frowned, slightly, and put her hand on her hip.

“Well, I can’t really say. It’s a weird feeling. Like the house has....a personality. I mean, I could swear that I put the glasses in the side cabinet, and then, well, they were in the front cabinet. And, the door to the back deck, it seems to open whenever there is a breeze. Almost like, well.... like it’s.... alive. The house.... Like there already is a system here.... I don’t know,” and

she scratched her head, looking over at them all, and then, laughing again. Jack’s eyes widened, and he looked over at his father, who was scratching his leg from a bug bite.

“Anyway, let me order something so that you all don’t fall over.” She walked back into the house, yelling back, “Be careful with that couch! It was my aunt’s!”

His father’s tall, lanky frame sat down heavily on the couch, and he rubbed his foot, his gray hair on end from sweat and grime. He sighed.

“I was afraid she would say that. I hate this couch. Okay boys, let’s go,” he said, moving back to the other end of the sofa. Jack moved to help, probing his father for a reaction.

“Wow, what’s that about? You think Mom’s, okay?” Jack looked around and riveted his eyes on the wind chimes that were swaying on the left of the door. The swing moved back and forth in an easygoing invitation. Jack involuntarily moved away from the couch and toward it to sit. His father didn’t seem to notice, and Andrew watched them both, exasperated.

“Can we eat?” Andrew puffed, and he groaned, “I am never going to get lunch.”

Jack’s father picked up the front end, and motioned his head to Andrew towards the other.

“We have to get the couch in first,” he demanded of Andrew, who rolled his eyes, and who then turned to Jack.

But Jack had already made his way upstairs to his room, the front door swinging behind him.

The house heaved a sigh, almost expelling the door towards Andrew and his father. They entered carefully with the antique couch, leaving the door ajar behind them, and the cat skittered her way inside. The summer wind whipped lightly backwards, after, and blew the door shut with a decisive thump.



Chapter Two- Click

September had hung heavy and ripe over New Jersey, a fruit that brimmed with promise. Jack's world swam wildly between the golden, hot remains of the summer and the beginning of high school.

East coast living was more structured than the banks of California. His teachers seemed more driven by timelines and commitments, and passed this urgency forward. Jack struggled with the intensity of his advanced classes and the newness of his peers, but finding respite in the world of his camera lens. It offered him a window to hide behind in many high school situations, and it also gave him the capability to join lots of groups that needed a photographer. His parents had given it to him for a birthday gift, with a small book on aperture and lenses. It was a newer version of a Pentax, but it gave him a feeling of safeness that he didn't have in his iPhone pictures. The very satisfying aspect of taking a picture appealed to his sense of control. Clicking, shuttering, zooming. It finished and completed things, and he liked that very much.

Click. My homework. Jack zoomed in on his calculus. It was dusk already and he was sitting in his attic bedroom, squinting under the low intensity lamp. He looked again at the light fixture.

Click. My light. How old was this thing? He rubbed his hand over the base of it the lamp, one of the artifacts that had been left in the house. The shade was Tiffany in character, a detailed conglomeration of violets and greens, forming a flower image at the center top. The bottom was so dusty, Jack doubted that it had ever been cleaned. Ever.

Click.

He zoomed in his camera on the lamp and switched to black and white. The flash almost made a lightning bolt against the aluminum lamp bottom. He picked the camera up and looked at the digital image. Not a bad shot. Very vintage. Almost eclectic, and.... wait.

He strained his eyes again to look at the image on the display of the camera.

What was that?

He squinted, and moved the camera very, very close to his face.

What???

He focused on the picture and held his breath. How was this possible?

There was an image around the lamp, somewhat like a small halo. And inside the halo was....

OH, my god.

The reflection in the picture jumped out at Jack, and he almost fell back off his chair. His calc book crashed onto the floor, and his papers flew helplessly to settle on the stained wood.

It looked like a

Jack began to sweat.

No. Impossible.

He grabbed the camera firmly and whirled around the attic. It was essentially a room with wood floors, an old carpet, a desk, a big rocking chair, and Jack's bed.

No ONE else.

No other PERSON.

He trembled, and his eyes flew open like saucers....

Except WHOEVER'S FACE WAS IN THIS IMAGE.

OH MY GOD, what was that? How could this be? He looked around the room. He pushed the desk aside, ducking to see if anyone was hiding there. Was someone or something hiding there?

Dear god.

“Hello?” he whispered, looking around, and stomping on the floor;

“Hello?”

His voice echoed slightly back from the floor boards, and he jumped. Turning, and frantically panicking, he ran out of his room and shut the door behind him, standing with the camera on the other side of the landing, gasping for breath. Then he raced down the stairs, breathing a mile a minute to the second floor as if he had been chased. By...He held onto the side rail. Oh, wow. Oh, wow. This was really crazy, and the floorboards creaked beneath him indignantly. He stomped them back in frustration, and took a deep breath.

What the hell was that in the picture? Was there someone up there? Did he miss something earlier? Is there a picture I didn't see earlier? He dared not to look at it again alone, and he made a decision to not be alone at this moment of crisis.

He banged on Andrew's bedroom door.

“Go the hell away!” he heard.

Nice.

He banged again.

No answer, but loud music.

He banged again, and almost fell backwards from the force of the music as Andrew opened the door, his headphones on.

“Sup?” Andrew yelled loudly, looking at him in mild annoyance.

Jack grabbed the headphones and pulled it off one ear.

“I need your help, “he yelled, against the sound barrier that had evidently been shattered.

Andrew pushed his chest away from him, and made an irritated facial expression.

“Hey. HEY, stop,” he said, pulling down his headset completely.

He finally stopped to pay attention to Jack, and his expression changed to one of slight empathy. He tilted his head.

“Hey. What’s up? You ever come out of your cave, man, what are you doing down here?”

Andrew looked at him beneath his long blond hair worriedly. He opened the door to Jack, who hurried inside in relief, clutching his camera.

“Why do you have headphones on and the music is so loud?” Jack queried absently, and Andrew rolled his eyes.

Jack flopped on the inverted chair. The bright blue metro of his brother’s bedroom was a stark contrast with the house’s character, and he glanced at the sixty or so pictures of sports players that hung all around the room.

“I am listening to Hayley Williams and Arctic Monkeys. I’m very diverse. ”

“Could you possibly turn off the music for a brief second?” Jack pleaded.

Andrew touched his phone. There was a deafening silence. Andrew stood quietly. He leaned over to the floor. He threw a hockey puck at Jack. Then another. Jack yelped, dodging a head wound narrowly.

“Spill it. Why do you look like you just ate Mom’s health food?”

“Funny. Andrew,” he paused, and then continued, “do you ...do you believe in... like...supernatural stuff?”

Andrew’s eyes widened.

“Like ghostbusters? Uh, NO. And you need a doctor.” Andrew threw a pillow at his brother.

Dodging the pillow, Jack lowered his voice. He continued, earnestly.

“No, I’m serious. Check this out,” and he put his camera on the chair, directly beside his brother.

“Look at the digital image, Andy.”

Andrew glanced at him sideways, “Really? I was intent on the power button.”

“Gosh you are funny,” Jack retorted sarcastically, continuing, and bringing the camera close to Andrew.

“Look,” and he flashed the picture at his brother, who was now leaning over his shoulder. Andrew studied the frame for a while, and then he whistled.

“That is very cool. How did you get the light to form a circle around the picture of the man in the back of the lamp?”

Jack waited, drawing a breath. He took another and slowly formed the situation to his sibling.

“Andrew. That is what I am telling you. There is NO picture. In the back of the lamp.”

“What?”

Jack nodded his head, watching his brother.

“Whoever.... whatever this is.... it’s not a picture. It’s IN MY ROOM. Currently. Like now.”

Andrew blinked his eyes, unbelieving.

“Let me look again.”

Studying it for about 20 additional seconds, he suddenly stopped.

“Holy crap!” he yelled, and grabbed a hockey stick, bolting up the stairs to Jack’s room.

Jack stood for a second in shock and then barreled after him at full speed.

“CRIPES, Andrew, what are you doing? Andrew?” Jack raced after him.

Andrew turned with the hockey stick half way up the stairs, brandishing it like a weapon.

“That. Is. A Picture. Of a MAN. There’s a man. In your room. And if you are pulling some sort of funky photo shoot trick, I’m gonna kick your ass,” hollered Andrew down the stairs, and he stopped on the landing outside the attic door opening.

“Okay, OKAY, I don’t think we have to....” Jack stopped at the top behind his brother.

The brothers stood adjacent, hovering. Their breath was heavy and labored, as the fourth floor of the house was a narrow and steep climb up.

“Jesus,” Andrew breathed out, and finally kicked open the door.

“Hello. Hello!” yelled Andrew, waving his stick in front of him as to sideswipe an attack.

The rocking chair seemed to be chuckling at him, and Andrew turned defensively toward it, then back to the lamp. He stayed in a stance, breathing heavily. He looked like a Jedi, Jack thought, and seeing that there truly was no one up there, Jack relaxed a little, and curbed a laugh.

“Andy, there’s no over here,” said Jack, and he tugged his brother’s arm, “seriously. I don’t see anyone. Maybe....maybe it was a camera fluke, I don’t know.”

“Jack, there was a MAN in that picture, NO DOUBT. You think he left out the window?”

Jack looked skeptically at the tiny window that led to a small ledge on the top of the house.

“I highly doubt it. Really. Let’s just go. There’s no one here.” Jack breathed a sigh of relief, but was incredibly strung out. He nudged his brother.

“That picture indicates otherwise,” Andrew breathed out, still riveting from back to front with the stick. He did then put the stick down, and looked under the bed quickly. Jack sat down in the rocking chair. He continued, running his hands through his hair and around his neck carefully.

“I think that maybe... we’re spooked or something. I don’t think anyone’s here,” he said, finally, and stood up. He tugged on Andy’s arm, and began leading him out of the room.

Was that it? He glanced quickly around. He questioned his own perception at this time, and glanced around. The room was an antique lover’s dream, with 1920’s skiing pictures framed on the walls, snow pictures of the street from the twenties on the sideboards. Pictures of people sleigh riding and skiing. There were curtains on the windows that Jack’s mom had put up, checkered red and blue. It was a rustic place, and matched the braided rug. No indication of anything superhuman. Just. Old.

“What’s that smell?” Andrew said, placing his hockey stick against the side of Jack’s bed.

He sniffed and looked around.

“You wearing cologne?”

Jack looked at him with a raised eyebrow.

“It always smells like that. Like a pine scent. I can’t place my finger on it.”

“Smells like pines and sandalwood, And, uh, beer.” Andrew looked at him suspiciously.

Jack crinkled up his nose and snorted.

“Yeah, that’s what I’m all about, Andy, a like a big ol’ tall one doused with some pine.

Oh, my god, REALLY? Yum. Thanks for that, ” Jack rambled, sarcastically rolling his eyes to the ceiling. He had to say, though, Andrew was right. He smelled it too.

The ceiling. No lights on the ceiling, but the boards that ran across it looked older than the house itself.

Andrew followed his gaze.

“How old you think these boards are?” Andrew queried.

“I think they are really old.”

“You think as old as this damn house?”

“I think you should speak nicely about the house; I feel like it hears us,” Jack said, cautiously, and the rocking chair moved in assent. He drew in his breath and moved toward Andrew, both of them inching out the door.

“You want to sleep in my room tonight?”

“Bottom bunk?”

Andrew eyed him.

“It’s yours.”

“Thanks, Andy,” and they both made their way down the stairs carefully.

“Hey, Jack,” Andrew said, and waited for a response.

“Yeah?”

“Boo.”

“Yeah. You’re a riot.”

Chapter 3 - Delia's Journey to the World of the Living

Delia gripped her hand around the railing of the ship, squeezing it so tight, the granular rivets of the wood made marks on her hands. Try as she might have, her long dark hair hung whirled about her a halo, whipping back and forth in the October zephyr of spray and wind. She watched, squinting, as the coast of Derry faded slowly into a miniscule speck of green and blue. The Emerald Isle winked and twinkled in the sunlight, sparkling its goodbye, and she gripped the rail harder, trying to blink back the tears that would come.

There was no picture she held; it was a time before pictures were transported. She had packed a small painting of her parents and brother, and a tapestry bag was her only claim to belongings. She had little to claim, and even less to bring of necessity. She wore small pendant earrings with an aquamarine stone dangling, exactly the color of her eyes, her mother had said. Those eyes flashed, twinkling not just with tears, but with spirit and knowledge, a “deep knowing” the neighbors would say of Delia. Ignoring the quick jittery movements of her stomach on the ship, she gently moved towards the foremast, looking back and around her, feeling the excitement and the anxiety of the passengers to accompanying her to the new world. She closed her eyes, and gripped the railing yet again, steadying herself as she was flooded with a current of knowledge from those around her.

The “knowing” would do that. It would remove her from the present, and almost force her to assimilate the downpouring stream of emotions from those who wanted her to listen, those who were guiding the present. She felt at ease with it now, but, as a young child, this had been confusing and frustrating until she realized the gift was hers alone.

She remembered the playtimes, running with other children, and then the rush of feelings, the cold air, and the immediate need to stop whatever she was doing to obtain the information that was insisted she get.

She would see faces of people, colors around them, and she knew quickly that the other children didn't see them. There were some that would come back many times, and others that were freshly present, She learned not to be afraid of them, they were never harmful. Mostly light filled, excitable beings that rejoiced in the fact that she was aware of them. They would talk to her, pray with her, ask her to communicate to the living people, show her pictures and places. She knew when they were coming, the lights would start to take shape and the air would grow cold, even on summer days.

She knew she would receive them now, and she braced herself for the deluge of light and voices that began to swim around her on the deck. She had learned quickly not to share with others. First would come little ones, they had no restrictions.

This one was a bright young one, circling Delia presently. She could feel its colors of gold and yellow and silver circling. She stopped trying to catch it, and just remained still, waiting for the being to load the information it needed to her, waiting for the request.

“Why are you leaving, Delly? Why are you going?”

“I am doing as I am told, “ she whispered to the blond-haired girl figure, ethereally balancing on the side of the railing, watching her.

“Who told you, Delly? Who? I remember this ship. Will you tell my mamma I remember this ship? I know you will. Tell her I am so happy, Delly. I know she is sad; I see her in her kitchen, and she weeps so. Will you tell her?”

“Yes, I will, Kyra. I will write her and tell her you talked to me on the ship. Do you want to tell her anything else?”

“Tell her to look in the tree outside the house, I left my cat animal there. Tell her that it’s still there, and that I miss playing with her, but I am happy here. I visit her all the time. And Matty. Tell them both.”

Delia smiled at the orb of happy light that balanced before her.

“And Delly, you have the charm with you? The one that is the color of your eyes? Did they tell you to bring it? To the new land? Do you have it? I want to see!”

There was a stir of the others that were around her, one very dark one, hiding beneath the quarterdeck even came close to see. She waited until she saw that the other passengers were not watching her, and she moved into the wind and spray. The others came with her, and she could feel their excitement building.

Delia reached into her bag, feeling for the cloth wrapped piece, the energy of it which pulsed with a life all of its own. She carefully pulled it out, feeling the power of the triangular form.

The little one called Kyra danced very close, and watched with great intensity as she opened the wrappings around it. When it was open, there was an audible gasp from the beings that were around Delia, and she moved to lift it to the sun.

The tribeca of the three sisters was an ancient Irish symbol, but what she held in her hand was more than a symbol. One large blue stone surrounded by smaller jewels of green and light blue and aqua were all embedded into its intertwining knots, and she felt the inscription that was raised on the back, remembering the words and the circumstances upon which it had been bestowed. Raising it to the sun, she repeated the words-

And there was a blinding flash, and the beings looked on in awe as it radiated a glow of colors that seemed to cradle them all together. There was sense of power, deep, brooding power, but yet, also a sense of peace, and Delia cradled it in both her hands. She repeated - and the pulsating lights retreated into her palms, almost feeling as though she had absorbed the lights. Her fingertips tingled with the power, and it was as if she was lit from within.

Kyra oohed, and moved back from her. Delia heard a voice, and she gulped air, summoning her greatest strength of temperance, and wrapped the amulet up quickly with the velvety cloth.

The others dissipated. Delia worked the cloth around the piece again, and slowly put it back into the bag. The strength she felt when she held it was much, and she was loathe to remove it from the air and water, where she knew it obtained its pulse.

Exhaling with excitement, she removed herself from the world she had just crossed, and looked around. They were completely at sea now, and the human side of her stomach heaved with waves of nausea. The Irish Sea lurched and bucked, and she steadied herself, looking out to the horizon.

She had been entrusted with this gift, and she did not take it lightly. Her stomach lurching again, she chewed the sprig of parsley she had brought with her in her pocket, knowing it would relieve some of the sea sicknesses. She recalled the three days prior, in which she had been called to this mission.

The plaid of the dress she wore was worn thin by wear, and she pulled the wrap around her shoulders tightly. The wind cut through the fabric, chilly even in the sun.

She remembered walking from the cottage to the hill. She remembered she heard the voices speaking to her from the other side, and she stopped to pick herbs and listen. They would

come in a rush, either the visions or the beings, and she knew to wait for them and become the vessel upon which they would communicate. Sometimes they would show her places and people, and other times they would just tell her remembrances and guide her. She knew that she was preparing for something more that day, as the voices had been surrounding her with great intensity even before she awoke.

The dolmen of Aghacliff was where she had ended that day, and she remembered the strong pull of the voices toward it. Legends had been given that the dolmans, great structures of stone with mossy coverings, were passageways to the world of Tir Na Nog.

The whirling of wind on that morning, and the deepening of the September dawn behind the stone structure made her quickly take in a breath. She knew she was being called. She could feel the quickening of the air, and the voices around her urged her to intake.

A blinding flash, one that threw her backwards, propelled by surges of wind and water, and she caught her hand beneath her, holding her up. She looked furiously around, alarmed and frightened by the intensity, shielding her eyes.

Her heart beat so rapidly that she clutched the bodice of the dress, heaving with exertion. The mist was surrounding her and she blinked her eyes, wiping them with the back of her hand to clearly make out the semblance of what was coming in to view. An aqua ring of light was emitted from the cave, and there was a figure inside it, white and silver, scarcely recognizable in human form.

Delia gasped as it had moved toward her, and the figure of a lady outstretched its long fingers to lift her up from the grassy surrounding. She could feel the energy and the cool moonlike streams pouring from the hands, and it flooded her with light and energy, draining her of fear. The woman was a gleaming giant of sorts, with hair that streamed blue and silver and

gold, no wings to show, but above the ground nonetheless. She was almost levitated off her feet. The figure seemed to speak in musical tones and waves, and Delia was, transfixed as she spoke to her.

“Delia of the County Cork, you are a seer of great strength and vision. I am Danu, of the otherworld. You, young Delia, you are able to see many from the otherworld, so you have been chosen of light. Do not be afraid.”

Delia bowed her head, replying, “I am not,” although she trembled as she did so, glancing at her feet to avoid the light.

“Delia, you are to bring the gift of Tir Na Nog to the hidden three sisters in the new world. There is need of the power it holds. There is need of its light there, there are many that need its strength. The three stones combined can open the gates to Tir Na Nog. Can you do this task? Can you take the gift of the otherworld as transport? It is highly coveted of the evil Mordrach, as the stone it bears carries great power. He stole the diamond stone from the tip of my sword many years ago, after opening the gates of the Mag Mell with the three together. With force, I retrieved the earth and water stone. He still holds the remaining stone of the sky, and he looks to gather power, the three stones, and return to Tir Na Nog to destroy it. He will succeed, if he is not stopped. The concluding of Mordrach will take time, and it will be only accomplished through the unity of the Morrigan Sisters against him...and now, one of the sisters resides in the New World, America. Your lineage will produce another, and together three can combine to defeat him.”

Delia managed to murmur, “As you say shall be done. I am a servant of the masters of Tir Na Nog, great Danu. I am reverent to you and those you represent.”

“I watch you, young Delia. Many from the Other side come from vast distance to seek your guidance and wisdom. You have been gifted with otherworldly sight and power. You believe in the unseen order. You are to take the talisman to connect the Great Shift. They cannot travel here, but you can bring this to connect them to each other.”

Delia bowed almost without thinking.

“What you say I will gladly do, Danu of the Tuatha de Danann.”

“It will bring them to the portals of Sidms, and they will gather the energy and light from Knockfierna on the night of Samhain. This is a very great task, but you have shown yourself worthy, small Delia. Your gift puts you on this journey. Shine your truest light bravely, Delia.”

And again, the flash of light, and the goddess was gone. Delia remembered how she had opened her hand and seen the triumvirate amulet, marveling at how it had appeared in her hands. Why she had been chosen to carry the tip of the very sword of Danu was overwhelming in and of itself, but it was now hers to protect and carry. She prayed to Saint Brigid over the amulet, and waited for God to show her the path she needed to take when she moved forward. It had a beautiful stone in it, mesmerizing to see. She looked closer at it, and it seemed there was a glint of a shadow. She saw the figure of three woman inside, as if in a dance. She blinked, and it seemed they were gone. She seemed to see them again, but it was hard to discern in the sunlight. But where was the third stone? If she had the amulet with the water stone and Mordrach had the sky stone, where was the stone of the earth?

She was a learned women for the time period, not just in her connection with those who had passed, but in knowledge. She had taught the villages in County Cork for many years, and was a prolific reader. She had devoured books at an early age, consistently looking toward accumulation of more knowledge.

Before she was to arrive in New York City, she had written many months in advance and been accepted as a librarian in the newly built New York Public Library. This was a great honor for a woman who was immigrating, and she was truly pleased beyond belief to be including in the momentum of such an establishment. The letter accepting her for this employment was in the same bag as the amulet, and she clutched it to her waist, together a source of strength on the boat that carried her to the land of the free and brave. She was to stay with her aunt, who ran a boarding house near to the library, and since it was 1912, she would be escorted to work easily.

She knew that mentioning the “seeing” or the amulet would result in being ostracized from society, as well as put in jail. She was fully aware of the privacy in which she must be surround herself with in order to accomplish the mission she had been charged with, and she hugged her shawl around her tightly.

She felt a sensation of the spirits leaving her, and she sighed. There was still was one who was hiding behind a barrel on the deck, and she turned toward it, letting herself be open so that it would bestow its needs upon her.

“What do you need, little one?” The small figure came into the view of Delia. She could feel from its energy it was a child, and how excited it was to see her.

“Miss Delly, I have to tell you to meet Miss Caroline. I have to tell you this. Danu told me to tell you this, and to take the amulet to her, she will know what to do with it. You can’t let it out of your hands, Miss Delly. Be very careful, she says Mordrach has many workers, and he will try and take it,” she earnestly flew around Delia’s head, circling her with warmth and excitement.

Delia smiled, and let the little one wrap her hands around the bag holding the amulet in awe.

“Many thanks, little one, you may advise Danu I will guard it with my life.”

“Miss Delly, she says that is what you must do. I will tell her. There are paths to the island in the new city you are going.”

“I will be careful, little one.”

The spirit assented, nodding, and was gone quickly. Delia completely exhaled, drained from the energy and seasickness that had flooded her senses. It would most likely be better to stay on the deck, and she looked around to anchor herself somewhere that looked stable. The waves and the wind bucked the boat up and down, and her stomach did many twists and turns. She faintly heard a man playing an accordion, and listened, enraptured, as she sailed through the uncharted and flawless turquoise sea that was to bring her to her destiny. The bag was warm in its power, and she felt a surge of energy towards a life that she knew would connect the perilous journey to the ancient people of Tir Na Nog.

Chapter 4= The New York Public Library 1912

Delia stared in awe at the large lions outside the library flanked her passageway. Just the walk down Fifth avenue had been awesome enough, but now, privy to the beautiful new structure that housed approximately 2.5 million books and items already, she was absolutely astounded. The marble facade of the building was detailed in an ornate fashion, like nothing she had ever seen from Ireland, ever. Walking up the stairs of fifth avenue, into the New York Public Library, she read the plaques that adorned its entranceway, and marveled at the architectural genius that had constructed this incredible building.

The Beaux-Arts Main branch, was the largest marble structure in the United States in 1911. To be a part of this amazing patronage was awe-inspiring. She had heard that the first week it opened, that May, there had been over 250,000 patrons in the building. She was honored to be serving as one of the first librarians there, and could not believe her good fortune in securing employment in Manhattan during a time when women's jobs were scarce and mostly labor typed. As an immigrant and woman, she knew that she would not be able to vote anytime soon, but she saw and was privy to many an earful on the streets for woman's suffrage and voting. Delia always walked with the amulet in her bag, and today, she felt it's power pulsing as she entered the magnificent library. She drew her breath, looking around. It's power, the structure itself, was so shocking in its magnitude.

As she walked into the main room, with its polished mahogany tables and stunningly ornate ceiling, the atmosphere was breathtaking. There was an elaborate display of extremely high ceilings, with a painting of the sky in the middle. It was a proponent of study just to be in the room, and her breath came quickly as she turned and met with the most revered Dr. John Shaw Billings, founder and most eminent librarian of the library.

“Miss Delia Macintyre, it is an absolute pleasure to meet you,” he booted out, extending his arm and hand, warmly, continuing, “how far you have come to be part of this monumental piece of history!”

Trying to cover her lilting Irish that would make its way into the conversation, she curtsied and responded, “the pleasure is uniquely mine sir, and I am so grateful for the opportunity to work in such a place.” She brushed back a piece of the black curls that kept peeking out of the chignon she wore, and continued to speak, “and I canna tell you how much I will work to be considered one of the valuable librarians you have here, “ and she curtsied again.

Dr. Billings took out a monogrammed handkerchief and wiped the sweat from his brow, as the summer was not quite over, and pushed back the gray receding hair. He carefully touched his lip, and she noted a scar upon it. Delia knew that not only was this man the head of the library, but also the great surgeon of the civil war, and the successful entrepreneur who had great influence at John Hopkins Hospital in New York City. His unassuming manner belied the magnitude within the man, and she could see, with her inner eye, a white light emanating from the aura of Dr. Billings.

This soul had designed the architecture for the library, combined with its seven floors of books and great room . He had done this in conjunction with the influential men of the time, had also developed the most rapid delivery system of books to get into the hands of those who quested for their knowledge. To meet such a man in the reading room was heart stopping, and she clutched her bag, with the amulet inside, to her hip.

“Ad astra per aspera, “ she quoted to him, and she blushed under his admiring gaze.

“Well, Miss Delia, the fact that you are quoting some Latin after just getting off the boat from Ireland does more than convince me that you are the young lady to assist my staff. *Dat deus incrementum*, “ he responded quickly back to her in Latin, humbly bowing his head.

Delia was overcome by the event, but she followed him into the great reading room.

“And how old are you, Miss Delia, “ he asked her pointedly, “ and where are you staying in this great city of ours? You know, I’m from Indiana originally, and it’s important to have a safe place to put your head down at night, especially after a day of work here, where all sorts of people will have your ear. This is a circulating library, ma’am, one of the first of its time. “

“Sir,” she stated, “I am staying with family in the boarding house located in close by, run by my Aunt. She has offered me lodging indefinitely, so I’ll not be needing any assistance there,” she added, and she smiled at him.

“But you will be needing an escort home, young lady, which I will provide, “ he boomed, continuing officially, “We have a few young priests who have come here to study all times of the day, and I will be happy to have them walk you to your house.”

“I am much obliged, sir. You have been so kind.”

“I have a wonderful wife and five children, and I would be very nervous if one of my daughters would be walking home by herself in New York City, Miss Delia. Please take this as a rite of passage, ma’am,” he stated, with great courtesy and a slight bow.

“I will, and obliged I am to you, again, sir.”

“Now, we are in the main reading room of the library. We have books delivered here to our patrons in less than seven minutes. There are over one million books here, and so to be a librarian at such a facility will require tremendous grace, expertise, and education, of which I see you have all three. Miss Malone, “ he called to a very tall woman behind the front desk, “ I

would love for you to meet and escort Miss Delia in the instructions and ways of our great institution.”

“Yes,” said the tall woman, and she moved from the one side of the great circulation desk to stand beside Dr. Billings. She was a good six inches taller than he, and moved in a graceful, gazelle like manner. Her brown hair was swept up in the chignon of the day, and she had large, intelligent gray-green eyes. Her quite demure was overshadowed by her intensity. When she looked down at Delia, who was, indeed all of 5 foot three, there was a gentle and warm acceptance of a book-learner, and Delia almost audibly sighed in relief. Here was a woman she could learn from and trust.

“So nice to see you again, Dr. Billings, and it is my pleasure to meet you, Delia. What part of Ireland are you from, dear?”

Delia curtsied. “County Cork, ma’am.”

“Well, if I am knowledgeable in my civic and economic geography of that area, there are not many libraries in Ireland. You must be a very intelligent young woman to be placed here, and I am glad to have you. My parents are both immigrated from the Emerald Isles. Bless you, young lady, let’s get started!”

“I will leave you to it, then, Miss Delia, you are in good hands with Miss Malone, here, she practically runs the place, “Dr. Billings nodded towards Miss Malone, and continued, without halting, “I will be sending an escort for you today at 5:00 p.m. to walk you home. It was my sincerest pleasure to talk to you both, and I will be checking in with you, Miss Delia, later this week,” and he made a courteous, small bow, and retreated, out the front doors.

Delia had removed her hat, and she followed, in wonderment, the tall Maud Malone. She walked quickly and efficiently, and Delia found it hard to keep up with her, both mentally and physically.

“Do you have a writing implement to take notes?” Delia was asked of Miss Malone. When she had shaken her head “no” the young woman whisked around a nearby desk, and handed her a pad of paper and a solid ink fountain pen. This was the first time Delia had seen anything like that, and she was excited to use such a writing tool. She scribbled with it furiously as she walked around with Maud, taking copious notes.

She was taken to the third floor, to the Rose Reading room, which was 52 foot tall, with ceilings of painted skies, and 297 foot long. She was escorted additionally to where patrons requested materials from the Millstein stacks, the storage facility located under Bryant Park. She could scarcely contain her excitement and awe. She watched as researchers from all over the country moved between them, looking and searching for books and items. Miss Malone proved to be an excellent teacher, going through each process of procuring books and looking for them, cataloging them, obtaining them from the stacks, and returning them. She was, however, quite frequently interrupted by people in need of assistance. Miss Malone patiently and carefully walked them through the particulars of how to obtain their items and where to go. Delia was inspired by her unflagging persistence to do the right thing by each and every person.

Additionally, she went through the methods of courtesy to patrons, how to greet each one, how to assist and have them find their “niche” in the library. As she wrote copious notes and walked beside the tall Maud Malone, she was introduced to other librarians in the various different parts of the library. She noted that it was crowded already within, and that the workers were very, very busy. The amount of people in and out of the library varied from young to old,

and each library aide was an integral part of their process of discovery. In wonderment, she watched as the librarians smiled and helped and assisted each of them, whirling in their business of books like bees in a hive.

As she stood in the middle of the dazzling third floor McGraw Rotunda, looking at the Edward Laning murals of histories of the recorded word, she felt as if she was floating. It was there, amongst the circulating people and the assistant librarians with Miss Malone that she received the download of cool air. She stopped, and, looking around quickly to see that Miss Malone was occupied and that she, Delia, was alone next to the painting of the recorded word, she received the message, leaning against the mahogany polished side table.

It was a whooshing, swishing side mind, that pattered and crackled around her. She held tightly onto the table, feeling the information enter her state. Being used to receiving information from the Other Side, she knew enough than to fight or not let them come through, but held on and forced herself to breathe slowly.

The air around her began to swirl, and she felt the spirits whispering answers come to her in wisps. The first was a woman, in a long black skirt, with severely drawn back hair, coming toward her quickly.

“Beware, Delia,” the spirit whispered to her, wavering in front of her slowly, her eyes darting back and forth, “Delia, the Mordrach has made his way here to the New World, and he seeks YOU. He seeks to steal the amulet back, as he can no longer return to Tir Na Nog without it. He knows you have been advised to hide it with the here, and he follows you many different paths.”

Delia's heart lurched into her throat, and she clutched the bag tighter to her chest. Mordrach. She had felt the dark presence even early, walking through the streets of Manhattan, and she knew he had been following her for a great distance in the guise of someone else.

She turned her attention back to the woman in black.

"You will need to have protection. Find a soul of great protection, Delia," the woman went on, and she looked around again, "someone of great strength."

"But how," Delia choked out in a whisper to the woman, "I am alone but for my aunt here. How do I find protection? What do I do with the amulet? And Danu told me there was another stone that I have to find? And then to find the three sisters? I am in need of help, sweet woman," she implored to this spirit, but she vanished as she moved closer.

Another, younger spirit with a bow and arrows and strange hair appeared to her on the left, emanating a peaceful yellow glow. She turned, and she spoke to man on her left, his dark, clear eyes distinct in the translucent image he portrayed, He calmly stated, "you are the bearer of the amulet, which opens any water or stone portal to Tir Na Nog. Since Mordrach has been forbidden to return to Tir Na Nog, he needs the amulet to get in, and he will try and reign and destroy that Otherworld as his own. He has already begun the evil destruction of much of the human relations within this World. You must hide the amulet, or the stones within it, here, in a place where there is no knowledge, and no access to it. You must find one of the sisters Morrigan to place a spell on it so that he CANNOT obtain it. Only the sisters Morrigan or their human offspring have such universal power, and are knowledgeable of it."

"I am frightened of this Mordrach," Delia whispered.

“Fight your fear with a plan to defeat him. We will help you, Delia. There are many spirits here in the library. It was built over many layers of lives. We will direct your course, but you must be very aware, he is very sly in his dealings and the way he will try to find you, so you must guard yourself and the amulet at all times, “ he said, his brown, dark eyes intense and focused upon her, “ and we are always here. We will assist you as guardian and oracle combined. You are the chosen in this time period.”

Delia wondered what he meant when he said “this time period”, and she went to ask him. He gestured to Maud.

Miss Malone was turning to come to her, finishing up with talking to a patron. Delia took a deep breath and whispered, “Thank you, friend,” to the man with the arrow. He nodded to her, and was no longer.

Maud had returned and was standing directly in front of Delia. Her direct gaze looked at her, and she searchingly asked, “Are you alright, Miss Delia? You look slightly pale. Oh, my, goodness, I just realized it is time for a midday lunch. Come now, I will take you to where we all eat! “

Delia shivered, and forced herself to return to the present library situation, responding, “ Oh, thank Miss Malone, I brought myself some lunch.”

“Well, just as fine, but I will be showing you where you can join other librarians to eat. Come with me,” and Maud Malone smiled and looked at her worriedly.

“I’m alright, ma’am, I just was winded for a minute,” Delia fibbed, smoothing her skirt and hair and smiling a brilliant, white teethed smile at the concerned woman who watched her. She had to be careful with the downloading information from the other worlds, and the drain on her own energy thereafter. She took a deep breath of air and followed Miss Malone, looking back

to the painting on the wall of the “history of the written word” and watched as the young man materialized again, smiled, and nodded to her as she left.

As she followed Miss Malone, her brain scrambled with the new information she had received. She knew that Mordrach would try and obtain the amulet when the veil between the two worlds was the thinnest, and she knew that time, in Ireland, was called Samhain. Here in New York City, it was called All Hallows Eve, where the spirits were able to visit the living. She clutched the tapestry bag containing the amulet to her chest. It pulsed beneath her hands, and she hugged it tighter. She would not let it out of her sight, and she would look for a place to hide it, and a spell to secure it being hidden. She would find what Danu had meant by the three sisters.

What did the spirit mean, when he said, “from this time”? Delia knew that time was of no matter to the spirit world. She had had visions in her sleep since she was a child of meeting three young adults, strangely dressed, in the library, even before she knew what the library had looked like. She wondered what this had to do with the amulet and Mordrach.

Time would tell, and she quickened her step after the lengthy Miss Maud Malone, down the winding stairs of the New York Public Library.

Chapter 5- The Mandel Hill Public Library

The Library, Present day

The town library held little promise of a friendly face. Jack gazed around, staring at the older men reading their newspapers in the corner. The lady at the copy machine and the woman at the circulation desk looked up curiously as he walked in, and he smelled a musty, sweet smell of books that had been placed on shelves for a long time. He took a deep breath, and tried to relax. The entire scene stressed him. Weren't libraries supposed to be relaxing?

“Hey Jack!”

He turned quickly in back of him, and his eyes eased a bit. Sarah Cartwright strolled over to him, her hands struggling with what looked like too many books. She swung her extremely long braided hair back, and dropped two books in the process. Jack ran over to help her.

“Hey Sarah! What's up?” he smiled.

“Shhhh,” she half joked, looking at him playfully beneath enormous brown eyes, “don't you know this is a library?”

The ruffled Sarah was possibly one of the quickest mathematicians in the school, and didn't hide it. Her brilliance had been quickly utilized in mock trials and county competitions. She was currently helping tutor students much older than herself in calculus and physics at Jack's high school. She moved in an organizational pickup, and he watched her fascinated, and somewhat entranced. He laughed at himself at this realization.

“Hey,” he whispered dramatically back, smiling, ‘what brings you to this fun filled haven?’”

She smiled back, her round eyes a deep ocean of dark secrets.

“ Well, if you must know, Jack, I’m looking up some original math computations and explaining them to my professor at school. He doesn’t understand how I came to the answer I did. I am referencing Pythagoras. I told him the textbook is wrong.”

He stood beside her as she straightened, and she looked sideways at him, modestly. He was very tall, comparative to her tiny frame. She continued, intensely.

“I just want him to understand. Hey, you’re in calculus this year, right? Do you have Healy? She is really hard, but she’s super smart. I had her last year.”

“I am in AWE of you,” Jack shook his head, gazing at her caramel complexion and long eyelashes. She was a striking person, her deep, intelligent dark eyes filled with hunger.

“You should talk, Jack, you are AMAZING with that camera! Some of the pictures you took for Art were in the hallway. Incredibly gorgeous- were they of parts of your house? I love your house; it definitely has its own character. It’s alive with beauty, and you really captured that....Especially the picture of the stained-glass window and the sunlight coming down through it....stunning! You replaced a senior photographer at the school newspaper, I understand.”

“Yeah, Jack replied, “and he’s still not really happy about it, either.”

“Oh, Phil Malloy? He’s such a jerk, Jack. I don’t even know why he owns a camera. The last picture he took of the chess club for the yearbook was minus two ears and everyone’s hair,” laughed Sarah.

The nearby librarian cleared her throat, looking pointedly at them over her glasses.

“Oh, man, this place is a nightmare to me,” whispered Jack, and he led Sarah by the elbow over to the reference section, where it was more secluded.

She looked at him thoughtfully.

“What are you doing here, Jack? This isn’t a place I would expect to find you often, though I’m here almost every day.”

Jack resolved to make a note of that fact, and took a deep breath.

“I’m looking up some information on my house.”

Sarah looked at him quizzically, waiting for more information.

“Historical information. Stuff like that. You have any idea where I might find any of that?”

Sarah thoughtfully looked up, thinking.

“Why do you want that information?” she asked him.

“Just curious,” he replied quickly. He was not about to get into a detailed conversation about a possible...something...in his house with Sarah.

“I think you’re in the wrong place.”

“Really?” Jack asked.

“Well, I think you would get more information from town records, which would be in the municipal building. I think that you might find pictures of the town here, by the town historian, but specific information about your house would be at town center,” and Sarah looked over at the reference librarian.

“That lady is really nice,” she said, “she’ll find you some pictures of your street and the town, I think.”

“She looks scary,” choked Jack.

“Don’t judge a book by its cover,” Sarah laughed, and leaned over to him, her coffee-colored complexion and ebony eyes twinkling, “and if you need company at the town hall, let me know. I love that stuff. See you in track practice!”

“Thanks,” he said, and watched her walk toward the exit. She had thrown the books into her school bag, and she glanced back at him and waved.

“I definitely need to visit the library more often,” he mumbled to himself, and reluctantly walked over to the reference desk.

“Excuse me,” he said, pushing his glasses up his nose, “could you help me, please?”

The woman looked up him kindly, scratching her head, and pushing some papers to the side.

“Sure honey, what can I do for you?” she asked, and she straightened her sweater, leaning toward Jack. The name on her desk said Mrs. Ohpnam.

“I uh, would like to find out more information about my house, uh, my street, well, uh, who used to live there,” and he trailed away awkwardly at the end of the sentence.

“Which part of town do you live in honey?” Mrs. Ohpnam pushed a graying tendril of curly reddish hair back in place. She gave Jack the impression that she had seen a great many students.

Jack was starting to feel a little strange about this whole endeavor. Maybe he should just forget about the picture and go home. He had a lot of homework.

“Uh, Mandel Hill, uh, maam,” he said, looking around. It had been nice to see Sarah, but he hoped he didn’t meet anyone else he knew. This whole thing was starting to getting a little weird.

“Mandel Hill? Which house, son?” Mrs. Ohpnam pressed, continuing, “you know, I have lived in Edgewood for a long time, dear. I raised six children here, all gone to college and some with families now. I can tell you more than you could find in a book.”

Jack saw all the pictures on her desk. She did, indeed have a tremendous family, it seemed.

“We’re number 3 Kelpie Ave. The Victorian white house on the hill,” he explained.

“Ahh, “ she clucked knowingly,” that’s the Winston House. The Winston’s lived there for 52 years. Before that, hmmm, there was an Irish couple with six children. They immigrated in the early 1900’s, and they were part of the building of that house. The father was very handy with carpentry. Tragically, he was a train conductor and was killed in a robbery on the train. I think their name was O’Malley. His wife moved afterward to Boston with her children. I don’t remember anything after that, truthfully.”

“Really?” asked Jack, prompting.

“Yes, that’s it. She was a wonderful photographer. Anne O’Malley. A handsome woman, very tall. She used to have her pictures hung in the town hall for quite a few years, and then, why,” she looked over her glasses at Jack, “I think she actually had a showing at the New York Public Library of some photographs that were published in the New York Times. A beautiful eye, she had. Two of the children are professors at Harvard, I understand. Might still be alive. Anyway,” and she looked at Jack squarely, “I’ll find you some historian books you can take home, and you can get a lot more information from them than I’m rattling off.”

“No, but no, Mrs. Ohpram, thank you. Thank you for the information,” Jack earnestly replied.

“What has you so interested in your house, young man?” and she swung her rather large body into another chair next to a different computer, pencil in her teeth.

Jack gulped. It was probably best not to show her the picture. He didn't need this nice, homey, but chatty lady exonerating his story elsewhere. In a strange way, he was beginning to feel a little private about the image.

Jack smiled at her winningly.

"I just think it's a real cool place, Maam. Thanks so much. I will look for these books," he said in a Californian drawl, and he carefully took the reference numbers from her.

Walking through the bookshelves, he was awed at the amount of information this small library held. He pulled down a large book that looked like it might contain pictures. He did not have a lot of time to read it, so he opted for visuals.

"Wow," he breathed quietly to himself. He sat down cross legged on the floor. The town had been civilized in the early 1700's around a river that flowed directly through the center. Jack looked at some of the older houses that had been built along the main road, similar to his.

His eyes almost bugged out upon viewing the next picture. That was his street! The photo was a long shot, and there were only four houses on it, one of them being his. It looked a lot smaller and less ornate than it did now, and he remembered that Mrs. Ophram had told him about the Irish father being a good carpenter. He must have really done a lot. The photo date was 1854. Wow, he didn't think that they actually had pictures then. Jack leaned forward to read the caption.

"Mandel Hill in a flurry," it read. Ha, thought Jack, that was funny. The snow had been transcribed at 36 inches. It was interesting to think about what life must have been like without a car. How did they get, oh, yes, horses, he thought. So, there must have been some place to put a horse at his current house.

That was really something. Jack's head was full of questions, and he was running out of time. He was supposed to be home by 5:30 and it was 5:15. It would take a good ten minutes to walk. Holding the book that he was currently looking at, and grabbing two or three others, he headed out to check out. Where was that? Oh my god, how do you get out of here?

The woman at the circulation desk looked over her glasses at him and he gave the card and books to her. This woman might be older than the library itself. Clearly. He liked Mrs. Ophram better, and waved in her direction. She smiled back, and he grabbed his books.

Leaving the library, he pulled his jacket around him. Man, there was actually a chill in the air. It was already October, and the leaves were green with a tinge of red and gold. This was new for Jack. Autumn. California really didn't have Autumn. So many things were different here.

"Like wearing a coat," he mumbled, as he quickened his pace, "definitely need a coat."

October 31 Present day

Oh, my god, I am exhausted, thought Jack, as he threw the calculus books on the floor next to his desk. He was entering his homework into his laptop, and pushed his head up to accurately watch the entries he transcribed from the book to the website. He rubbed his eyes, leaned back at his desk chair, and looked around his room.

He pushed the chair from the desk, stood up, and began packing his backpack for school for tomorrow. As he was bent over the pack, he felt a rush of cold air. He raised his head. How was that possible? Was there a window open? Strange. He smelled the musky pine smell, and moved back from his desk, looking around. Shrugging, he went back to adding books to his bookrack. Seeing a blue folder with the photo negatives in it, he removed it from the pack.

He took out the picture he had developed, staring at the luminous face he had captured on the film. He took out his iPhone, and took a picture. He uploaded it to his computer quickly, and moved to see if he could enlarge it and narrow in on some various parts of the edges of the photo. It wasn't uploading.

His computer snagged. The screen blinked. Ahhh, thought Jack. What's happening? This is a brand-new MAC? He glanced outside and the wind was gusting through the trees, eerily swaying the top of the pines outside his window.

The screen blinked again, and then blacked out completely.

Jack stood up and slammed his hands in frustration on the desk.

“What???” He yelled out, and paced back and forth before the screen. “Damn, I hope I don’t lose my calculus homework that I just put in,” he muttered at the computer, trying vainly to touch any key he could. How was this possible, literally minutes before deadline, that his computer was crashing.

He closed the top of it, and breathed deeply. Okay, let’s try again. Let’s try again.

The laptop was amazingly warm. Hot, even. REALLY hot,

“GEEZ!!!” He snatched back his hands, and waved them back and forth. Ouch.

What the hell? Was that smoke? It’s a LAPTOP? Laptops don’t go on fire sporadically. OH, my GOD, what was happening? What was that? WAS THAT A SIZZLE?

He moved back from the computer again.

The computer screen flew open, in front of his eyes.

What?

The screen not black, it was stark white, and the uploaded picture of THE FACE was staring straight at him from the computer.

“Oh, my, god!” He screamed and jumped back from the face luminously staring at him. He ran back to the computer and slammed the laptop shut, backing up into the hallway outside the door.

“Oh, my god, what is this?” He peered around the corner of the door to his room. The computer was shaking as if it was ready to explode, and the windows of his room had burst open. There were gusts of wind blowing papers and various pieces of clothing through the air, and he heard a high-pitched screech as the wind started circling around the laptop.

The laptop burst open.

His mind whirling with the air, he stared in horror as the face looked back at him.

The screen then went black, and Jack raised both his hands protectively again moving backward.

With a last tremble, the screen blinked, and there was a blinding flash.

Jack wasn't sure if that was lightening from the storm outside or from the laptop, but crouched to cover his face in a block move.

The wind had stopped. The noise had stopped, and the laptop was showing his calculus homework.

As if nothing had happened.

“What the?”

As if there had been no instance of insanity, and there had been no complete tornado that had just swept through.

He turned to lean on the bedpost behind him, turning. The pine smell again, and his breath caught in his throat. He almost choked, and stopped in horror, watching, as in a dizzying effect of light, a stream shot from the pc and flew to the ceiling. There was a burst. Light spewed everywhere from the ceiling of the room.

He fell back, shielding his face with his left arm, and catching himself with his right, blinded.

This is it, he thought. I'm gonna die. His heart, ironically, beat furiously in his chest, and he steadied his gaze to look up, gasping. He blinked, and looked again. He felt like his heart actually stopped.

Hovering before him, shimmering with incandescent glow, was the figure of a man. The man from the picture.

Jack couldn't breathe, and gulped for air. To his alarm, it swept toward him, precisely two inches in front of his face. Jack was frozen in fear, and the figure whooshed upward to the top of the ceiling, floating there, watching him. It was shimmering, suspended.

Jack couldn't pull himself to move. He was transfixed by watching the man, wavering back and forth above him.

Jack took the nearest thing next to him, which happened to be an old teddy bear from his childhood, and stood with it in front of him, waving it furiously at the ceiling.

He thought he heard the image chortle.

“Do you think you'll be after me with a dolly, there son?”

The voice made him jump, riddled with an accent unfamiliar to him. He stopped waving the bear, and then realized the idiocy of that action, dropped it. He retreated and then boldly yelled,

“WHO ARE YOU?”

The thing swept down from the ceiling, hovering in front of him and the door. Jack resisted the urge to bolt out the window and instead raised his arms in an involuntary move to protect himself.

“Oh, I'm not gonna hurt nobody, young man, don't be afeared of ol Mackenzie. I'm not one of those who'll be boxing your ears anytime soon! Though I was known for having a good arm in my day!” And he sat, so to speak, on the bedpost corner, punching at the air.

“Oh my god.”

Jack just stood, completely frozen, looking back and forth between his computer and the ceiling.

He began involuntarily pacing the floor.

“Go away!” Jack yelled.

There was a shimmery chuckle in return.

“Why are you in my room? Are you some sort of messenger? Are you like, one of those things from Harry Potter? Like you're going to suck the life out of me? I am LOSING IT HERE- I mean, am I hallucinating?”

The figure looked at him quizzically, and then, as if speaking to someone else, said, “Annie, I think this one’s daft. “

Jack whirled around, looking under his desk frantically, opening up the top drawer to his dresser, as if expecting another apparition to jump out at him.

“Annie? Is there somebody ELSE UP HERE? What is this, like Grand Central Station for dead people? Ugh,” he exclaimed, closing the drawer. He felt himself beginning to unravel. He boldly forced himself to look at Mack.

“Well, now, don’t get your boxers in a scrunch, there, young Jack,” chuckled the thing.

“HOW DO YOU KNOW MY NAME? “ Jack was beyond himself and could hear his voice go up an octave.

“I’m your guide. For you. To help ye, god helping ye, I think you’re not the full shilling, by god.”

“HELP ME? You? Why? Are you an angel or something? AM I DEAD?” Jack began feeling his arms and torso, pinching his forearm.

“No, lad die, you aren’t, but I am, “replied Mack seriously.

Jack was incredulous. He began pacing again, hitting his thighs as he walked. He whirled around and looked at Mack. He could hear his own voice rise an octave.

“How long?” He asked him, “how long have you been dead?”

The air had settled in the room now, and but for the strange shimmer coming from the outline of James and the blue light from the laptop, there was an eerie glow over the room. Jack shifted his stance to one of less adversity, and looked closer, carefully, at James.

“Well now,” Mack said, scratching his chin, and looking upward, as if contemplating an equation. “Well, now that would be according to what time I’m in now.”

“It’s 2024.”

“Oh, holy mother of heaven, now, is it?” Mackenzie was laughing, and when he laughed, he rolled backward and up, so he was nearer to the ceiling as before.

“Do you hear that, Annie? It’s 2024? It’s been almost a century since we lived here!” He was talking upward to the ceiling again, and was getting impatient.

“Who is Annie? YOU LIVED HERE?? In this HOUSE? Is that why you’re bothering me?” asked Jack, becoming bolder, yet his voice sounded hysterical.

“Well, now, thank you for the hospitality there, young Jack, I canna think of anything more welcoming than that,” and the ghost that was Mack retreated a bit, pouting.

Jack squelched his disbelief at a moody ghost, and continued staring at him, repairing his previous phrase with a softer tone.

“Sorry, I was just, well, I was just surprised is all, uh, sir. Would you be kind enough to tell me why you’re here?” Jack asked in his politest tone, ignoring the irony of the fact that he was speaking to something that most people would put him in asylum for admitting to speak with.

“I should say, I will. Can you get me a pint, now, and we’ll have a talk, there son.”

Jack choked, and exploded.

“A what? A BEER? I don’t have any BEER! I’m 16 years old! I don’t walk around serving or...I don’t drink... pints! With a ghost or anyone else, for that matter.” Great, he thought, now the ghost that is in my room is an alcoholic.

“Oh, pity, that. Well, then, we’ll have to do without. The missus, that’s Annie, yes, she doesn’t like it when I imbibe in any way, so, none’s the worse. Though I do miss a nice pint here and there.”

Jack rolled his eyes and flopped on the desk chair in frustration.

“Can you tell me anything about why you are here? Are you like, Casper? Or are you going to be haunting me for the rest of eternity? Cause, like, that would really suck.”

Mackenzie whooshed around the ceiling, and Jack got a chance to look at him a little more clearly. He had on what looked like a conductor’s uniform which he filled out considerably with an amazingly broad torso. His face was round, with strikingly blue eyes, which Jack could almost actually see through.

His eyes were mesmerizing.

The thing seemed to look directly through him. Jack shivered.

“You need to find them. You need to find them and protect the three sisters. You have a charge.”

Jack’s head was spinning.

“I have NO IDEA what you are talking about,” he yelled in frustration at the ghost.

“I can only stay here for a little while to help ye.”

“Well, that’s a relief, Jack mumbled beneath his breath.

“I dinna think you’ll think so later, lad. Find the three sisters Morrigan.”

The wind gusted quickly again through the open window, and he was gone.

Chapter 7- Andrew doesn't help and there goes my Calculus grade

Jack was loathe to tell anyone, but after explaining the situation to Andrew, he was not encouraged to go further.

“You are a loon, “ his brother announced, eyeing him squarely in the eye.

“Are you telling me that there is an alcoholic ghost in your room that wants you to talk to him and find three sisters? This sounds like a bad B movie.”

Jack glared at him.

“Thanks, Andrew, I knew I could count on your deep understanding and help.”

“No problem. If you need me to sign any papers to commit you, let me know,” and Andrew jauntily walked beside him, going through his Instagram, and quickly typed a response.

Jack sighed in frustration.

“Well, you can think I am crazy, but I showed you the pictures.”

“Which could be anything,” Andrew quickly retorted, still typing and walking.

“Do you need to see this guy to believe me?”

“Well, I don't know, Harry Potter, do you have your magic book of spells to conjure up any ghosts you might be needing to have a conversation with today? “

“Not funny.”

“Just stating facts. Hey, Alex,” he called to a kid running past them with a backpack.

“Are we late?”

“Yeah, you are. I am hightailing it now. Ciao, bro,” and Andrew sped off in the direction of the school at record clip.

I feel like I should be playing 70's sad music right now, as I am walking to school late and alone. He quickened his pace. Dang, I have calculus first, too. He hoped his homework had loaded, he hadn't checked after that insane evening.

He walked into the school, nodded to the hall monitor, ignored his locker, and swept into class. He dropped his phone in the basket of the room, quickly sneaking around the back to his seat. The teacher had already begun to write equations, and her back was turned toward the class. Jack nodded to Chris, a friend, and sat down quickly and unobtrusively as possible, pulling out his computer.

He opened it up, and sat there, logging on to the classroom page, his earphones in his ears.

"You're late, Mr. Mandel. I marked you down already. You'll have to get a late slip at the end of class," Miss Healy turned back from the board and stared at Jack, pointedly.

"I am sorry, Miss Healy. "

"We're working on integration by parts. There are notes on classroom, and you can find them and your graded work from last night there as well."

Jeez, thought Jack, I hope it's there. He quickly pulled up the classroom notes and moved into the assignment section. He connected blue tooth to his earbuds and began going over the work.

The assignment key was in the corner and he clicked on it, looking to see what his grade was from the night before take-home quiz. He clicked again on it.

The computer blinked.

Jack stared unbelievably at it, and looked frantically at the laptop again. Stop, he willed it, and clicked furiously on his homework again.

A white flash. Jack smelled the familiar spruce scent.

He looked around, first to his right, where Cecily was twirling her long blonde hair around her right finger and looking out the window. She didn't seem to notice Jack or his computer or the fact that he was even there.

He looked to his left, where Chris was bent over his computer trying vainly to work on whatever problem the teacher had put on the board. He didn't seem to observe that Jack was having any difficulty either.

Okay, let's try one more time. He went to the homework icon, double clicked and then literally almost flew out of his chair.

Mackenzie O'Malley had materialized onto his computer and was staring at him from the homework icon.

"OH, my god!"

Jack closed the laptop and feverishly looked around. Nothing from anyone acknowledging him. He slumped down in his chair and opened the computer halfway, peering onto the screen. There he was, Mack, his bright blue eyes looking directly at him.

"Well, hello, there Jack! It seems I am caught in your boxy thing right here. I canna find how to get out, so I am hoping you would assist?"

"WHY ARE YOU IN MY COMPUTER?????" Hissed Jack fervently, continuing, "I am IN CALCULUS CLASS, which, by the way, is very hard. I don't need you here!" He looked around him in panic.

"Well, I dinna know HOW I got here, Jack, I'm just knowing the fact that if I was sent into your boxy thing, it was to help ye." Mackenzie whispered back at him.

I am losing my mind, thought Jack. This is it. This ghost is a figment of my imagination, and I have lost it completely.

No one had seemed to notice that he was talking to his laptop, or that Mack was on the screen.

Everyone was head bent, earbuds in, and concentrating on their own work.

Well, maybe I can actually do something productive here, thought Jack, his attitude swinging around. Maybe I can efficiently find out why there was a ghost following me.

“Help me what? Get expelled?” He hissed at the figment.

“Find the three sisters, Jack. That’s what you have to do, “James was jumping from icon to icon on the screen.

“You look like the lucky charms leprechaun,” Jack whispered, relaxing a little, “ what do you mean?”

“The amulet, from Tir na Nog. Oh, it’s very powerful, Jack, and it was the reason they went after me.”

Ignoring the fact that he was still in class, Jack whispered back, “ I have NO IDEA what you just said or what you are talking about! What do you mean, Tir na WHAT? And who went after you? What do you mean, you’re dead! “

Chris on his left glanced over at him, and Jack hastily pretended he was singing.

“You’re DEAD!” He whispered again and lowered his voice, “what amulet? Who is after you?”

“The amulet was on the train, Jack, and the three sisters are the amulet. And he...murdered me because of it.”

Jack sat back, and he felt cold. Mack looked back at him from the screen, his big blue eyes piercing.

“You were murdered?” He whispered fiercely. He looked at Mack nodding, and leaned into the laptop even closer.

“Aye, it was the death of me for sure, and my wife Annie left to raise our children in the house you live in today. And it was a struggle, but Annie, she pulled through, and started her own photography business, doing whatever job she could find.” Mack was earnestly shimmering inside the computer screen.

“Mr. Mandel, do you have the answer to number seven?”

Jack was completely jolted out of the conversation to realize that he was, indeed, still in class.

“Uh, uh, uh,” Jack revisited reality, and looked up, “uh, yes, sorry Miss Healy. Hang on, there.

Um,” he stammered, trying to move the mouse around Mack and get back to his homework icon.

“Yes, ma’am I do, it’s $-6e$ to the negative fifth plus one.”

“Thank you, Jack, I appreciate your attention, Christine let’s see if you can move onto the next one together. Please present this on the classroom page and I will go over it,” Miss Healy continued.

Jack riveted his attention back to the figure of Mack, who was poking at the FINDER icon on the computer.

“Okay, well, that’s really sad Mack, really” he whispered,” but I don’t know why you think that I am the one to be able to help you. I am literally just a kid in calculus right now, and if I don’t pass, I won’t get good grades, I won’t get a scholarship, and I won’t be able to go to college, so I am really hoping that you have some way of letting me know what in the heck you think I am going to do about this?!”

His voice had risen, and Chris was staring at him on the left. He put his earbuds quickly back on, nodding and pretending to sing. Chris looked at him, raising an eyebrow, as though he had nine heads, and went back to his work. Jack silently thanked the person who had made calculus incredibly difficult, so that it was almost impossible to lose your concentration.

“Yes, and they went after Annie, as well, they did, but she woudna have it, and she up and went to Boston with her brother to protect the bairns,” Mack continued as though Jack had not interrupted.

I am talking to a ghost inside my computer, Jack thought, in the middle of class. Really? I should have my head examined. The extreme lunacy of the entire situation made him put his hands on the side of his head and lean over into the computer, and he opened his eyes widely.

“Who was after you?” He said, pointedly, “ tell me who, because I don’t understand.”

“He changes his body and with the change in time, they always change their name.”

Jack was annoyed, but pushed on, adding, “you mean the people that killed you and went after your family? Are they a group of people? Are they still here? Is that why you have come back?”

His voice had lowered to a hiss. It was almost impossible to have this conversation in calculus class.

James looked furtively around, and spoke carefully, quietly, and with much emphasis.

“The Mordrach” and it was almost as if the computer screen shivered a little with the word. Jack shivered too, and James’ blue eyes shimmered from the screen with intensity.

“They’ll be after you too, Jack, but you must find the three sisters.”

The bell rang, and students around him began packing up, quickly.

Jack looked again for the figure of Mack on his screen, but he had vanished. He blinked and closed the laptop. His hands trembled as he moved it into his book bag, and he shivered, again.

At home, he went downstairs to the kitchen. He had no understanding of why he would need to be in the kitchen, but he wanted a place to think, uninterrupted. He ate a cookie, and almost spit it out. Ew. What was Mom making? Where those dog biscuits? They didn't have a dog, so unless she was starting a business, it seemed like these were, unfortunately, a very bad imitation of what his mother thought were a treat for them all.

"I know, they suck," Andrew whirled into the kitchen from the other room, "she's trying to kill us."

Jack laughed, and looked at Andrew.

"Shhh, she'll hear you, and then you won't even get dog biscuits."

"Mom and Dad are both at work. Are you okay? You look pale, for you."

Andrew slumped on the counter school and threw his backpack onto the floor, moving in a languishing motion toward the "cookies". He chewed them discontentedly, and looked searchingly at Jack.

Jack sighed, raking his hand through his hair.

"I am not ok. I am having conversations with Mackenzie O'Malley on my computer during school. I am not so sure what he is, and I have NO IDEA if I am not going screaming insane," he emphasized the last two words while looking out the kitchen window.

Andrew was on his phone now. He looked up, stating, "You are insane. Just accept it, there's nowhere else to go with that, really. In the meantime, I think you should do what this O Malley guy says, so he'll get off your case."

He continued, "You're smart, Jack. You can figure this out, that's why this, thing, this, "whatever" spirit is in your room, in your computer. In your head, even. It needs your help. If he had tried to show up in my room, I would be in a hospital right now. "

Jack looked at him with amusement and fear .

“Yeah, I hear you. So, what’s my next step? Why did this guy get killed by someone? And he keeps saying something about an amulet, which I don’t understand. He told me the name of the guy that killed him, and he told me that his wife left this house and moved away, and that before she moved, she was a photographer. All of this I picked up in Calculus class,” he laughed, wryly.

“So go find out. Can you google this guy’s history? What was his name? Aren’t town records online?”

“Some are. I’m really afraid to open my laptop right now, bruh. I think I have to go and look, I have this strong feeling there is something in town hall that’s going to give me more information. Or the library, or both.”

“I’ll go with you.”

“You’ll go with me?”

“I will.”

Jack quizzically looked at Andrew.

“It amazes me when you are human, I just cannot get over it.” [SEP] “I’m posting pics of the dog biscuits. I’ll meet you after school, tomorrow, and we’ll go over to town hall.”

“Thanks”

Chapter 8- Dinner with Roman and Sarah

His head swimming from school and calculus class, Jack moved up the stairs to the house at a snail's pace, chewing an apple and watching the incoming storm clouds over the eastern sky. They formed a grey blanket over the town of Mandel Hill, and in a strange way, Jack found it comforting. He chucked the apple core into the garbage can. The lowered clouds were like a protective cover against starkness, and that was just what he felt he needed right now, after the day's events. Their cat moved in front of the window, its white and brown image another spoonful of comfort to Jack's rattled brain, and he smiled inadvertently. He hadn't remembered smiling in days, and thought back to the last time he remembered doing so. He laughed at himself wryly and recalled it was when he had spoken to Sarah in the library.

He opened the creaking front door and stepped in the hallway, throwing his book bag on the bench that stood just beside the door. The cat immediately appeared out of nowhere and jumped on it, circling it, kneading it with its paws, and then contentedly falling on it in a circular ring of fuzz that made Jack laugh again.

"Make yourself at home, there, Bernard, don't spare a second to greet me!" and he walked farther into the kitchen area, kicking his shoes under the bench as he walked.

The house smelled...incredible. Wow, what was mom making? Garlic, onions, sauce and pasta, oregano and...bread? Baking bread? His mouth began to water, as he knew his mother would have kneaded the dough earlier herself. The olive oil tang and toasty bread scent wafted through the air, and he breathed in again.

"Mom? You home? "

His mother, her hair in a topknot stuck with a pen and pencil in it came out of the kitchen with a dishtowel, wiping her hands and looking mildly disheveled.

“Hey, honey, how are you? How was school? You all right? What’s going on? I hope you’re hungry. I am completing my speech for my lecture on Friday, but we have guests tonight, so I thought I would pull together an Italian meal for everyone,” she smiled and hugged him with her free arm, pulling him close. She smelled like an Italian bread roll, and he pulled back, breathing in the pungent, intoxicating scent of garlic and red sauce. He faintly heard Johnny Cash playing in the background.

“We do? Wow, are you actually making a full-on dinner? Who’s coming?” She smelled like marinara sauce, and he dodged the sharp pencil that threatened to stab his ear at the hug.

She laughed and pulled away quickly, fixing the pencil and wiping his shoulder that now enjoyed a handprint of flour.

“Roman Cartwright and Sarah, his daughter. You know Sarah, right, Jack? You said you met her at the library? She’s in cross country with you, I understand? Your father and I work with Roman at the university. He’s such a nice man.”

“Yeah, she is,” Jack smiled, but then he continued, “what about their mom? Does she work with you too?”

Susan put down her towel and leaned on the counter, looking down at the sliced cucumbers she had cut for the salad, and carefully picked them up and placed them on top of the lettuce and tomatoes. She wiped her hands on the towel, quiet the entire time, and then regretfully looked up at Jack, her eyes large and tragic.

“She is not around anymore, Jack.”

He tilted his head, questioningly.

“What do you mean, Mom?”

She looked out at the window at the eerily rising full moon, and drew a deep breath.

“She was never found. She disappeared 8 years ago.”

“WHAT? How is that possible? That’s awful, Mom! Where was she? Oh, my god, poor Sarah. How did that happen?”

“From what I understand, she was on a dig in Europe at the time. They are both in anthropologists, that is how they originally met. Roman is from England and Sarah’s Mom is from, well, Brooklyn, I think. She was evidently on a Megalithic expedition, and she was seen at a sculpture, and thenher partner couldn’t find her. She just....disappeared. It’s so sad, Jack,” she said, and then inhaled with intention and continued.

“So, I decided to invite them both for dinner. It’s the least I can do, such a nice family,” she murmured, almost to herself, and she looked candidly at Jack.

Andrew came bounding down the stairs at that very moment, slapping Jack on the back. Jack pushed him lightly with his free arm.

“MOM. You never cook, and this smells amazing! Are the royals coming for dinner? Is it Christmas? Cause I can’t remember the house EVER smelling like this. Oh, god, “ he groaned in ecstasy, opening and peering into the kitchen oven, “Oh, there is BREAD in here! Baked bread. Are you sure it’s not Christmas? Oh, wow, this is like, unbelievable. Who’s coming?” He walked around the counter and grabbed some homemade croutons from the salad. Susan playfully slapped his hand. He grabbed another, and moved away from her, grinning.

“Sarah and her dad,” Jack told Andrew, and Andrew’s eyebrows raised slightly, smiling at Jack.

“Nice,” he murmured, grabbing a full garlic round. He smiled at Jack and his mom, broadly waving the bread in the air, “yeah, I don’t think Jack’s too upset about that. What else’s is cooking, lasagna? Oh, man. I am literally in heaven.”

“They will be here in fifteen minutes, 5:30, so get yourself together,” his mother yelled up the stairs after him. He ran halfway back down.

“Oh, you couldn’t pull me away with wild horses, Mom. I hope you have enough for the rest of the family,” Andrew yelled back, and Jack heard him thumping up to the second floor.

Susan laughed, and she grated cheese into a bowl.

“Jack, could you quickly put out some plates and glasses?” she asked him, absently putting the bread on the table and opening the oven to pull out the lasagna. As the oven door opened, the sizzling and bubbling cheese and tomato sauce wafted the tangy aroma in the kitchen area. Jack’s mouth began to water. The smell was intoxicating, and he was starving.

“Sure, Mom, no prob. Listen, why did she... disappear? What happened? That’s like...awful, Mom,” he continued, placing plates and utensils down, arranging them carefully, while he spoke.

“Napkins,” she instructed, pointing over to the side cabinet, and continued to answer him, “quite truthfully, I have no idea how she disappeared. You know they are both heads in the anthropology research department, and as I said, she was on a dig. She was researching megalithic dolmens, I understand, and was at a specific one in Ireland when she disappeared. They only found her notebook, her apron, and a bunch of rock samples next to the structure, and she was never found,” and she shook her head, sadly.

Jack stopped putting down napkins and looked up, questioningly, “never found? What? How is that possible? What happened to her? Was she killed or something? How is that possible?”

“I don’t know, Jack, it’s just a very awful phenomenon. They searched and searched and never found any remains or evidence or anything.”

Jack was quiet, and then blurted out, “What’s a dolmen, Mom?”

She glanced over at him and handed him two bowls more of cut bread, which he brought to his nose, appreciatively.

“A dolmen,” she continued, “is a Megalithic Rock sculpture, found mainly in northeastern Europe.”

Jack interrupted her, “Like Stonehenge?”

His mother shook her head.

“No. Stonehenge is a Chromlech, which is characteristically a stone circle. A dolmen is a structure. It was created for various different people by the cultures of Ireland, some completely unknown,” she continued, gesturing wildly with mitts on her hands, and Jack laughed. She looked like a Muppet. His mom was brilliant, but she had no idea what she looked like when she lectured or spoke with passion.

Seeing his unspoken mockery, she glared at him, and thrust the butter into his hand.

“Listen, Mister, we need glasses and water on the table as well,” she continued, and could not help but smile at him.

“Jack, this specific dolmen was considered a portal in the ancient times, the Irish were very superstitious about such things.”

Jack froze.

“An Irish portal?” he asked her, carefully, and his voice shook slightly.

He drew a breath, pretending to concentrate on the water in the glasses, but continued, “so, where would this “portal” go to? Like a “time” portal?”

His mother continued, not noticing his intense concentration.

“No, the Irish and Welsh believed that certain dolmens could transport people to what they called the “Other World”, um, it’s called, Tir Na Nog. Have you heard of such a thing?”

Jack almost dropped the glass he was pouring water into, and he spilled quite a bit onto the floor.

Oh, my god, he thought, I cannot believe this. He shook himself out of it and ran to grab some paper towels.

“Jack? Have you heard of that place? It’s supposed to be a place that is a parallel universe to ours, where people drink from an immortal spring, and there is a legend that the artistry and beauty is unimaginable. Sounds nice, right?” she laughed, and looked at him.

Mopping up the water, he choked out, “Yes. Yes, actually, I have heard of it. Sounds incredible.”

This is insane, he thought. I cannot believe I am having this conversation.

His mind whirled with the connection between the disappearance of Sarah’s mother and the legend that he had obtained from Mack. He felt his brow start to sweat, and he steadied himself on the counter as he stood up.

The doorbell rang, its chimes resonating throughout the old hallway and kitchen.

Jack jumped in shock.

He heard his brother bounding down the stairs, yelling, “Dinner!”

“Slow down, cowboy,” their mother said to Andrew, laughing, “we have to LET THEM IN first! Have a breadstick, please,” she directed him towards the table.

Andrew looked like a dog that had been chided, and he remorsefully moved to crunch on a long, toasted breadstick. Crumbs dropped around him, which he ignored, watching the door.

Susan opened the front door, and the last setting sun rays illuminated the outline of a strapping broad man and young lady, their shadows spilling into the hallway. Roman Cartwright's physique was imposing, but his unassuming gaze behind large dark glasses was not. There was a pervasive sadness about him, and Jack watched as he stepped into the hallway. He was a deeply bronzed, large shouldered figure beside the small and tiny frame of Sarah, but they both had the same intelligent and gentle demeanor. Jack smiled and waved from the hallway.

"Welcome, Roman and Sarah!" his mother ushered them in with a smile.

Jack's father had quietly come down from his study, and he extended his hand towards Roman, clasping his arm with the other and pulling him closer to the kitchen.

"Great to see you, Roman, please, come on in. Sarah, so nice to meet you," his father warmly greeted them both.

Roman smiled, and answered, "Well, thank you both for having us over, this was truly above and beyond. My gosh, it smells incredible in here! I began sniffing outside on the street!" and he chuckled, appreciatively, gesturing towards the kitchen.

"It's one of my three standard company meals," Susan laughed back, "and then I'm done."

"Yeah, normally we get beets and potatoes with tofu," Andrew exclaimed, still crunching on the breadstick, "and that's a good night," he added, smiling at Sarah.

She laughed, and Jack moved over toward her. She smelled amazing. The candles on the shelves and table were drifting shadows on the wall and the table. Her dark skin and dark eyes were luminescent, and he could almost feel her glow. He sighed and moved closer.

Wait. What am I doing?

Stop it, he thought. Sarah is my friend.

Who smells really good.

Shaking his head, he leaned over to Sarah.

“Hey!”

“Hey Jack,” she said, looking at him shyly, “thank you so much for having us over. It’s been a tough night, the anniversary of my Mom’s disappearance and all.”

“Sarah,” he croaked, looking at her carefully, “I cannot tell you how sorry I am about your Mom. I didn’t know. That must be....devastating.....I cannot even imagine.”

His mother interrupted them both with a broad gesture and the pencil flying out of her hair.

“Okay, you two, come on in now and sit down. Let’s eat, can’t let everything get cold. Jack, get that chair from the dining room for Sarah, and put it right next to you and Andrew,” and she ushered them towards the kitchen table, set with a wildflowers and waterglasses.

“THANK GOD,” Andrew groaned in ecstasy, moving right next to Sarah, and grabbing the bread basket, put a piece on his plate and passed it to Sarah. She smiled and laughed, and put a piece carefully on her plate.

“Lasagna, Sarah?” asked Jack’s mother, and with the nod, Susan served both Sarah and Roman first, then her husband, Jack, and Andrew, who immediately dug into his piece with relish. His father roared laughter, and put his glass up, looking pointedly at Andrew.

“First, a toast, to our friends and guests, the Cartwrights, may they feel welcome in our house and home and hearts. Thank you for joining us, and thank you, Susan,” he looked at his wife and grinned, “for this feast! Let’s eat!” He raised his glass.

Roman smiled a disarmingly white smile and clinked his water glass with Perry’s, and then the consequent rest of the table followed suit. The conversation began flowing with passion

when the adults raised questions concerning an up-and-coming carbon-dating technique used for anthropological excavations, and Jack chuckled, glancing sideways at Sarah. She was listening to the conversation, watching the give and take of ideas. Jack smiled at her, and she, feeling his gaze, smiled back. Andrew, leaned on his elbow and rolled his eyes at their connection, but then smiled at both of them.

It was a good dinner. Andrew excused himself under the guise of homework, and his mother stood up to lead them all into the living room to relax. Jack took Sarah's plate and his own, put it in the sink, and followed his parents to sit in front of the fireplace. The old house was warm and inviting, and the wind outside formed a whirling cocoon outside. The leaves could be seen in the moonlight outside the window, and Jack sat perched on the ottoman beside Sarah. She had sunk contentedly into the large, beige tufted armchair beside the fire, and she was instantly rewarded by Bernard's fuzzy form appearing in her lap. She pet him and he kneaded her pants leg, circling, and plopped down to settle beside his new friend. Sarah laughed and looked at Jack.

"So cute," she said, and she flipped her hair back. In the firelight, she glowed with an incandescence that made Jack's heart flip, and he had to move his head quickly to shake off staring at her. She's going to think I am weird, he thought, and he pulled the ottoman closer to her.

"They sure are into this carbon dating thing," he purported, looking over at the three adults on the couch and adjoining settee. She nodded.

"My father is really into it. It's what my mother was experimenting with before...." And she trailed off, looking into the fire wistfully, and blinked quickly.

Jack put his hand on her arm, and quietly murmured, "I'm so sorry, Sarah."

She continued, while looking towards the fire, “before she disappeared. She was dating a structure in Ireland. There was more, though, “ and she whispered lightly, looking directly at Jack, “She was being followed.”

Jack started, and his glance was sharp back at her.

“What do you mean? Who would follow her to a dig? And why?” he asked her blankly, searching her face for a response.

She hesitated and then gave the reply, “it’s a wild phenomenon, but there is some evidence that some man, some really wealthy dude, followed her to the Isles. He was looking for her help with some big project she was on, but she wouldn’t deal with him. It’s so creepy, but I can’t find out what the project was. I feel like if I knew, then....” and she trailed off again, her hand lightly placed on Bernard the cat’s head, absently ignoring his affectionate licks on her fingers.

Jack stood up and looked out the window toward the whirling leaves.

Finally, he turned and spoke to her, bent over protectively.

“We should find him. That guy.”

“I don’t know, Jack, this was eight years ago. I’m not even sure if he still is in Manhattan. He owns the communication agency Nu-World. Seymour Droch. Have you heard of this guy?”

Jack reeled back, looking at her out of the corner of his eye.

“Yeah?! Of course, who hasn’t? That’s the dude who wants to form his own communication agency for all the big businesses. He’s like, a billionaire, right? Whoa. That’s incredibly weird, Sarah. What would he want with your mom? Like, she was an anthropologist, not a business person. Don’t you think that’s incredibly strange?”

She looked at him again, and her eyes filled with tears.

“I don’t know what to make of it, but I would like to know why he was the last person she spoke to on her cell phone before I never saw her again. That’s what I would like to know.”

She wiped the tears from her eyes.

Sarah’s father stood up, and moved toward them both.

“Well,” he said, “it seems like we might need to leave this incredibly cozy abode, Sarah, although it’s just about the nicest night we have had for quite a while, wouldn’t you say, honey?”

Sarah stood up, and Bernard jumped with objection from her lap.

“Thank you so much, Mr. and Mrs. Salisbury. The dinner was delicious, and,” she glanced at Jack, “the company was great too!”

Jack’s iPhone was quivering in his pocket, and he hastily pulled it out, glancing quickly at it. Who would be calling? Nobody called anybody on cell phones anymore, except his Mom. The screen was glowing a bright, incandescent blue.

That was weird. Not his normal screensaver. The phone made a buzzing noise again, and he moved away from the departing guest to answer it.

“Hello?” he spoke softly, “hello?”

The phone was silent on the other end, but strangely he could see Sarah stop suddenly from the front door, and, eerily, turn toward him. She stared straight at Jack. Her look made him freeze. She seemed to be listening. To his phone. That was saying ...nothing.

Then the call dropped, and Sarah looked around the house, and back to Jack.

“Bye, Jack,” she said, as if nothing had just happened, “see you at track.”

Jack stood in the doorway of the house, blankly staring after her. The screen door shut in a windy, leafy THUMP, and he watched them both walk down the stairs and out to the street. The

fireplace popped its farewell, and Bernard stood in the bay window, watching the father and daughter depart.

Chapter 9 - Mack in the Flat Screen

Jack pulled himself out of the bed the next morning. It was Saturday, and he had track practice. 5:45. Who gets up and runs on Saturday at such an ungodly hour? Somebody that wants to go to college on a scholarship, he answered himself. It was raining. OH, excellent. I needed to be running in the rain in November, there is nothing better, he fumed, as he pulled on his regulation shorts and shirt. Need a hat.

As he walked down to the kitchen, he glanced into the family room. The T.V. was on. That was weird. His parents were awake, but his mother was in her office and his father had already left on his run. The coffee machine was brewing, and the torrential downpour outside made him grasp his windbreaker and hat quickly. He texted Sarah, also going to practice. She was going to meet him outside his house, she sent back, 10 minutes. The track team was meeting at the old Mandel Field, a few blocks down the road, and practice was from 6:15 to 9. His phone started ringing inconsistently, and he to see who would be calling him. Nobody ever “called” him, and he curiously moved to look at the phone. No name. The phone didn’t indicate who it was. Simultaneously, the tv in the family room was flickering. He hoped they wouldn’t lose power in the storm. There was no chance, unless it was a tornado, that his coach was going to call off practice, so he patiently looked for Sarah outside the window. He could usually tell it was her because of her bright yellow hat over her long, streaming dark hair. She was unmistakable, and possibly the fastest runner he had ever experienced knowing. She would fly past him in practice, with no chance of ever getting tired. He was in awe of her discipline and her capability to persevere. She never seemed to get winded.

I really admire her, he thought. She is definitely one of the people I could talk to about this. She would believe him and the story about a ghost in his room. He started at that realization. Perhaps it was more than admiration, he laughingly thought, and he moved on to the family room to see what was blinking.

The flat screen on the wall was flickering, and he moved to shut it off. As he picked up the remote, it flickered again, and he touched the off button. Why wasn't it going off? His parents rarely watched television, and he normally caught up with everything on YouTube, it seemed strange that it was on at all.

He sat down on the couch and flicked it off again. It flickered for the third time, and then he jumped back. Holy hell, Mackenzie's big, bright eyes and face was staring at him from the screen, and he shook his head in disbelief, clutching the remote, wielding it like a sword in front of the flat screen.

"Hello, there, Jack, again! I managed to get back into a boxy thing, here. What have you got there, Jack, a square little bugger weapon? Now that's not going to defend you against Mordrach, I am not sure what it's going to defend you against, lad die. Maybe a small bug I think." Mack looked puzzled.

Jack moved quickly back and forth in front of the television, pacing quickly, looking around for anyone else in the family to observe. He tossed the remote onto the couch. No person was around. Standing directly in front of the screen, his mouth gaping, he sputtered out a reply.

"You are now in the T.V., Mack. How in theoh, my god," he whispered to himself, "I cannot even with this. Mack! You are invading all parts of my technology. What are you doing in the flat screen? And how did you get there??" Jack just stood there, beside himself with anxiety.

“Well, now, I think it has to do with some type of wave length that I am able to get onto. But, you know, son, I am a railroad operator, and truly am not used to having a scientific conversation, now, Jack. Should we keep talking about the amulet now? How you are going to get it and where you are going to bring it?”

“Okay, well, Mack, I have track practice in 15 minutes.”

“Oh, I can see now by your little shorty shorts, there, my boy,” Mackenzie laughed uproariously, poking his way around the screen.^[11]_[SEP]

“ They are running shorts, and yes, I want to know about the rest of this out-of-control story, but I have a friend coming to pick me up in 10 minutes. And I am talking to a television, in light of things, really, I don’t know why I am not concerned about my mental health.” Jack just stared at the television.

“I need you to know, Jack, “ and with that, Mack came very close to the edge of the screen, “I need you to know that he is looking for you, the Mordrach.” He stared at Jack, unblinking.

Jack moved uncomfortably around in front of the television, tugging at his hat that hugged his head.

“Why? WHY AM I IN THIS STORY? What do I matter in this saga? Because we moved into this house from California? I have no relation to this Mordrach, or to these three sisters! Or to anyone else in that story, by the way! So, I cannot understand that part. I understand the whole Tir Na Nog thing. I understand the fact that he stole the top of the sword, and that’s what lets people into the Otherworld. And I get that he left the Otherworld because he’s a power-hungry maniac that likes the dark magic of who you call the “Elders”. But here’s my big three questions....how did he lose the amulet, why is he looking for it now if he stole it earlier, and

WHAT DO I HAVE TO DO WITH ANY OF THIS? I am seriously just a high school kid. Can you help me with that part, please? Cause,” and Jack glanced furiously at his phone, “I am essentially meeting Sara in two minutes. To run. Away. From you. “ He placed great emphasis on the last five words, and stared at Mack intently on the screen.

“Sara, eh? Well now, is she pretty?” Mack chuckled.

“NOT IMPORTANT,” Jack shot back, and he looked at his phone, “Mack, I got to go. You and I need to talk, or at least you need to give me background information on this whole thing.”

“Well, I can tell you, you need to look at my wife’s pictures first. You see, Annie, she was so smart, and when I told her what I was transporting that day...”

“WHAT DAY?” hissed Jack, “Mack, what day and what were you transporting?” He thought he had heard a family member coming to the first floor.

“I was transporting the money train, Jack. And on that train, there were the were the artifacts for the New York Public Library on 42nd street. And one of them was the amulet. And the train, well, it, it was ambushed and well, that was the last I spent time in this world. Mordrach got to me. And the train was lost, you see. Lost under New York City. And my body was found, but the train, it vanished.”

Jack just stood there silently, and then he protectively moved toward the screen. Thinking of the horrible aspect of Mack’s death made him shudder. He looked at the blue eyes staring back at him, and then shook himself out of it, putting his hand to his forehead.

“Excuse me, Mack, all due sympathy in relation to your death, but, uh, how do you LOSE a TRAIN? Like, where does it go? How is it possible? What was on there? The amulet? Why was the amulet on the money train? That doesn’t make any sense at all. “

“Well, Jack, on the train was a safe. In the safe was the artifacts that are transported from and to the New York Public Library on 42nd Street in Manhattan. You see, they would showcase ancient relics. And somehow, this one had been found IN the New York Library. Why? Well, that goes back to a human descendent of the Three Sisters named Delia, who came from Ireland and worked in the library for many years. She was known as a famous and prodigious librarian, but also one of those with the second sight that comes from being from the line of the Sisters. She was given the amulet by the great goddess Danu when she left Ireland to immigrate to America. She was told to protect it, but more even so, to keep it from Mordrach.”

“Did she know this whole story? And how is she is descendent of the three Sisters? First of all, I thought they were one, uh, thing. Goddess. Whatever. And like, if that is the amulet was so valuable, why did she hide it in the library? Why didn’t they just keep it at Tir Na Nog?”

“Now here’s the thing,” and Mack moved closer again to the edge of the screen, “if it was left in Tir Na Nog, it would cease to exist, because Mordrach had stolen it and brought it to the human world. So, when that happens, it is hidden treasure in the world of humans. This is what happens to most of the artifacts from Tir Na Nog, if they are brought outside the Otherworld, then they cease to exist in Tir Na Nog, just like any, uh, being cannot be a human and go back to Tir Na Nog.”

They were interrupted by the ringing of Jack’s phone.

“Mack, it’s Sara. I gotta go. I need to see you again, soon, so can you come back and tell me the rest?”

“All right, then there, Jack, you just go with your shorty shorts and that girl, now, “ Mack chortled at him, slowly dematerializing on the screen, “but watch out for any dark figures you may see, the Mordrach is alive and well in your world, son.”^[SEP]

Jack's stomach flipped, but he turned away from the screen and looked out the front window at Sara, who was jogging in place outside the front door. She had a bright yellow hat on her long, dark hair, and her hazel gray eyes were searching in through front windows. The rising sunlight behind her almost made a glowing halo, and he caught his breath. She was so beautiful. He realized his own thoughts, and it startled him to action.

“Bye, Mack, “ and he ran out the front of the house, where the eerie flicker of television lit the family room, and the blue eyes of Mackenzie O'Malley faded from the screen.

Chapter 10- Annie's Song

(Present day)

Four more books on Mandel Hill yielded nothing to speak of from the town archives, only that his house was a relic. He pushed the books away, on the floor of his room, and said out loud to no one in particular, “Well, I don’t have a clue what you want me to find.”

Jack picked up his iPhone and scrolled through to his Instacart page, liking some lame pictures of his brother’s dog cookies, and looking up more information on Google. His mind whirled with questions, and he listened to the crashing lightning storm that was outside. He put the phone down, deciding it would be a good idea to turn on some lights. Perhaps charge the phone and laptop as well, he thought, considering there was sure to be a power outage with this type of rainstorm.

Another crash of lightning sent him stepping back from his small bedroom window, and he looked to see if it had hit a tree. The shutters on his windows flapped petulantly in response to the storm’s commotion, making a thumping sound on his outer wall. Behind him, his phone began buzzing uncontrollably, and he turned to pick it up. There was a short tremor from the phone, and a stream of light shot toward the ceiling, blazing the body of Mack holding onto the rafters above him.

“IDJOT!!!”

Jack jumped up and whirled around, staring wildly. His eyes ignited, Mack held on to the rafter comically, maintaining an uncertain balance. The opening and closing of drawers combined with the rain’s pelting slashes against the window made for an unnerving experience. Jack dropped his iPhone and stared, open jawed, as Mackenzie continued to upbraid his young audience.

“You don’t think that I have you lookin for pictures of houses, do you? I need you to find the three sisters. “

Jack sputtered, “you’re back?”

Mackenzie leaned over and looked at him closely.

“Well, yes, I am. “

“I don’t think you should continue to show up in my calculus class, “ Jack yelled, continuing in frustration, raking his hands through his hair so that it stood up on end, “ and you are going to have to give me some kind of clue as to why and what the three sisters are, Mack. And what’s your connection? And why am I involved????” Jack sighed heavily, thinking he would do anything to scroll his social media right now and not have to deal with this, but he looked at Mack earnestly.

“Did ye find the pictures by my Annie, now? Did you, Jack? Quite the photographer, she was, now.”

“I did, she was amazing,” Jack took out his phone and glanced through the pictures he had taken of the photographs at town hall, marveling at their artistic creations. Even Andrew had been impressed.

“She was amazingly talented, and her use of aperture is unfounded, really, during, uh, your time,” Jack lauded his ghost host with praise.

“I don’t think I know what you’re saying, but I know she was a gifted woman,” Mack puffed out his chest proudly, “but I am asking you for a reason, here, Jack. Have you seen the pictures of the library yet?”

“The library? In town? No.”

“No, no, sir, THE library. The New York library...that’s the one. Those are the pictures you need to see, Jack, those are what you need.”

“Why do I need to see those pictures? And why was she taking pictures of a library? I still cannot believe I am having a conversation with a dead person, here,” Jack interrupted himself, muttering.

“She took pictures of the amulet. It was in the library for safe keeping, she took pictures of it, Jack. The triumvirate amulet. Its place was hidden in the library, safely away. Until one of the stones was sent to be transferred from it, and it was stolen by Mordrach. She knew, Annie, about the amulet, and she knew where it was, and she knew it’s power, and she knew about the power of the three sisters. He wanted to use it to foster the rise of the Milesians, the dark souls that he trained when he left Tir Na Nog with the old arts. He instructed them and trained them hundreds of years ago when he left the great Island. ”

Jack’s head was spinning, and he slowly sat backwards on his chair, folding his arms over the back, watching Mackenzie as he shimmered intensely in front of him, coming towards him dramatically.

“ You do realize, “ Jack sighed, moving back from him somewhat fearfully, “that I have no knowledge of your Irish legends here? By the way, I am not even half Irish, or Scottish, or English. I think my ancestry comes from like, Canada or something. Like, I have no IDEA what you are talking about!”

Mackenzie sat down on the top of the dresser unit. He closed his arms over his chest, squared himself, and said, “Well then, it’s time I explained it to ye, so that you understand the consequences and matter of importance that I have come to bring to ye, so, listen, young Jack.”

Jack leaned his head on one arm on the back of the chair, rolling his eyes.

“Ok,” he said, “shoot.”

Mackenzie leaned forward, starting, “Do you know of the Otherworld? Of Tir Na Nog?”

Jack shook his head.

Mackenzie continued, “Well, sir, every good Irishman knows of the legend of Tir Na Nog, a place of immortal youth, where great wisdom and knowledge and beauty prevail. There are many stories of the place, Jack, many ways where the people of Ireland tried to explain the story to their children, and if you believe, you will see evidence of it everywhere where there is earth and land and sky.”

Jack yawned, and leaned his head on his other arm, murmuring, “I have calculus homework.”

Mackenzie jumped up and down, creating wind and a small gust of air that swirled around Jack.

“Listen up, you young tweet, I am telling you what you need to know so that Mordrach doesn’t go after you,” he growled at him with intensity, “are ye daft? Think you that he won’t destroy anyone that gets in his way?”

“Okay, Mack, that’s all very scary, and uh, BY THE WAY, YOU are very scary, but I don’t see where I fall in this whole thing,” Jack protested to Mack.

I am still talking to a person who is not alive, Jack thought. Always be aware of that.

Mackenzie started moving back and forth, seemingly very distressed. When he floated to and fro, Jack could feel the air swirl again around him.

Mackenzie stopped midair, and slowly moved down to the edge of the bed. He sat, hovering, propped on the bedpost, and looked upward, as if praying. Finally, he began to speak in a singsong manner, almost as if he reciting something. He watched Jack carefully as he spoke.

“Oh, there’s a place called Tir Na Nog, a place where wisdom and magic are hand in hand. A place where they run with the deer on the mountaintops, a place where you could race the dolphins in the crystal blue water beside the shore. There is no sickness or death. It is an earthly place of magic, a realm of eternal youth. Many a human has heard of the power of the land, of the power of the people called Tuathe de Dana-an. Life there is forever, and the people are affixed in time.”

They grow in knowledge, in strength, and love of their fellow man, but they live in youth eternally. They are a people of peace, but they are the greatest of fighters, and they are what the earth used to be before we separated from the angels. Now they are the Otherworld, and only certain humans can go there, but they canna return, nor do that they want. They stay there, in Tir Na Nog, but, they know time of no importance It is a place of beauty and magic, of power and knowledge, and they speak in a different language, that of the ancients. Only those with the gifts of sight can communicate with them, and no one who is human is ever able to return from the Otherworld, Tir Na Nog. “

Jack drummed his fingers on the desk, and glanced up at the ceiling.

“And so, what does this have to do with me and you HAUNTING ME? At home? At school? ON MY LAPTOP?” Jack sighed in exasperation.

Mack paused, looking at Jack, and he suddenly flamed loudly, “ Your young tweet, it has everything to do with you? Have ye been listening at all? Have you even pondered why I might be wandering around you daily? I’ll tell you, it is not due to your warm personality, I can tell you that!, “and he loomed dangerously close to Jack, his eyes deep and bottomless in their antiquity. “No, “ he continued, “you happen to be in the circle of time elements that connect to Mordrach leaving Tir Na Nog. “

“What? What did you **actually just say**? And how is that possible?” Jack was sputtering. “Didn’t this stuff happen like thousands of years ago? How is possible that I have some connection with this guy?”

“Well, first of all, Jack, time has no element in the land of Tir Na Nog. One minute is equal to one thousand years there. The ancient science has kept them all in a state of immortality. They drink from the spring well of youth, which makes the Tuathe De Danann, the inhabitants of Tir Na Nog, very wise and strong. They’ve compounded their years of wisdom, strength and knowledge into lives that are eternal. Mystics, Jack, but not mystical in that their existence is parallel to ours, but their time is not,” Mack cumulated, and his blew a breath of wintry air through the already windy attic. His eyes blazed bright. He’s kind of sparkling, Jack thought.

“So,” Jack pushed further, “what about me?”

“PATIENCE!!” , roared Mack, and he flipped in his intensity, and continued, “I canna even contain your idjiot questions until I finish!?”

Mollified, Jack sat back on his chair and listened.

“Do you know,” continued Mackenzie, “ that on the island of Tir Na Nog, there is the well of The Immortal. It is the place where the ancients drink from, but also the spring of eternal youth. Because with age comes knowledge, normally people are very wise in the human world when they are very old. In Tir Na Nog, because no one ever gets old, they only retain the knowledge of the centuries. Do you understand that so far?” He looked at Jack, who had put his head on his arms on the back of the chair, and continued.

“There is knowledge of the magic that existed when both worlds were one, powerful magic, Jack. Powerful knowledge that could change thought. It could sway the balance of good

and evil that exists today. Few know how to obtain that knowledge from the well, and even fewer know how to use it. Mordrach, sad as it sounds, was one of those who knew both.”

Mackenzie paused, making sure that Jack was following him. Jack had shifted, and was now listening intently to Mackenzie’s tale.

“Yes, Jack, there is a way to obtain that dark knowledge that can destroy and disunite cities and peoples and it’s all the knowledge buried in the well of the Ancients. There is also the magic of light, but Mordrach was set on finding the dark. He wanted to use it to conquer worlds outside of Tir Na Nog. The world you live in, Jack. The parallel universe that, to someone like Mordrach, is only another passage to power. He stole the top of the Awan sword of Danu, which is the amulet, and he left with the dark magic of the ancients, to wreak havoc among those in your universe.”

“How did he steal it?” Jack asked, his interest peaked.

“Well, you would think that the he would be happy in a place like Tir Na Nog, that Mordrach. No, sir, not that dark soul. He quested for the dark folklore and knowledge. He would go to the well and call upon the dark gods from eternity, and he would pray to the old masters so they would send him their knowledge.”

Mackenzie paused dramatically, his blue eyes glowing. He continued.

“They would come out of the depths of the well, swirling their old chants and runes. They taught him the secrets to raise the horrors from the ancient dark masters. He learned the evil songs, and the songs that cause havoc and disturbance, so to weaken those who oppose him. Then he pretended to be of good spirit, and he asked the great Danu to visit the Inner world, the place we live in.”

“Who’s Danu? Where are we now? Mordrach is still on this- What did you call it? Tinny Nog?”

Mack flipped up and backward, swimming in the air with agitation.

“Oh, my heaven’s, Annie, why do you think that I have to talk to this one? He’s half daft, and I dinna think he has a speck of constitution in his noggin,” Mack spoke to the ceiling with frustration, and then turned back to Jack.

“You idjiot, it’s TIR NA NOG. A place you’ll never be frequenting, I can tell you that, as sure as I am Mackenzie O’Malley. Listen, now, and I will tell you the rest. And then you will see why you are part of the answer. You must find the amulet and the stones in it and return it to one of the three sisters. And they will bring it back to Danu, so that Tir Na Nog can continue to exist. Without the Otherworld, this world that we live in, Jack, will succumb to the dark. And it will all be destruction and disunity. And Mordrach will leading it. All the things that people have been fighting for over the centuries, if Mordrach gets the Aran piece and is able to go back to Tir Na Nog, he will destroy the balance between the two worlds. He will tip the scales, and the edge going downwards will become faster and faster. Do you see, Jack? You MUST find the amulet before Mordrach, and you MUST get it back to the three sisters?”

Jack sat there quietly, shocked. Putting his hands around his shoulders, as if to shield himself from the insanity that this story encompassed, he drew in a long breath.

“So,” he stated to Mackenzie, “so you are saying that this place, this Tir Na Nog, is the parallel universe to the world we live in? Like, the good place? Like sort of heaven?”

“No, it’s not heaven, Jack, that’s where I will be hopefully visiting after I am done with the likes of you. No, Tir Na Nog is the Otherworld. Mortals are often struck as so by it, so I have heard, though I have never seen it myself, “ Mackenzie mused.

“Where’s proof of all this? How do I know that I am not a psycho right now? Who HAS seen this Tir Na Nog? Do you have any pictures? I am going to google this, “ Jack puffed, grabbing his smart phone.

“There are pictures,” Mackenzie went on, almost in a hypnotic tone, “but they canna tell ye what it really is.”

Jack was scrolling on his phone. “Whoa, and I am supposed to believe that this place exists, and I am the person that’s going to SAVE IT. Like you need me to help you SAVE THIS? This is absurd. You are talking about this guy, Mordrach, and he left this place like thousands of years ago...”

“Time has no element there,” Mackenzie interrupted.

“Well, thanks, but it sure has some element here. And like, Mack, I am fifteen years old. I have a ton of homework, two working parents, a brother that should be on a reality show, and a house that evidently inhabits a ghost from one hundred years ago. Why ME? I have to get into college! I cannot be messing around with your evil dude that stole a rock!”

Mackenzie quietly stated, “It was an Aran amulet, stone from the tip of the sword of Danu. ’Twas fashioned by the great smiths of Credne. This sword with the three stones together will hold the power to defend off any evil, be it old or new. It also opens up the ocean’s path of sun twice during your calendar year, when the moon and the sun are the same. “

“The equinox,” Jack interrupted.

“Yes, lad, that’s what it’s called here. Equal. The two words are equal. This is the path that will reflect the sun onto the water, and makes the “Mag Mell”. The Mag Mell, that is the way that the heroes of our world can access Tir Na Nog, and it also is the way back for someone like Mordrach, who has left Tir Na Nog.”

“Why did he leave?” Jack was confused.

“He was always looking to learn the dark legends, to acquire powers of evil that would make him stronger than the Tuathe de Danann. He wanted to rule not only the Otherworld, but the human world as well. He waited and learned and absorbed the dark knowledge of the spring of immortality, and then, he stole the amulet top of the great goddess Danu, opened up the gates of the Mag Mell with it, and left for the human world. But the three stones of the amulet broke off in the battle between them both.”

They were both interrupted by the wind and rain outside, and the lights blinking. It seemed Mackenzie grew apprehensive, and was moving wildly in front of the attic window, watching the storm rage.

“I dinna think I have more time here today, Jack, the winds seem to be pulling me to remove myself from your companionship,” and Mackenzie moved quickly towards the window, gesticulating upwards.

“Wait! WAIT! You can’t go now, I need to know the rest of the story! What if Mordrach comes? What if I am in a place, wait, WAIT! MACK????!!”

Jack was frantically running back and forth in front of the window, the trees of late autumn wind bending and apologizing to the torrential downpour. He was gone.

Chapter 11- Archived

A gust of wind brushed passed Mackenzie as he tightened the straps on the baggage that was to be loaded onto the platform. He lifted his head inquisitively, looking about for the source, and, finding none, went back to his work. His large, broad frame moved with accustomed assuredness amongst the boxes in the underground station, and he hauled those that had been transported from the archived section of the library unto his back and then dropped them into the back cargo section of train.

The smaller one was unusually heavy, and marked CONFIDENTIAL-LIBRARY OF CONGRESS. He wiped the sweat off his brow, pushed his conductor's hat back, and blinked his bright blue eyes through sweat. He looked around him again, knowing that the station, considered abandoned except for those who knew of Station 61, would have secret service men monitoring elevator to it at both the entrance and the exit. He was acutely aware of the dangerous element of transporting the items, but he was "cream of the crop" according to station masters, and was greatly trusted amongst the government workers when sending top secret material to the airport. This train, used by FDR for secret escapes from Manhattan, carried confidential and abstruse information to airports in minutes. This included gold and artifacts of the highest value. He had been entrusted with artifacts that were on a 7 pm plane tonight, and worked to get the diesel moving quickly. The bespoke locomotive beneath NYC's Waldorf Astoria fired itself up quickly, and he moved to encourage the forward motion ahead.

The picture of his wife, Annie, was always inside his breast pocket, with the six bairns alongside her, and (as always) he kissed it for good luck as he put the train into motion. He looked aside, flipping the switches to on, and listened for the familiar hiss of the engine.

He stopped, the hissing sounding unusual, and moved to examine the engine. After making sure everything was intact, he continued the switching on of the engine and the train began to exhale steam and surge forward. They moved in lightning speed out of the station beneath Manhattan, and he was vigilant to any potential issues, which there were none.

After a small period of time, he made his periodic pace of the conductor's area, having sworn he heard some type of animal noise beside the door of the engine room. He saw nothing, but swiped his eyes from left to right nonetheless. It was a highly rigorous protocol to run the diesel from Station 61, but he was cautious of even minor concerns. He felt the hair on the back of his neck instinctively rise, and he half turned.

He was met with a rock-solid pair of arms suddenly pulling him straight up, hitting his head with a loud "smack" on the iron ceiling, rendering him unconscious minutes after he glimpsed the red eyes and a face that froze his very heart. Deep sockets of dark, dark shadows, pulled taut over thin cheekbones illuminated the red and fiery depths of the eyes of monster, but a monster in human form. Mackenzie gasped in sheer terror, his mind swimming slowly into unconscious grief. He would not see his wife and children again, and the heavy-handed beast that had picked him weightlessly up now dropped him mercilessly on the floor. There was a low moan, and then the beast trampled his head and face underneath, leaving only a remnant of once was a father and conductor.

Mordrach roared, moving away from Mackenzie O'Malley's lifeless form. There was a hissing and a creaking, and beside him there slithered an enormous brown serpent, its yellow eyes shifting back and forth, its spiked tail rasping and scraping the iron. It moved into the cargo car, and its red knife-like tongue moved over the tops of the cartons, stopping finally over the smallest carton. It raised its head as if to strike, its teeth glaring with pointed ferocity, and it

slammed its head into the carton, breaking it cleanly down the middle. There was a light emanating from within, and Mordrach quickly and urgently reached into the box. Pulling out the amulet, he lifted it up, his eyes narrowing into slits, and he let out a bloodcurdling shriek that tore through the moving train. The stones from its engraved tip were removed.

“The stone is missing! The amulet is missing the stone of earth. SSSSSS,” he hissed in frustration, and he muttered a spell of dark intent, the serpent with him twirling about him, lifting him up. He lifted his hands up and the whirling around him grew dark and freezing cold. He screamed loudly, a piercing, painful screech that was louder than the pitch of the runaway train he now boarded. He continued in an irate, maddened tone.

“The circle cannot be complete without the stones! Who has taken the earth stone from the amulet?” he howled loudly and he spun about, making a circle around him of fire that illuminated the inside of the train car. He moved toward the cargo door and it was flung off the moving train into the subway depths, expelled by the fire and wind he created. He roared toward the serpent, and grabbed the amulet, jumping quickly into the darkness on the back of the snake, its slithering form moving back into the subway not to be seen again, while the train hurtled towards its destruction beneath the bowels of Manhattan.

Chapter 12= Track Meet

The track practice was freezing, and most of the high school's students were outfitted thinly against the November weather. Jack hopped up and down beside Sara, hoping the coach would call a practice run quickly, before he became a teen popsicle. Sara didn't look cold at all, and he puzzled at her warm-blooded capabilities, being that she was at least a foot smaller than he was. "Chuffed to bits to be here, eh?" she nodded to the goosebumps on his lower arms.

"I am not sure what that means, Sara, but if it means I am going to be used in some sort of frozen module soon, then you are correct."

"You signed up for track, correct?" she jostled her hair into a braid, and thoughtfully tucked it under her cap. She was grinning at him, and playfully shifted her hip towards him.

"C'mon, Jack, join me in a few push-ups!" she dropped down and began working steadily past 15 before Jack could even begin.

He glanced at her admiringly, stating, "you are quite the inspiration, " and squared his shoulders against the chill November gusts, struggling into his third push up.

She finished and stood up, motioning for him to follow her over to where the coach was gathering track members to gather. He sprung up and followed her, half listening to the coach, half staring at Sara from the corners of his eye. The coach dismissed the runners in groups of four, and Jack was happy to note he was placed in the group leaving directly after Sara's, which was four girl members. His own group were four boys, all of which had already departed onto the long path through the back woods. He started on a healthy jog after the group of girls, straining to catch up, moving into their group. Whew, they were fast, and Victoria moved ahead of him, looking strangely at him as he moved close to Sara. He strained to keep step with her pace, and pushed himself harder,

He was running beside her at a fast-paced clip, and she glanced at him, her hazel eyes glinting mischievously.

“Trying to keep up with the big people, Jack? I’m honored.”

He panted beside her, struggling.

“Ha, very funny. So, Sara, have you ever thought anything about the supernatural? Like ghosts and stuff? Do you believe in that stuff?”

Sara kept her gaze ahead and her pace steady.

“That’s an out of the box question for sure, Jack, and an interesting conversation choice on a seven-mile run. What brings you to this sudden interest?” She had not blinked or faltered in her step, and Jack continued to watch her clip into an even faster pace. He suddenly realized how weird that question sounded, and quickly tried to gather himself and continue to keep up with her. Idiot, he thought fiercely, she’s going to think I’m a loon.

“Well. I just have a strange phenomenon in my house.”

“Your brother?”

He laughed, and then looked sideways at her again. “Ha, funny, but no. Not who I was referring to.”

Sara somehow had managed to pick up her pace, and she breathed out.

“So, it IS a Who?” She queried, stepping lightly over a large branch on the trail, and grabbing Jack’s elbow, jerked him to the side.

He gratefully kept up pace with her.

He just decided to go hog wild at that point.

“I have, uh, I have, uh, uh. A uh. Well, I have a...uh, a spirit. In my house. Yes, there, I’ve said it. And his name is Seamus Mackenzie O’Malley, “ he felt he was word vomiting at this point,

but he continued, going full force, “and, he is hanging out in my attic bedroom, and he wants me to find some amulet and bring it back to a place I am not sure exists.”

There, he said it. She’s going to call the police, I know she is. Way to go Jack, he thought, excellent way to get a girlfriend.

Sara continued to run, not breaking her pace, not slowing down in the slightest. She didn’t even look at him. She was quiet for what seemed like an eternity, and then, she nodded.

“I see. Where was the last time you saw him?” She had not even flinched.

He was astonished that she had asked. And not run away. Screaming. That he was a madman. He took another breath and continued, watching her worriedly, in case she decided to break.

“Uh, this morning.....in the uh.....in the uh, television. On the flat screen.”

Now she’s going to really ponder my mental state, he thought ruefully. He waited.

Sara continues to run in silence, only looking forward. It seemed like an eternity and then she abruptly stopped running and moved to the side of the path. Jack, shocked, circled back to stand by her. She was breathing heavy, and she leaned over with her hands on her knees.

Jack stood beside her, gasping for air. It was never good to stop running that quickly, and they both knew it. She looked up at him, directly in the eye.

“Well,” she panted, “still watching his face intently, “ a spirit normally can materialize much easier in an electromagnetic field. Like a camera, or a television, or....

Jack interrupted her, triumphantly, “or a computer! Yes, that’s exactly what he’s been doing, Sara.” He gratefully acknowledged she believed him, panting heavily, and beyond elated that she believed his story.

She continued, panting, “yes, and mathematically, that’s the easiest place to appear, in terms of time continuum. He’s looking for instances to give you information without completely having to... well, let’s just say, it’s a more advanced form of materialization for him to appear live.”

“He’s done that,” Jack continued with his confession to her feverishly, not believing that she was on the same side as him, even believing he was sane.

“Well, that must have been very difficult. He must have something really important to tell you.

Tell me what he’s told you, “ she stated all of this matter of factly, and continued to run. Jack had forgotten that she was truly a math head, a brain that accepted and believed based on knowledge and accuracy, and he exhaled exuberantly, so relieved to have an opportunity to discuss the weird instance he was currently involved in. He caught up with her, and began the entire story from beginning to end.

Upon culmination, and her being silent then entire time, they both rounded the corner of the path to a clearing, where the biker in the track team was waiting for everyone to stop. They were fourth and fifth there, respective to the rest of the team. Stopping, they walked together in silence, and he watched her in amazement. She hadn’t run away, and she hadn’t even flinched with the information. What an incredible friend she was, and he stared at her, gratefully.

“Jack,” she finally said, sipping water from her bottle, “there’s a part of this story that you’re missing. Your friend, Mack, only shows up to you, right?”

“Yes, “ he said.

“And so, if no one else can see him, then you must be a part of this lineage- this part of Tir Na Nog. You must be a descendent, or somebody’s else’s descendent. Because in order for you to be involved in this story, there has to be a connection. With you.”

He sat down on the bench that had appeared in their path, and raked his right hand through his hair so that it stood upon end with sweat and anxiety.

“Yeah. That’s the part I am not getting, Sarah. That’s the part that I haven’t been able to ascertain. Do you think that it’s because I am living in the house? Or is it some connection that I have?”

“I think it’s the latter, Jack, but I think you need to sleuth out more information on why Mordrach went after this man and his family, and where the amulet is now...is Mackenzie putting it upon you to get that? There’s a lot to find out. Since you already went to the town library, I think you need more information- older information. You want to go into the city with my dad and I this weekend? We can visit the Library.”

Jack winced. Another library. Really not a fan, but considering Sarah was asking him, he would go sit in a dark cave.

“Love it. What library?”

She stared at him.

“What?” He laughed at her expression.

“What library, you moron? The New York Public Library, Jack. Sometimes I worry about you,” she said, speaking upward and looking at him quizzically, “there is no place with more information, more background, and more spirits to help you than the New York Public Library.” And she laughed, catching up with the rest of the team at the center of the circle.

He breathed out, and watched her as she ran, quickly grabbing his water bottle and running after her.

Chapter 12.5 – A Library of Spirits

As Jack and Sarah ascended the stairs, he was awed by the largeness of the New York Public Library. He passed the pair of sculpted lions, and Sarah affectionately patted one of them on the head before turning and taking a selfie as in front. She grabbed Jack and pulled him into the photo....throwing her hair back and hugging him. Snap. Jack just stood there, grinning like a fool, and then he was alone as she continued ascending the stairs and stood outside the doors, waiting for him.

“Their names are Patience and Fortitude, Jack. They were named because the mayor at the time thought the people needed that during the Great Depression.”

“We sort of need it now, right, “ Jack responded, laughing at the fact that the we had just made it through a pandemic, and looking around, grateful the library was actually open.

“It’s magnificent, isn’t it? I love it here, it’s one of my favorite places in the world,” she breathed, and looked around appreciatively, motioning for Jack to look at grand hallway as they entered. Jack stood inside in disbelief. It was a beautifully appointed place, impressive in its silence and majesty. The beautiful chandeliers and the description of the Astors, who founded the library, were described in front of them, and everything was marble. Jack drew in his breath. It was, indeed, magnificent. The marble staircases flanked the side of the hall, and beckoned them further.

On the second floor there was historic displays of information about the history of the library, and one could look over the entrance from the balcony. Sarah steered him to stand beside her, and she spoke to him about the windows and what she knew of the architects. Jack was absolutely fascinated.

They walked up to the McGraw Rotunda, on the third floor. ascending a flight of stairs into a huge, high-ceilinged room.

People were reading and researching. There was no sound, and Jack marveled at the silence. An impressive silence. It was fascinating to see the focus of hundreds of people in one place.

There was something else. There was the sensation of beings. The same sensation he received when he spoke to Mack. The same sensation that he had when he woke up at 3:15. There was another world here. He couldn't put his finger on it, but he turned to Sarah. He looked at her, questioning.

She stopped in the great hall outside the reading room and took a deep breath, closing her eyes.

"I feel it too, Jack," she murmured, and she turned her enormous eyes to him, luminescent in the light of the of the library's shadows, "I feel it. There are not just living people here," and she shook herself back to where they were. She had almost gone into a trancelike state. Jack had felt it, and had stepped back, watching. There was a wind around her. Could it just have been the door opening? He doubted it, and he quietly stood, taking it in. This was a place where the otherworld resides, and to his understanding, Sarah was part of that.

She opened her eyes, and turned to him.

"I felt it. Jack, they are here. What you're looking for is here, all of it. Everything you need is here, and more. Be careful," she spoke to him as though she was dreaming, " be careful, Jack, there are good and bad ones here."

Jack looked at her, and he moved closer to her, more in a personal space than before.

"Sarah. Sarah, are you ok? You good? I think you're not. You okay? " He felt like there was a presence around him, and he couldn't shake it, and then, suddenly, as though a great shift had

happened, she turned and looked him clearly in the eye. Whatever had moved her into a state before had left.

“I am okay, Jack,” she moved to touch his shoulder, continuing, her eyes searching his face, and he drew a breath. She was truly beautiful, but he felt like he had almost lost her for a brief second. He tilted his head, and looked into her eyes, hoping to find an answer to the transience that had just occurred. She had very luminous grey eyes. He shook his head.

“You were somewhere else there for a second, Sarah. Where did you go?”

She laughed, leading him up the stairs to the next floor. “You see, Jack, you’re not the only one with secrets. I can feel them.”

The murals around them seemed to be part of the strange conversation, and the silence in the library contributed. Jack looked around, and whispered, “Feel WHO?”

Sarah turned to him. “I feel that there are others here. Sometimes I can hear them.”

“You hear what others? Sarah? What do you mean?”

“I can hear the people that have been here centuries before, Jack. It’s something I have been able to always do. Like right now, there is an American Indian in the corner by the mural, and he’s trying to tell me something.”

“WAIT. YOU SEE GHOSTS? YOU HEAR GHOSTS? Oh, my god, my life has really turned around since coming to New Jersey. I have a ghost in my house, and now one of my best friends tells me she SEES GHOSTS? Sarah. Is that why you believed me before when I was telling you about Mack?”

She nodded.

“And so can you see and hear them all over the place, and I can only see and hear Mack?”

She walked over to the mural on the wall and pretended to read the plaque, whispering, “it’s a gift I have always had, Jack. Mack is appearing to you in the mediums he can. I have always been able to detect spirits and hear them, if they are around. It’s very, very hard for me to call them out if they aren’t already there.”

Jack was incredulous, and he began to pace in front of the picture, mumbling, “that doesn’t seem possible. You are such a math head. You are practical, pragmatic individual, Sarah. This doesn’t work.”

She looked at him indignantly. “And who are you, Jack, that you feel that being practical doesn’t involve the acceptance of the other world around us? It’s a very thin line of dimension, sir. There is proof that Einstein believed in this, Jack. Would you say he’s an impractical man? Harumph,” and she moved toward the next floor, glancing back at him with an annoyed look. She moved closer to the reference desk, and beckoned him to follow her.

Jack, beside himself, moved into the high-ceilinged room cautiously, feeling as though this whole new world of books and silence and ghosts was starting to make him really bananas.

“So, is that why you believe that there are ghosts here?”

“Spirits,” she corrected him, “the word ghosts is very sophomoric, Jack. Like the word “spooky”, it gives me an idea that there are pumpkins and kids in costumes around. These were people, and the reason they are around is because they have unfinished business in this world. They have a message,” she whispered back to him, pointedly nodding toward the desk.

“Save your strength, Jack,” he whispered to himself, “you are going to need it,” and reveled in admiration at the knowledge that Sarah possessed that he did not know about. He joined her at the reference desk, shaking his head. Sarah was speaking to the man who was standing behind it.

“We are wondering if we could find information on a relic that was stored here in the library in the 30’s or before. How do we go about doing that?” Sarah asked the dark suited, tie clad man who loomed over them both in height, his shaggy brows shading his eyes from them.

He mumbled something, and looked at Sarah and then at Jack.

“What kind of relic, mademoiselle? Can you be more specific, please?”

He’s French, pondered Jack. Excellent. And weird at the same time. Well, whatever. New York City is a melting pot.

“A relic from Ireland. Something that looks like three sisters? I am not sure that you have,”

Sarah was speaking very softly, and she was looking around rather mysteriously, Jack noted.

The French reference desk assistant took his long fingers and spread them on the desk like spiders, tapping each finger progressively as he, too, looked about.

Why is everyone looking around except me, thought Jack? Am I missing something here? Are the secret service waiting for us? He shivered, and stared up at the beautiful ceiling above him.

“So,” the man called Pierre (Jack read his name tag, noting the title reference desk manager as well) “what you THINK you are looking for is a European relic that resembles three sisters? Do you know,” and with that question his head dropped lower, as did his voice, “do you know what it looks like? What its medium is? “

“No, no, “ Jack interrupted loudly, “we are not looking for a medium. We are looking for a relic. An artifact from Ireland.”

Both Sarah and Pierre turned to stare at Jack.

After a demonstratively long silence, Pierre placatingly spoke to Jack as though he were four years old, his accent heavy and condescending.

“No, young, uh, monsieur. No, it is not a habit of ours to hold seances at the New York Public Library. I do see that you are looking for a physical relic, young man, “ and he turned back and spoke in relief to Sarah, looking at Jack strangely out of the corner of his eye.

“Mademoiselle, do you know if this is a book, a photo? Perhaps it is a drawing? What MEDIUM (and as he said this he glanced derogatorily at Jack) is your artifact?”

Sarah smiled, and said simply, “we believe it is a physical relic, an amulet of some type.”

The Frenchman called Pierre drummed his fingers again. That was so unbelievably annoying, thought Jack, angry about the whole medium thing.

“Mademoiselle, I think this is possibly recorded or stored in the, uh, Wallace section of artifacts, if any area of the library. I can assist you in looking for some reference to it, if you wish, or you may go about that on your own. Si vous plait, let me know, “ and he made a slight bow to Sarah, glancing sideways suspiciously at Jack.

Jack glared at him. He could take his si vous plait elsewhere, thank you. How annoying this French dude was.

“Thanks, no,” he said to the guy, steering Sarah away with his arm, “we got it.”

Sarah looked at him in an amused fashion again, and walked over to the computers for reference. She starting typing in “artifacts, amulets”, and looking over at Jack, mentioned for him to sit down.

He purposefully stopped himself from staring at her and how her hair curled around her cheek as she sat by the window, typing into the computer of the library. She stopped, feeling his gave, and when her eyes turned to him, he quickly started and drew a breath, looking up at the ceiling just to look away.

“Jack, “ she said softly, “what do you think this amulet might look like? Because whereas I don’t actually see any relics that match the description, quite a few photos keep popping up that depict that type of an object. That’s so weird. There are pictures from 1928 here that.....wait, Jack, didn’t you say that Mack was married to a photographer?” Sarah stood up, triumphantly grabbing Jack’s arms.

“What was the name of Mack’s wife, Jack? What was Mack’s last name? Oh, my gosh, that’s why he told you to go here,” she almost yelled, so fiercely was she intent on the computer at the moment.

He sat down quickly beside her, his hand scratching the top of his head. He worked hard to concentrate, and then, slowly, he looked up.

“It was Annie. Yes. Anne, I guess, and their last name was O’Malley. They had seven kids. She had to take up photography as a trade after Mack died, but I suspect that she took a lot of pictures before that time, Sarah. Just for fun, or...” and he paused, going on, “for necessity.”

Her look back at him assented as to the meaning of that statement, and she began typing in the computer, looking for the name of Anne O’Malley. He looked over her shoulder, and watched her search, looking for anything resembling what Jack had described. Eventually, she glanced over at him.

“Jack. Jack, oh my gosh. Jack, look.”

She spoke in a whisper, but her words were weighted. She shifted the computer to show him.

He drew in his breath, shuddering involuntarily. She had taken pictures, alright. They almost seemed to jump off the page. There it was, just as Mack had described it. The amulet. It breathed before him on the page, almost pulsing from the photographs accuracy. He couldn’t believe he was getting this definition from a photograph.

Sarah drew in her breath, “Look, Jack, it gives a biography of Anne, next to it. It tells us EXACTLY what your Mackenzie was saying to you! It’s proof, do you see?”

Jack strangely found himself almost coming to tears at this realization. The aspect of the entire story not being a part of his imagination and having documentation made him feel as though he had suddenly been alleviated of 400 pounds. He felt so relieved, that he almost cried, and he put his hand on Sarah’s shoulder, squeezing it. She looked at him knowingly, and continued, pointing out separate points on the computer.

“See, Jack,” she continued, “here it is. Anne O’Malley, photographer, Mandel Hill journalist, displays work from the Celtic exhibition in 1939 at the New York Public Library. How did she get that gig, I wonder? She lived in New Jersey, and wasn’t very well known during that time period as a photographer.”

“She actually was,” Jack interrupted her, “ she was the town historian! The town and county used her for all the exhibitions and all the events. You can see all her work in the archives. That’s all I found, “ he continued excitedly, “ and I thought, ok, so what.”

He continued, perusedly.

“Maybe she had some connection with the librarians there at the time. And Mack said that he drove the trains into the city and out every day, and that he drove the “money train”, which I didn’t understand.” Jack looked at her quizzically.

“The money train transports just that, Jack, the actual gold reserve and the money from the banks. They have underground secret tunnels beneath the city. In fact, it’s rumored that some of the tunnels actually go under the library!”

“That’s impossible, “ he spluttered, thinking that was truly a stretch.

“No,” she continued, “it’s true! There are tunnels below, underneath the library that reach out to abandoned train stations. They used to use them during the 30’s and 40’s- not only for banks, but also for trains carrying weapons during the war! I am wondering if that’s how this amulet got transported?”

The picture almost jumped off the page in its intensity. It was a triumvirate shaped object, with a pointed top, and a stone shaped center, the shades of shadows in the black and white photograph suggesting that the stone’s color was unusual. There was an eminence of light from it, and Jack felt he could almost feel life from the computer screen.

Sarah looked at him knowingly, watching him look closer, be pulled into the image.

“I feel that too, Jack. I feel the pull. It’s crazy, right? Look, if you look closer, toward the stone portion of it, you will see something etched into the stone. Can you see it? “

Jack moved closer to the computer, and, consequently, closer to Sarah. His arm brushed hers, and he looked over to her, seeing if she had noticed. She turned and looked at him directly. He almost couldn’t breathe for a brief second, he was so caught up in the depth of her. They sat there, together, still.

“Back to our regularly scheduled program,” she breathed, glancing down at keyboard.

He looked away, and then looked back at the computer screen, trying to focus back onto the picture.

Looking quickly at the picture of the amulet, he could see a carving into the stone. Barely discernible in a photograph, it made him zoom in the computer screen and look closely at the etching. It seemed to be three women, intertwined in hands, and looking in different directions. They were in some sort of flowy material, almost Grecian in appearance, but the one in the center seemed taller and with more energy than the others. He moved his closer, to peer even

closer at their faces, and he could see, with amazement, that he could detect the carved eyes of each one in the stone, especially that of the center woman.

“Wow,” he breathed, and he looked at Sarah, “that is absolutely amazing.”

“I know, “ she responded in a whisper, “do you see the eyes, Jack? Do you see the power in this relic? I feel like it’s almost jumping out of the picture. And this is a picture of a picture! I wonder where the real pictures are.”

“Mack said that Annie moved to Massachusetts because of being followed by the Mordrach, and she took the kids with her. And they left the house that I am living in, then.” Jack rubbed his chin musingly, continuing, “I wonder what became of her? I am sure I could find out.”

“Let’s just concentrate on this, now. This amulet is somewhere in New York, I feel it. The spirits are whispering to me as I walk through the halls of the library. “

Jack looked at her in alarm.

“Seriously, “ he choked, “what are they saying, cause if anyone talked to me in this library, I would freak out, especially that French guy, “ and he looked over and waved to Pierre La Annoying at the reference desk.

“They are saying, Beware the Mordrach, he looks for you, and the sisters.”

Jack sat staring at her.

“He looks for you? Not me? You? And the Sisters? Could they mean the ladies in the stone.”

“I’m not sure, Jack. Maybe. They are metaphorical, you know?” She was looking around her, and he half expected her to start conversing with one of the people he did not see again,

“Well, okay, that just adds a whole new layer to this crazy cake of an adventure. How do the, uh, spirits, uh, whatever they are, in the New York Public Library know about this Mordrach? Can

we find out more about him? Can I at least know what I am looking for?" He asked, sighing in exasperation, eyeing her as she looked around.

"They say he is here often"

Jack started. "Who says?" he asked.

"Well, the spirits here. And they say that he is waiting for..." Her voice trailed off and she looked frightened.

"What? What is he waiting for?"

Her eyes looked up at him, luminous in the surroundings of the library, and she whispered, "he's been waiting for us."

Jack involuntarily swallowed air.

Okay. Okay, us. She is freaking me out, he thought. She is trying to freak me out because I don't even know this Mordrach dude, and....he stopped his thoughts, and spoke out loud to her.

"Sarah," he whispered, "How does this guy know about US? Wasn't he like from the island and got banished a billion years ago? How is he still alive?"

She spoke as if in a trance.

"He's alive here, Jack, he lives in other people's bodies and his to remake himself overtime that person's life is at an end. Remember he is from Tir Na Nog. He has the power of immortality, but in this world, he has to inhabit a body. So, he moves into the life of another whenever he needs to."

"Whoa. Do the people whose body he inhabits, do they know that he takes them?"

"No, they would have otherwise died. So sometimes it can be a child, an adult, a man or. A woman."

Jack coughed. “That’s freaking weird, Sarah. Are you telling me he could be a little kid?” She looked at him seriously, and responded carefully, “They say that right now he is a man. A man that should have passed in sickness last year. This one,” and she nodded to the corner, “ this woman from the 1600’s says that he some sort of bank executive now.”

“whoa.”

“Yes, whoa. And he is causing great havoc and suffering to people all over Manhattan due to his power-hungry ways. He has a tremendous influence with evil, they say. It builds upon each other. “ She suddenly stopped, and removed herself from the trancelike state she was inhabiting. She refocused back, and looked at Jack’s eyes, continuing, “he’s an enigma. People feel as though he has tremendous power, but what they don’t realize is that he is doing all the things he does to make them all succumb to him. And his influence. And, “ she stopped, and went on, “his evil.”

Jack shivered.

“Is he here now?” Jack whispered

“Not now, the spirits say. He frequents it here. The spirits try and warn people when he comes around, but not many can hear the otherworld whispers.”

Jack looked at her incredulously.

“But YOU can?”

“Yes,” she stated, simply.

“So are there people around us now?” He whipped his head around, back and forth, as to ascertain who she was speaking with currently.

“Not directly around us now, but there are people over there,” and she pointed toward the landing” who look like they are from the turn of the century. They have a lot of knowledge about what happened here.”

“Were they here?” Jack asked, continuing, “because if they were here, then they might know about the amulet. I mean, can you ask them questions?”

Sarah chuckled and looked down at her hands, stretching them out before her, “they are practically begging me to come over there, but I cannot just stand there and talk to those people without looking like a crazy person talking to thin air. So, I have been waiting for an opening. An opportunity. They don’t truthfully leave their designated spot, and that is a difficult way to obtain information.”

He looked at her incredulously. “How do you know that they want you to talk to them?” Sarah looked over toward the hallway, thoughtfully stating, “Well, they sort of shimmer. And if they do not shimmer, then, they I stay away from them. It’s like they have something to tell me, you know? Like, uh,” and she laughed, “like a dog wagging its tail? They shimmer, and then I know to listen, or go over there.”

Jack shook his head unbelievably and admiringly stated, “you are incredible! I would never had known any of this about you. You are so quiet and controlled and brilliant in school, and you have this whole other world about you that you manage as well! I can barely get through calculus, and when I saw Mack in my computer for the first time, I thought I was going to have a stroke. You are simply amazing,” he stated it again, and realizing he said it again, looked away. Sarah seemed quiet, but then said, “Thanks, Jack. You are the third person I have talked about this gift, and I am glad to share it with someone who gets it.”

She swiftly kissed his cheek, stood up, and walked over to the empty hallway that she had indicated was not empty. He smiled.

“I feel like I’m shimmering,” he laughed, and went to follow her.

As they left the library, and walked up 42nd street, it was obvious they both needed something to eat. The cold beginning of December in the city was in sharp contrast to Los Angeles beautiful sun kissed weather, and Jack rubbed his hands together, feeling the wind cut through his hair and coat. Burr. He questioned the whole idea of the tri state area. My god, it was freezing here. How do people work in this city?

“They run from office to office, Jack, “ Sarah said, as if reading his mind, and she turned into a Dean and Deluca. “C’mon, let’s get a chocolate croissant and a coffee, that will cheer us both up. “

“A chocolate croissant? I’m your man, “ he replied, and breathed a sigh of relief at the warmth in the coffee shop.

They ordered at the counter and brought over a small feast to the table, comprised of two scones (Sarah’s idea), one coffee and one large hot chocolate (also Sarah’s idea)

There were people milling in and out of the cafe, and it they faced outwards, sitting beside each other.

Sarah pulled the flaky crust from the croissant, dipping it in her hot chocolate, and looked up at Jack.

“You don’t seem as out of place as I thought you would, here, “ she smiled with her eyes and watched his expression with amusement.

“May I ask what that is supposed to mean?” Jack countered with objection.

Sarah laughed outright at his stare, continuing, “you know, California boy and all that. I didn’t know how you would handle the city vibe here, it’s very different than the Valleys you are used to.”

“Hmph. Your confidence in me is astounding. I happen to have went over the complete map to the city here, on my phone, all last night. Yes, I know I am a nerd. I wanted to make sure I was ready for a trip anywhere in the Big Apple with you. Look, I can show you the theater section, all the cross streets, and anything you need to know about the history of the great city,” he informed her in his most educated voice.

She laughed, and grabbed his phone, “Let me see, Mr. History buff, you have so much to learn about NYC.”

Their heads together, she widened the grid on the area of the New York Public Library. She was staring into it intently.

“Jack,” she whispered, and he looked at her in alarm, as she had dropped her croissant, and was staring down at the screen.

He put his hand on her arm, and moved to look in her face worriedly.

“Are you okay?” He whispered back, looking searchingly into her eyes.

“Jack. He’s there.”

“WHO?” He whispered, looking around completely freaked out by her mesmerized motions,

“WHO is where?”

“He is here. Right now. In the shop. Don’t look up.”

“WHAT?” Jack almost shouted, and he tugged at her phone, wanting to see what she was speaking of.

“Where???” He continued, whispering fiercely, looking down at her phone with no intent save to avert his eyes, “and how do you know? You don’t even know what he looks like!”

“I know, “ she said, and tapped his knee on the left side. Ignoring the fact that she had touched his knee, he glanced over to the left. She nodded to a man on line. Jack sucked in his breath when he saw him, as he immediately understood her feeling of knowing the power of the individual who had entered. Jack stared at him.

The man was tall, dark hair and dark eyes. His build was stealth like, clothed in a suit that boasted expensive taste and styling, and the overcoat he wore distinctly tailor made and cashmere. He had on black leather gloves and he loomed ominously over the other people at the Dean and DeLuca. It was almost as if the y had moved aside for him, Jack noted, and he tried to look away. There was something uniquely effortless in the manner in which he moved, and darkly sinister as well, Jack thought in trepidation. Indeed, the man was smooth, but evoked a strange sense of dread around him. A sense of dark fright, and Jack could not remove his gaze, searching to place the man’s presence. A panther, he seemed, he eyes fixed and unmoving, watching. The man moved his body towards the front of the line, obtained his drink, and turned towards them.

Sarah audibly gasped. He was looking straight at them. His gaze locked with Sarah’s for an instant, and she did not move. Jack watched in panic as the man continued to gaze, cat like, at Sarah. Like prey, Jack thought immediately. No. His next reaction was distinctly protective, and the body blocked her gaze, leaning over to look her in the eye. It worked, and she broke off the stare with the man, who smiled a pearly white Cheshire smile, and moved out the door, still watching Sarah. It seemed as if he walked at an abnormally quickened pace, and suddenly sped up and seemed to vanish down the side street.

Sarah stared after him, as if in a trance. Jack grabbed her elbow, and gently shook it.

“Sarah. Sarah? You okay? Hey, you there, Sarah?” He spoke to her carefully, and he strained to look over his shoulder, making sure there was no return of the presence who had so disrupted their lunch.

Her eyes came back into focus, and she slightly shook her head. She turned to look at Jack.

“I knew that was him, “she spoke to as to herself and to Jack, and he watched her as she carefully picked up the remains of her lunch, “I knew it because I felt a wave as soon as he walked in, Jack. It was like nothing I’ve felt before. It was a wave of...” and she looked again into his eyes, her hand on his arm, and she trailed off, not finishing the sentence, visibly upset.

Jack moved toward her again, and picked up the remainder of her half-eaten lunch tray, whispering, “let’s get out of here. We can talk about it later.”

She nodded, and they put their garbage in the trash. Her hands were shaking. He put his scarf around her, and she looked up, smiled appreciatively.

“It’s pretty cold here in New York City, Sarah. “

“We have to walk back to the train,” she whispered, and she took his offered hand. It had begun to flurry, and they moved quickly down 8th avenue and 42nd street, a small circle of warmth among the crowds heading toward the station.

Chapter 13- Delia Hides the Stones

September 23, 1936 -Manhattan

Delia moved with quickening pace towards 42nd street, holding her tapestry bag close to her, anticipating filling it soon with the amulet. Her husband, Edward, had been informed of the importance of her journey, although he did not fully understand the depth of her tale surrounding it. He had assured her he would watch the children while she traversed, and had kissed her goodbye with trepidation, his auburn hair curled tightly in the September heat, his brow furrowed with concern. He had watched her walk down the street, holding the baby in one arm and clutching his other daughter with his right hand. Their fifteen-year-old son had stood in the doorway, also holding the hands of the twins as she scurried through the Upper West Side of Manhattan. Edward was a busy printer of religious pamphlets, and worked in the Printing District in Hudson Square. He was devoted not only to his ministries, but a deeply loving father to his family. He had been the priest that had walked her home every night for five years, until eventually their love was stronger than his calling.

She had run back across 42nd street towards the steps of the library, knowing that it was time to remove the stone and retrieve the amulet from the hidden archives there, where it had been hidden for many years. The keys jingled in her pocket mysteriously as she carefully picked her way down the stairs to the lowest level of library literature. It was there she had hidden the amulet for so many years, and where she had intention now to return. She felt spirits acknowledge her as she quickly and swiftly swept towards the back stairs, looking furtively left and right. She carefully nodded to the two spirits that stood beside the stairway doors, one a Dutchman from the 1600's and another the somber woman in black that greeted her years before

upon her arrival to the library. They allowed her passage and she removed the keys from the pocket of her dress to open the passageway.

Mordrach had been sighted by her many times in the last few years, his current state a German scientist and supporter of the Reich movement that now presided in Europe. She had spotted him twice on the streets of the city, his diminutive form shadowing the horror that was his shadowed soul. She knew he had already conspired with evil forces in Europe, and that he looked to gain more power through the use of biological warfare within the United States, unknown to the citizens he passed each day. She knew that the acquisition of the amulet with the two stones would empower him to take over more than Germany, and the spirits had warned her that his aim was to steal the amulet during the equinox, as it would enable him to traverse the Mag Mell and overtake Tir Na Nog, thus fostering the rise of the Milesians he had trained. She had safely ensconced the artifact in the shelves of books and was protected by the ancient spirits that resided there after she had spoken to them of its value.

She walked down the many flights of stairs to the underbelly of the library, and looked around to see if she was being followed. It was a tedious pilgrimage, but she was careful not to slip. Her hair was flying around her wildly, as she had been too rushed to leave and secure the clips into place.

On the very basement floor, she stopped, breathless at the exertion, and surveyed the stacks. Normally she would have the book she needed called up, but this was not an easily obtained novel. She stood directly in front of the stack in the left-hand back side of the musty room, took a deep breath, and chanted in a sing song voice.

“The three rays of light, collide within,
Bring forth the stones that unite the kin

The deepest power that Credne bore

Bring forth the stones from the deepest lore.”

She stopped and looked about her, her eyes flying with anticipation and wariness, for she knew that Mordrach had followers everywhere, malicious and intent on his every desire. She shivered, and waited.

There was a rustling beside her, and the tube that normally would send the books upwards into the core of the library began to tremble. She turned towards it, expectantly, and watched as the dust inside it began to whirl around. As she watched, there was the shimmer of silver and light within the vessel, twirling and spinning, and suddenly there appeared a silver leaf within. She gasped, and moved to open the dusty outside of the tube. Carefully pulling back the opening, the leaf floated in a sing song way into her palm. She clutched it, carefully, staring in wonderment at its perfectly detailed veins and shape. It had a warmth to it, and she felt it moving, as though urging her to utilize it. She picked it up between her left forefinger and thumb, and it trembled.

There was a flow of energy, and a burst of three rays of light. It was so powerful a light that Delia had to shield her eyes with her alternate arm. No corner was unlit and the light on the shelf of books to her right poured directly to a volume on the highest shelf, at least 20 feet above.

She stared at it, and moved, with the leaf still in her hand, toward the shelf. The leaf trembled again, and its silver rays began to spin in a dizzying manner, faster and faster, and then, it was gone. Replaced in her outstretched hands was an enormous volume of *The Chaldean Oracles*. She placed it carefully on the desk before her, and gingerly traced the outside cover, a raised, embroidered leather bind, a triumvirate sign on emblazoned in thread beneath the title. She delicately opened the cover and gasped.

The pages of the book had been carved out in a triangle, and there, inside the cut-out portion, was the velvet bag that she had commissioned long ago to the depths of the library.

She had sent it with a warning to the spirits and recited incantations to protect the artifact. It had returned to her intact, and she drew a triumphant breath. Opening the bag and thanking the spirits that had protected it deep within the shelving, she started.

A creak.

There was a rustling at top of the stairs, and hurriedly she removed the amulet from within. Her hands trembled, feeling its pulsing power flow through her body, becoming part of the great, ancient music and light that it emitted. Her breath came deeply and she absorbed it, her mind racing. Slowly, she pulled it down again, and with much God-given strength, removed the blue stone from the tip of it. It was difficult to pull apart. The amulet almost sighed as she did so. She put the stone back into the book, closed it tight, and chanted again.

“Bound by spell, bound by sleep,
In this writing here I steep
The stone that falls to the sword of light
To keep all Tuatha from darkest night
The hidden depths otherworldly see
Only to be found by the bonded three.”

There was a great burst of light, and the book was sent into the library tunnel, rattling and followed by a silver burst. She held the amulet in her arms. “This shall be sent to another,” she murmured, and she pushing upon the row of bookshelves, she found the handle that opened the hidden door beneath the library. Only those who had great knowledge of the library were aware of the tunnel beneath the building that let to Bryant Park. She carefully pushed it, and the door

creaked its rebuttal, cobwebs floating downward, and Delia noted as she brushed them away that it had not been opened in many years. Hearing the steps upon the stairs coming down to the library, she hurriedly shut the bookcase door behind her. Peering ahead into the darkness, she quickened her step and began walking in the dark corridor, one hand clutching the amulet and the other ahead of her protectively. She knew that the path she travelled, beneath the city, and the corridor before her beckoned. The walls were rough and touched with dirt, and she brushed her hands on her dress. The amulet shone its own light as she walked. She looked behind her nervously, but moved ahead with determination. When at last there was a light ahead of her, she hurriedly stored the amulet in the bag (outdated in its tapestry design) and moved into the little-known storage area beneath the city's park.

There were many wooden boxes to be transported to either another library or to a government building around her, and she looked carefully, seeing that there was one box marked "Library of Congress, Station 61."

Station 61.

That was the unknown train station beneath the Waldorf Astoria. Having been privy to many secrets as a librarian of the New York Public Library, she was aware that this would provide safe transportation to the world's most secure library, directly from Manhattan. The train beneath the Astoria was the vessel of presidents to the airport, and of precious artifacts.

Making a heavy decision, she opened the box carefully as she had seen a wedge beside the boxes and slipped the velvet bag into the straw inside. She closed the top and banged it shut with her shoe. She knew that she could leave from the park, and, seeing the light from the stairs, began ascending toward Bryant Park, looking back at the amulet as it glowed inside the crate.

She said a small prayer, and moved up the stairs and out towards the open air of Manhattan, its bustling wind and people whisking her back.

Chapter 14- The Letter

Delia had returned home, and her children had rounded her with great joy. Her husband had beamed, heaving a sigh of relief when she walked up the brownstone steps into their house on _____-street. His arms enveloped her quickly, and she lay her head on his chest, inhaling the comforting aroma of musky bergamot.

Edward was at least two heads taller than she, and he looked down at her after kissing the top of her curly dark hair.

“Mission accomplished?” he smiled down, looking at her questioningly.

“Yes sir,” she voiced quietly, hugging him closely, and then pulling away, looking up.

“It’s hidden, and never to be found. Only the descendants of Morrigan can pull it up from the depths. It was dangerous, Edward, but I am happy it is done. I have recurring dreams of three young people looking for it. And he.....is following them. The powers in the earth stone are stronger than all the others. Edward, those children.....they are not.....” she trailed off.

“They are not what?” he prompted.

She took a deep breath.

“They are.....not from our time. This time. They are from a different time. They quest for the stone. They look, but they are not sure why they are looking. Two boys and a girl. And the young girl.....looks....” again her voice shook, and she grabbed his hand, as if for strength.

“What is it dear Delia? What does she look like?”

“Me. Edward. She looks just like me.”

Edward was silent, quietly thinking, nodding. As he often did, he pushed his long fingers through his shock of red hair.

“Perhaps,” he said slowly, “perhaps, this girl that you see, she is a descendant of you. Thus, the Morrigan connection. I have loved you long enough to know that your dreams are no fancy notion, Delia. They are not only a prediction, but a directive. This is a forewarning to you to take action in some way towards the hidden gem. You have it protected by a binding prayer, I know, but perhaps you can advise the children somehow that there is way to receive it? Is there a way to do that? “

She thoughtfully moved toward the stairs, leaning on the banister, and still holding his hand.

“I cannot transcend time, dearest, that is not my gift in this world,” she sighed.

He looked at her curiously.

“Your physical body does not transcend time, Delia, but your spirit exists through the word. As a great follower of the Lord, I am well aware of the power of the written word in the outcomes of lives,” and in so saying, he moved over to the Bible that was open on his desk in the living room secretary desk, reverently touching it, and looking back at his wife. He had been a priest, she reminded herself, before they had realized their connection had been stronger than his calling.

Her eyes became very large and round, and she nodding, silently acknowledging his meaning.

He nodded back at the realization.

“Go then, dearest, write to advise those in your dream of the stone and it’s whereabouts. Somehow, fate will bring it to them, I know that with certainty.”

She nodded again, and ascended the stairs to the master bedroom, making her way quickly to the desk beside the vanity in her room. Her dark, curling hair swirled around her face,

and she quickly turned and opened the curtain. She swung back and stationed herself in the chair, and took a deep breath. She frantically searched for stationery in the drawer, and spread it out before her, grabbing the fountain pen from the holder in front of her. The sun was streaming in through the window, and the classical music that was coming through the Atwater Kent radio lifted her spirits as she emotionally readied herself to write to the future. She felt the spirits swirling around her, and she saw the spirit of the widowed woman from the library tapping from the other side.

Clasping the necklace to her chest, holding the sanctified water stone in her left hand, she breathed out. Her right hand began to write, directions from the mysterious woman in the long black dress, telling her their names. Advising her about Mordrach, and how he visited the library throughout the times, lurking, visiting, searching. She drew in a great breath, and, asking for guidance, began to scribe.

“Dearest Sarah.....” she began, and the music led her as she moved deeply into the state of directing her great, great granddaughter towards the earth stone.

Chapter 15- Zoey and Mordrach Meet

The skyscraper on millionaire's row in Manhattan looked auspiciously over Central Park, and Seymour Droch held a drink in one hand, the other palm faced on the giant window that panoramically viewed the city. His deep, dark grey eyes, like a cat's, fiercely stared out at the people below. His suit and collar were smoothed perfectly to outline his stunning physique. He was an inordinately tall man, with legs leading to a solid torso, and an aquiline jaw line defined his beautiful, savage features. His entire person and gait was reminiscent of a panther waiting to strike, with the intense ferocity of an animal always looking for prey. Zoe squirmed in her seat on the streamlined couch, none too comfortable with him or the seating.

His condominium was furnished with the most modern furniture and streamlined décor, and it sidled next to an enormous office. This room housed a giant mahogany colored desk, a leather-bound chair, and a library of books that could only be termed as priceless and extraordinarily rare. Some of them were festooned with maps atop of them, but placed in a manner that can only be regarded as unparalleled in their antiquity. There was a certain manuscript placed distinctly upon a podium in the middle of the office, and it's pages were worn and frayed with age. It was a peculiar juxtaposition of room settings. Zoe's eye's became large and incredulous with what she viewed on inside the room. She gripped the cushion beside her in shock.

On the floor by the desk lay what appeared to be a large green and brown ottoman. Horrifically, upon second look, there was a hissing and moaning sound that emerged from its center. As Droch watched the people below him cycle and run through Central Park, the slithering, heaving mass began to upwhirl, getting larger and larger. It finally round itself fully upright, ominously, turning its diamond shaped head toward Zoe, slicking its long, orange and

red trident shaped tongue. She gasped, her long fingers pulled protectively toward her chest, and pulled her body away. She stood up, and retreated to the door instantly. She tugged on its handle, pulling it desperately.

Mr. Droch moved swiftly, picked up a remote device, and clicked it immediately. A large transparent wall closed the office from the living area. The serpent pushed up against it menacingly, flicking it's tongue back and forth.

Zoe's thoughts were involved in how she might jump out the window without injury.

"Mr. Droch," she breathed with difficulty, her hands and legs trembling, "what in God's name is that...that...that thing???" Her eyes were round and incredulous. Her hands were shaking, and she clenched at her sides.

"Please don't mind Naadred," Droch turned towards Zoe, his eyes glinting, "she's completely harmless. An endangered species I picked up when visiting Wales and the exploration of the lakes. Incredible. She's very affectionate, really. When I feed her," he added, slowly and pointedly turning. The giant serpent snapped menacingly towards her, and she jumped. Seymour Droch was looking directly at Zoe.

Zoe recoiled at his direct gaze, finding it difficult not to run. What did he want with her, and why had she been essentially forced to see the famous Seymour Droch? He had a strange, strong, disturbing undercurrent, and she very rarely ignored her instincts. With trepidation, she kept glancing back and forth to the adjoining room. What could have been named Naadreed was, it seemed now, a coiled ottoman. Ugh.

Her husband, Roman, had expressed great distaste at the mentioning of Droch's name, indicating his reputation of a madman in business and a tyrant towards those who worked beneath him. There had been a barrage of phone calls at her office, and finally, her receptionist

had walked in with a handwritten note from the infamous Mr. Droch. It included an address and rather insistent request which promised a large endowment towards the university if she took interest in a study he had proposed. Nigel, her partner, had balked at the meeting, and he was currently calling her cell. She declined it.

Swiveling toward him, she coolly moved forward, ineffectively ignoring the enormous, sinewy mass present in the adjoining room.

“And so, Mr. Droch, what can I do for you?” she gasped, turning her face away from the beast, “I am lecturing at the University in an hour, and, of course, you know how traffic works here in Manhattan,” she smoothly inquired of him, as she shivered inwardly at the prospect of having to work with him.

When a custom Rolls Royce had shown up outside her office requesting her to meet with Mr. Seymour Droch, she could not refuse, and even further when he threatened to remove the allocation of 25 million dollars towards the anthropological department from his business from last year. She sighed, and turned back to the matter at hand, watching as he paced to and fro in front of the window. He turned to her again, suddenly.

His grey eyes were icicles on her skin, and she shuddered again, involuntarily.

“I understand,” he carefully selected his words, “that you are hosting an expedition to the ancient ruins of County Cork in Ireland? Is that correct?”

She looked at him warily, quite clearly surprised at his question.

“Yes. An expedition on dolmans. For dating purposes of the stone. We will be testing out a new dating system. What could possibly be interesting about that to someone like you, Mr. Droch? I am sure you could go visit such sculptures quickly in your private jet?”

What could this man care about carbon dating and rocks from the Megalithic age? She doubted very much that this was a scientific interest on his part, and she waited for an answer as Seymour sipped his drink and watched her every move.

Zoe's skin crawled. Whatever this guy wants, she thought, he wants it really bad. Whatever his motivation was for funding the NYU anthropology department for millions of dollars, it must be pretty important. She wracked her brain trying to find the connection between the slanted communication system that he privately owned and operated and a megalithic rock.

"I would be surprised if you didn't ask, Mrs. Cartwright," and he smiled his large, Cheshire cat toothed smile, "yes, what do I want with an expedition of such? Well, it is actually not the expedition but the reason that the stones are there which is the intent behind my interest."

"I don't understand."

He walked carefully closer to her, and seated himself opposite her on the streamlined chair. She did not flinch.

He leaned forward, his drink mysteriously swirling in the crystal cut glass. With the sun streaming in the window, there was reflected an amber glow over them both. They seemed to be frozen in time and motion. Trapped, thought Zoe, and she moved uncomfortably.

"Yes," he went on, "what could I want with an anthropological expedition? Nothing cut in stone, I assure you," he punned, and laughed at himself, continuing, "no, nothing of the earthly persuasion. I assure you that."

"I am not sure I am following you, Mr. Droch," answered Zoe, "what do you mean? We are specifically dealing with earthly things on this exhibition....sorry to disappoint you," and she stood up to leave, grabbing her purse and her notebook. This was ridiculous, and she refused to

entertain this palpably evil man anymore. As she walked away, she could swear that she heard hissing.

He stood up, intercepting her in an astonishingly unearthly speed, and stood directly in front of her. He was effectively blocking her from leaving. Her eyes flashed at him, and she gritted her teeth.

“Mr. Droch.”

“Mrs. Cartwright. I need your unlevelled attention. Please do not assume our conversation is finished. You see, I think I may want to be part of your, uh, expedition. Are you familiar with Celtic mythology, Mrs. Cartwright?”

She stood there, seething. Who did this man think he was? And was that thing actually alive? She wanted to get out of this amber colored hell hole, and quickly.

“Yes, Mr. Droch, I am very familiar with the legends and lore of the area. It’s very amusing and essential to know if you are part of the excavating of past generations. What’s your point?”

He stepped closer to her even again. She suppressed the urge to bolt, and stood calmly in front of him. He put his drink down on the small table beside him. He took a breath, and spoke carefully and selectively.

“My point, Mrs. Cartwright, is that I feel that you and I want different things from the same place. If you have heard the legends and lore from that region, you will understand that these dolmans, as you call them, are regarded as portals. Do you believe any of this folklore, Mrs. Cartwright?”

Portals for what? What is he speaking of? Portals in time? Yes, she had always known about that, but never fully believed any of those tales. Could THE Seymour Droch have a

possible interest in time travel? Could he believe in such things? Zoe could not fathom that he did.

“Can you please explain further, sir?”

He gestured towards the attached library.

“As you can see, Mrs. Cartwright, I have an extensive library. Most of it pertaining to the ancient art and folklore of the region you are to be visiting,” he smiled, gleaming his teeth again at her, “it’s a hobby I have been interested in for many years now. My, uh, ancestors have told me so many of the tales of that reason that I cannot imagine not seeing if some of the possible stories are true.”

“Quite an expensive hobby, if I do say so, Mr. Droch,” and she looked at him warily, “you are investing millions in something you regard as a “hobby”? That is very unusual.”

“Is it, Mrs. Cartwright?” he drawled slowly, “I know many millionaires who will pay astronomical amounts for seats at sporting events, cars, vacation homes...need I go on? Is it really that unusual? I am merely interested in seeing if any of these “dolman” structures do what legends say they can do. Clearly, you as a scientist do not negate that time travel could very well be a concept, and perhaps that it is something that was discovered in times past on a very primal level.”

“No, Mr. Droch, it is not disputable that there is time travel, but I am unsure as to how you plan on arriving at the conclusion that you will be involved in the University’s expedition. There is no room for a person to “mosey” around, so to speak, the structures on an archeological dig. What can I do for you in respect to that? “

He watched her, eerily focusing his gray, glinting eyes intently on hers.

“It is with great hope, “ he drawled out, “that I can find you leading an expedition with research as its intention, Mrs. Cartwright. Perhaps you can work some type of, uh, excuse the expression, magic, and make the time travel aspect of a dolman an integral part of your work? It is my humble hope that you would be using the university’s endowment from Droch Enterprises to, uh, formulate your, uh, focus on the travel and discovery thereafter. I am sure you understand my hope?”

He smiled the infamous Cheshire cat smile, and tilted his head.

Zoe just stared at him in amazement. She couldn’t refuse this proposal, although every inch of her flesh crawled with the concept of having Seymour Droch accompany their team investigation. She shook her head and looked up at him, and suddenly smiled. She wanted to get out of there, and her first thought right now was freedom.

“Okay, Mr. Droch. We can certainly allot for the interests of our benefactors. You are welcome to meet us in County Cork, Ireland on May 14th. That’s a month from now, and you will want to make sure you have lodging on your own. It’s pretty sparse out there.” She smiled, beguilingly, and grabbed her purse, inching toward the heavy oak door.

It opened.

How incredibly frightened she was did not show in her face or stature, but her legs moved in an almost biconically fast speed. He followed her out, standing in the hallway, an imposing, dark figure against the ambient lights of the hallway fixtures.

“Until we meet again, Mrs. Cartwright, “ he called down the hall to her as she moved at a lightning like speed out and down the lobby.

He turned back to the serpent and smiled.

“Nadreed, it looks like we have an opening to another world at our fingertips.”

Chapter 16 -The Dolman

The sight near the dolman was a grassy plain, the sky itself the color seen only by those privy to the Irish sunrises that took one's breath away. Zoe, her team beside her, stood in awe of the outline of the dolman of Kilcoyne, artfully and gracefully etched against the sun that broke into the beginning of the morning. The beautiful sculpture was peacefully emitting its own glow towards them, as the sun rose higher, the shadows that fell in front of it were forming a figure.

The shadow of the rocks looked like a bird in flight, thought Zoe, and she withdrew breath for a brief moment. How amazing. The Stone Age had produced some magnificent structures, but the simple strategy of this stone architecture was breathtaking through the sunrise. The builders from that time epoch had not only been great builders, but they had transcended warfare techniques beyond the gage of other Celtic peoples. The three stones beneath precariously balanced a large, flat rock on the top, as was the style of the colmeacs, or dolman rock structures from this age.

Zoe's partner, Nigel, stood besides, his notebook poised for exact measurements, but the sunrise overtook both of their agendas. His dark head inclined toward the dolman in the sunrise.

"I think I have never seen anything so beautiful," he murmured appreciatively, and she glanced over at him and nodded.

"I wish Roman and Sarah had been able to come on this expedition. They would have loved the country and the lore behind the people. You know," she added, "these are supposed to be portals," speaking not only to him, but also herself.

"The majesty behind these, I would believe it. Do you see the moss that has settled on the right-hand side? And the lavender growing on the left? I could paint this, if I had any talent,

Zoe,” and he laughed, moving away for his tools. Their team of four stood behind them, sipping coffee and watching the shadows become magnified in front of them as the sun rose higher.

“Well,” she said, shaking her arms out, “let’s get moving. I want to get our megalithic structure measurements and the essence of this stone monument moving before we are visited by what’s his name and he messes it all up.”

Nigel laughed, and indicated toward the measuring units and tools that the team had.

“They are also supposed to be graves. Tombs, where revered people were buried. This one here is a Neolithic structure. Do you see the capstone? The top stone and how it is balanced over the two supporting stones? It’s almost physically impossible to construct such a monument,” and he stroked his short, dark beard carefully, thoughtfully. His complexion was swarthy and dark, but his deep, black eyes were generous of spirit, and overtly gentle. Nigel was a very tall man, but he was kneeling beside the stone megalith, and from there, he took a deep breath, and he looked up at Zoe.

She ran her hand along the side of it, the mossy patches soft and forgiving. The stone was very, very cold. She met his gaze.

“It’s an astonishing feat of engineering. I would say rooted in France, but I know I would be challenged by locals,” she smiled.

He glanced at her sideways and smiled in return.

“I am shocked, but the locals here will burn you at the stake for such a remark, Zoe. Their culture and lore are not to be disputed.”

Nigel walked about, taking notes. He spoke aloud, “Classic tripod design, large, massive roof stone, lower backstone supporting. Doorstone, which closes off the entrance to the “tomb”

area. Any clue, “ he paused, turning towards Zoe, who was busy taking her own measurements, “as to what or whom is buried here?”

She shook her head slowly, and continued taking measurements.

“This dolman capstone weights 70 tons, Nigel. How is it possible these ancient people actually maneuvered these large pieces of stone in this manner? Unbelievable, really,” she murmured.

“I feel like there is a spirit here,” she continued, musingly, and then caught herself, laughing, “why, that sounded remarkably like my great-grandmother speaking.”

“Your great grandmother was an anthropologist?” Nigel queried as he lifted and measure different smaller stones surrounding the structure. His eyes laughed at her.

“ My great grandmother,” she responded cautiously, “was a psychic. Delia Magellan,” she sang out loud in an Irish lilt, laughing and continuing, “and a mystic, although she would never admit to that, being a devout Catholic in the early 20th century. She was very,” and she glanced over a Nigel again and patted the rock affectionately, “spiritual... in mind and body. Unusual for that time period.”

Nigel whistled.

“It’s amazing that she made it out of Ireland then, as you have told me. They were pretty crazy about that stuff back then.”

“She was very discreet,” she said, admiringly, “and she ended up being one of the first librarians at the New York Public Library. Ha. She married a priest, also!” and she couldn’t help but smile, remembering her Grandma Delia, even in her 80’s, reciting passages from Darwin, Chaucer, and Shakespeare at every dinner table discussion, asking specific questions of all of her grandchildren, specifically Zoe. Nigel’s eyebrows raised.

“Anyway,” she moved toward the rock, “the sun is coming up, and I am interested in seeing the effects of shadows on the terrain here. Let’s move inside this one, a little further, if you can manage that, Nigel.”

He nodded.

“Are you going to take pictures, or am I?” he said, moving to the right of the dolman. As he did so, he glanced over at Zoe. He blinked, repeatedly.

“What’s up, Nigel? Why are you staring at me like I am a three headed monster?” she stared back at him, mildly alarmed at his expression and recurrent blinking. He seemed frozen.

Nigel moved forward and outstretched his hand toward her, even though he was at least 20 feet away.

“You,” he began, and then tilted his head, still staring at her, “you, you’re...you’re glowing, Zoe. Your....your....necklace, it’s glowing....around you. Like a lion, like, like....like the sun is around you.”

He stepped back, careful to move away from her.

She confusedly grasped the necklace. It was shaped in a trifold design, and it appeared to have three indentations that previously had held gem-stones, but no longer did. The beauty in the antique artistry had never eluded her, but no other person other than her husband, Roman, had remarked upon it until now. This had been a gift from her grandmother when she was very young, a very elegant Gaelic pendant that she had left her as a gift. Zoe had worn it various times before, and had felt the need to don it before her trip the island, but it had never produced any reaction previously. She looked down and around her, surveying the effects of the sun.

It was true, the sun had shifted so that it glinted and reflected the rays from the pendant all around her, almost in a circular frame. She gasped, outstretching her own arms, and dropping

her writing tablet and instruments. She had, indeed, begun to take great effect. In constellation like bursts, she had become the semblance of a star on earth.

Nigel was without speech. His team members moved around him, clearly noticing the glowing as well. Jake, a smallish college student, swore. Ellen, a spectacled, heavy set middle-aged woman on the team tilted her head, watching Zoe, and then began scribbling intensely in her notebook.

Even as this was happening, there began a deep rumbling. The earth beneath them began to tremble, and the wind picked up quickly all around them. Papers and instruments began flying in several different directions, and the team scrambled to get them. Nigel continued to stand, transfixed, as he watched Zoe. She felt her hands outstretch in front of her, and wind began to urge her hair from the tidy chignon at the nape of her neck. It soon whipped around her face brutally. The sun flashed Zoe and the necklace. Her shadow profiled the entrance to the dolman tomb. She gasped, and moved backwards, away so the sun passed her shape and moved in to light the inside of the rock walls of the dolman. A white beam inverted a shadow back out of the entrance, and the flipped silhouette delineated the cast.

Zoe's heart seemed to stop. Who was that? What was that emitting from the tomb?

Urgently, swiftly, they heard a slow, steady beat. Turning away, in a blinding flash stood a tall, translucent figure of a woman. She carried a spear.

Nigel placed his hand over his eyes. Zoe shielded herself as well, but she was greeted by another flash, and found herself instantly in a position of prostrate humility. She bowed her head with unanticipated reverence.

The third flash was synonymous with a wind blast which keeled them all over. They lay there, each and every member of the university team, in wait for the revelation of the figure above them.

Chapter 17- Brigid

The whirling of the helicopter behind them made them all turn away from the glowing figure that was emanating from within the dolman structure. Emblazoned on the outside of the helicopter was “DROCH ENTERPRISES”, and it slowly made its way down to the grassy field in back of the Dolman. Such an interruption was completely a surprise, and with what felt like an invasion, Seymour Droch alighted from the helicopter, accompanied by two darkly dressed individuals.

“Oh, wow, this is NOT well timed,” stated Zoe, matter of factly, and she glanced toward the retreating glow from the dolman, almost a backwards imitation of Droch’s forward movement. Zoe sighed, and she noticed the sun had moved away from the necklace and away from the dolman altogether. Whatever had just happened had been completely interrupted by the introduction of Seymour Droch. She sighed, and tried to recompose herself. Nigel had moved over to her, standing protectively by her side as she watched Droch and his counterparts move toward them. He quietly put his head down and spoke in tones only she could hear.

“Let’s not minimize what just happened here, Zoe. That was a movement. Something from another realm,” and he turned his back towards Droch, facing her and speaking in the same low tones.

“You connected with something and it’s the spring equinox, Zoe. Whatever and whoever that was coming out of the dolmen is something that is connected to the sphere of your necklace, and who DOESN’T want any part of Droch, it’s pretty obvious. Play it cool, sister,” he stated, and turned around, flashing a shining smile to their visitors, halfway planted himself in front of Zoe as a barrier.

Part of her was touched, and she blinked appreciatively. Part of her was still in a state of shock as to what had just happened. It was EXTREMELY strange that as soon as Seymour Droch had shown up, the entire effect on the sculpture had changed, and whatever (maybe whoever) had been emitting light from within the structure had evaporated.

Droch swaggered his way over towards Nigel and Zoe. His pants, inappropriately silk, swished as he walked, his raven hair gleaming in the waxing rays of sun. A hawklike glance at both Zoe and Nigel produced another smile from the aquiline jaw, the wide, white teeth bared towards them both.

Zoe shivered, both from the loss of sunlight and the presence of Droch.

Nigel saw this, and moved forward, intercepting Droch.

“Ah, Mr. Seymour Droch, how nice that you should join us here in Kilkenny. I am not sure we have formally met, I’m Nigel Satari, and this is our university anthropology team. I believe you know Zoe,” he stated, nodding back towards her.

Droch was paying no attention to Nigel. His gaze was fixated. His eyes narrowed, and he physically brushed past Nigel to stand directly in front of her.

“That, uh, necklace. Mrs. Cartwright, mmm...” the black onyx of his pupils were dilated fully, his head tilted slowly. It was almost a purr.

Zoe clasped her hand protectively around it, and moved backwards, feeling inadvertently like prey. She staunchly responded.

“Yes, this was a gift from my great grandmother. Quite a relic, really. Something from the bronze age, I believe,” she forced out at him.

His eyes never left the talisman. His response was alarming in its urgency.

“Yes. Exquisite. May I buy it from you?”

Nigel again moved closer to Zoe.

She blinked, and retorted defensively, putting her hand over it.

“It’s not for sale,” she flashed at him, half laughing, half frightened.

“Name your price, I am sure we could work something out, Mrs. Cartwright.”

Zoe’s eyes fluttered in alarm.

“You see, Mr. Droch, as I said before, it’s not for sale,” she spoke quickly, and turned toward the dolman. The necklace was strangely warm on her neck.

She could almost hear him growl. He sardonically laughed at her.

Facing both him and Nigel, she looked back inside the dolman. The figure had completely retreated. She sighed in disappointment. Droch watched her gaze.

“Missing someone?”

Ignoring the remark, she drew a quick breath and laughingly drove her gaze back to the sleekly coiffed profile of Droch. He stared back, and alarming intensity in his deep voice.

“No, Mr. Droch, just marveling at the structure here. Shall I walk you about it and explain the dimensions? Or are you interested in investigating in some other fashion? I know that the trip overseas must be a large interruption to your already busy schedule, and we wouldn’t want to keep you any longer than necessary.”

He smiled, again, the catlike, his grin luring and despotic at the same time.

“Oh, no, Mrs. Cartwright, I would love to watch your team’s investigation for the better part of the day, no local information needed for me. May I introduce my two counterparts, part of my, uh, research, so to speak.”

A small, oddly shaped woman with a pronounced chin clad in all black moved forward, her suit a mismatched uniform for the expedition. Behind her stood a large, burly man in a

hooded sweatshirt, completely contrasting the formal attire of the rest of Droch's entourage. His face was sullen, frowning. He was hulking and smelled as if he hadn't showered in many days. He grunted his hello, and Zoe turned her head from him in disgust.

"Candice and Morty, Mrs. Cartwright and Mr. Nigel Satiri, the chief officer of NYU's anthropological department. It is evident that these two people and their team will be reporting statistics on the rock structure present."

"Mrs. Cartwright and Mr. Nigel, it is a pleasure, truly," said the darkly clad Candice, extending her hand. It clawed at Zoe, its thin talon-like nails gripping her hand painfully. She recoiled again, looking nervously at Nigel.

He did not extend his hand, and made a slight incline with his head in greeting. She saw his distrustful glare, and he moved back towards the dolman.

"I am wondering," murmured Droch, "if I could be of any help? My intention is to observe your interaction with the stone structure, but I can certainly assist should there be need."

Zoe quickly responded, "Just what is your intention, Mr. Droch? What are you thinking you will be finding here? This is dirty work, sir, and mostly gadgets and measurements. Not a place for a billionaire, I can assure you, in a silk suit."

Nigel chimed in, "yes, we can certainly do our work here, and report back to you, Mr. Droch. Unless you are looking for something, uh, specific?"

Seymour Droch's eyes riveted themselves back to Zoe's necklace and the opening of the dolman.

"Ah. I see. Yes, alright then, perhaps I will stay for a bit and play to the "observer" role. I would be interested in seeing if you would be finding any further relics amongst the remains of the structure. May I stay and do so?"

Zoe heaved a sigh. There was no possibly to refuse, but she knew Droch would cause her problems, not only among her team and workspace but also with.....whatever had just happened. Whoever, whatever, had shown itself inside the dolman was not coming out with Droch there. She would come back later tonight. Alone.

“Yes, Mr. Droch, you may stay. Let’s go, Nigel, we have a ton of excavating to do, and I want to do it during the day when the sun is out. It is the equinox.”

Chapter 18- We Gotta Talk

The next morning was a Sunday, a blissful and unexpected day of sleep for Jack. No alarm, snow and no track practice brought him to a 10:00 awakening. What was with this March weather? Now snow? Oh my god, New Jersey was so weird.

He stumbled downstairs in a pair of flannels and an oversized hoody, groping his way into the kitchen. The sun was streaming in the windows, and his mother's vintage ragtime music was playing on the blue tooth speaker. His father brought back bagels, and Jack put his hand in the bag hungrily, grabbing one and pulling it out with one hand, while pouring himself tea from the pot on the stove in the other. Tearing the bagel into bites with his teeth, he dumped a good six tablespoons of sugar into the cup and moved into the living room, plopping down on the embroidered couch, looking out at the snow and the sun, blinking sleepily. He was grateful today was a break day for track, his coach being one of those who didn't care if there was a tornado outside, it was still a "great day to run". He sighed, and thankfully pulled the blanket around him on the couch, chewing contentedly on the bagel.

Bagels were a novelty to Jack. In California, they was scarcely in existence. So many things had changed since last year and living in San Luis Obispo. Jack grinned. Bagels and the weather, for sure. The sun on the snow gleamed brightly through the window, and the cat on the cushioned seat stood up, stretched, and moved back into the sun.

He heard his brother rummaging among the bagels in the kitchen, and he yelled out, "Hey! Andrew."

There was a grunt of assent in return. His brother turned the corner, fully outfitted in hockey jersey.

"Do you have practice?" Jack queried.

“Had, bruh, like I have been up and out since 7. Nice of you to join the living. What, no winter run this morning?” Andrew grinned at his brother, pushing back his sweaty forehead with matted hair so that it then stood straight up. He took off his elbow guards and threw them on the chair beside the counter.

Looking out at the expanse of snow from the living room window, Jack took another bite.

“Nope. Think there might be a human streak in the coach after all. He didn’t call it. Did you drive to school? How’s the roads?”

“Barely tractable” Andrew laughed, standing in the doorway of the living room, “I probably shouldn’t have driven, but I didn’t really want to walk, “ and he chewed on the bagel, leaning against the frame of the doorway.

“Hey,” he continued between bites, “where did you and Sarah go last week? Did you guys find any information? About, you know who in the house? ”

“Yeah, “ Jack answered, “we went into the city and the New York Public Library. It was like, unbelievable, Andrew.” He suddenly stared at him, looking at him squarely in the eye.

“Yeah? Why? “ Andrew sat down on the ottoman opposite him.

Jack responded carefully, “Well, for a couple of reasons. First of all, the library is insane. It’s beautiful,” Jack looked at his brother in amazement. Andrew nodded appreciatively.

“So, we went to go look for the amulet. We didn’t find the amulet, but we found pictures that Mack’s wife took of the amulet from the 1920’s.”

“Wait, Mack, the guy that keeps appearing in your bedroom?”

“And on my computer.”

Andrew’s eye’s widened, and he looked alarmed.

“Bruh. What?”

“Yeah, more about that later. And the flat screen, but listen. Okay, so we found these pictures. And they were absolutely phenomenal. Like, detailed, and they. I don’t know. They glowed. Incredible, really. “

“Okay, so you saw the pictures. Now what?”

“So, I didn’t finish....the pictures were taken of this amulet when they were displayed AT THE LIBRARY. So, at one point, the amulet was at the library. Sarah’s father works at NYU, and was telling her that there were underground railroads that went below the city. There were abandoned stations underneath the library and they used them to pick up gold and relics and transport them to bank safes. Sarah says this.”

He looked up at Andrew, who had gained his attention.

“So, they might have been an artifact that Mack was transporting! That’s how Mack was killed...he was transporting the real amulet from Tir Na Nog from the library!”

Andrew sat in silence, chewing his bagel. He was staring out the window. He finally spoke.

“So, who wanted this amulet bad enough to kill a man?” Andrew said, and the cold frankness of the statement chilled Jack. They were both silent, again.

Jack whispered, “I think it was Mordrach. I told you about this guy, right?”

“Yes, but I am not sure I was listening. He’s the guy that escaped with the amulet in the first place right? It’s the tip of the lady’s sword? That what opens up the gate to that world, right?”

Jack looked at him in amazement, smiling, “You WERE listening!”

“Yeah, I amaze myself frequently when that happens. So anyway, then, this guy, he took it. Then he left. He left Tir Na Nog. Which I don’t understand, considering what you told me, but

whatever. And then he left with it and went to our world, but he left when it was like the 1800's here. So, how is he still alive, and why did he lose the amulet?"

Jack sat upright on the couch and moved the blanket off of him, fully awake.

"So that's the missing part. I don't know how he lost the amulet and why it ended up in the library. There must have been some, like, fight. and, and, well, he has been shifting in time, waiting. He was looking for the amulet.."

Andrew sat bolt upright.

"What do you mean, shifting in time?"

He coolly turned towards his brother and threw his head back, laughing, incredulously.

"Now we are moving through time? I am seriously so not with you, here. And mildly alarmed. So, like, am I going back to the 1700's any time soon? Cause I'm bringing toilet paper."

Jack laughed.

"Funny. You're funny. No. So because Mordrach technically is from Tir Na Nog, where this immortal spring is, and wisdom stored for centuries beneath it, his soul survives in our world, but he has to change bodies. "

"Huh? You lost me at change bodies. That's so creepy."

"He moves into bodies that were supposed to die. So, like, if there was a child that was sick in the 1800's, he moved into that child's body if it was going to pass the soul. "

"Oh, my god. That is ultimately weird," Andrew said, "and it's freaking me out."

"Yeah, so let me freak you out more. He's in NYC now. And he's following me and Sarah. And he's a millionaire. Named Seymour Droch."

"Bruh". Andrew moaned.

“I am not kidding. He is totally following us, and last night, I realized that he is actually following Sarah. Not me.”

Andrew looked at him, perplexed, “What do you mean, you saw him? How did you know he is following you? How did you know it was him? and SARAH? Okay, this is so bizarre.”

Andrew looked around, paranoid, “is he looking for me too?”

Jack groaned, “Oh, my god, Andrew. He is not looking for you. Why do you think you are even involved? First off, I think that Sarah is part of a lineage that he is looking for that carried the amulet, and that can get it back. Second, I knew it was him because there was this like, aura around him.”

Andrew looked at him skeptically.

“What did he look like?”

“He was a tall man in an expensive suit. And it was like as he walked, people moved away from him. Crazy. Palpable, almost.” Jack shivered.

“So, that could be like anyone in Manhattan.”

“Shut up, Andrew. It was him.”

Andrew rolled his eyes.

“Okay, so, now what are you...” his voice trailed off as Jack’s phone rang, and he could see it was Sarah.

“Your girlfriend.”

“Shut up, hey, Hello?” he spoke into the speaker phone, and stood up.

Sarah’s voice spoke softly.

“Hey, I am outside. To talk to the house.”

Jack looked at Andrew.

“Hey Sarah, okay, yeah. Andrew will open the side door, so come to the side.”

Andrew watched him spring off the couch and run upstairs. He laughed to himself.

“Yeah, you don’t like her or anything. Sure.”

This was really not what he had intended to do after hockey practice.

A quick knock at the side door brought him back to the present, and he hurried down the stairs to the side door. Sarah was standing outside, surrounded by about a foot of snow.

“Hey Andrew,” she said, looking up at him gratefully.

“Oh, my god, Sarah, did you run over here?” he had glanced down at her running shorts. It was about 32 degrees out, and he gasped just looking at her and her swirling hair underneath her hat, ushering her in quickly.

At that moment, Jack came jumping down the stairs, and stopped short.

“Sarah,” he almost choked, “did you actually run over here?”

“You two are really a pair of worrywarts. My god, really? I’m fine!” and she shook the snow out of her hair and took off her shoes, walking into the kitchen, “oooh, bagels.” She reached into the bag and pulled one out, looking at Jack.

“Cream cheese?”

“I think. I can look in the fridge. Hold on,” he said, going over to the fridge, and then, he turned, concerned, and looked at her closely.

Jack silenced him with a look.

She spoke as if to no person.

“So, as you know, my mother disappeared on a dig when I was eight years old. She had been destined to travel to England and then to Ireland, and she was testing for a specific time dating of some ancient ruins there.”

“Yeah, “ Jack prompted, “she was head of the archeology at NYU. She was conducting fieldwork in Europe,” he said, gently, and looked at Sarah carefully.

She took a deep breath.

“Yes, and she went with her research partner. And she vanished. It was all,” she stopped and drew another breath, “very difficult and emotional. Very awful, very strange, no funeral, no body to bury, ironically. “ She could not go on, and Andrew stood up and went over to hug her, a highly uncharacteristic move on his part.

“You don’t have to continue, “ he said, moving away.

She lifted her eyes to him and then to Jack.

“No, you see, “I do. It’s an integral part of this story, as I have come to see.”

“Ok,” he said, and solidly sat opposite her, handing a coffee.

She held the cup in her hand, warming steam beneath her face. Almost a conjuration, thought Jack.

‘My mother was amazing. Not just as my mom, though. She is.....She is the missing piece, in more than one way. She was the granddaughter of one of the lines of three sisters.’

Sarah stopped and let that sink in, watching as she noted Andrew had completely stopped eating and was only listening to Sarah.

Jack was just staring at her, wordless.

He finally spit out, “wait. How is that possible? That doesn’t make any sense at all.”

Sarah laughed wryly, and she continued,” So, you see, the three sisters were the mythological counterpart, the juxtaposition, the complete opposite of Mordrach. When he was in Tir Na Nog. Ironically, however, one of the three sisters was the mother of Mordrach and his

sister.....well, his sister Adair, she was the love child of his mother and Lunghaire, the king in the human world at that time. “

Andrew threw his hands up in the air, gesticulating wildly.

“I’m done, guys. I’m out. You are all nuts,” he exclaimed, pounding the wall with his fist.

Sarah continued as if uninterrupted. “Yes, so if you follow the entire mythological tale, you will realize that Morrigan sister returned with her son Mordrach, to Tir Na Nog. She left Adair, a half human, half goddess lineage, with her father, and she became a line of Irish royalty for many years. She was known as Queen Adair after her father died, and she married a just and amazing ruler named Connage, who had a long line of children. Adair had many of the special gifts of the goddesses that evolved from Tir Na Nog, that of creativity, of the ability to cast spells, and the capability of foresight. Many of her lineage had various aspects of these gifts through the years. And so, I am sure you can guess the rest of this story.” and she stopped, looking and blinking at the sun streaming in.”

Jack nodded, “so, that means your line of family is from Adair’s line. And you...you can talk to the dead people.”

Andrew’s jaw dropped. His head swished back and forth from both Sarah to Jack. He unconsciously pushed Jack. He looked back at Sarah.

“What? What the....seriously who talks to dead people? I thought Jack was the only person here who talks to dead Irish men from the early 1900’s? Seriously? Sarah? You too? What is going on here? “ He stood up and pointed at both of them, back and forth.

“You’ve completely gone over the deep end!” He stood in the middle of the kitchen, and crossed his hands over his chest, watching them defensively as though they were going to grow tentacles. Jack laughed, and Sarah pushed back her chair to look at him.

“Sarah’s got the ability to speak to spirits, Andrew, “Jack said gently, seeing how alarmed he was.

Andrew was quiet, and then sputtered, “Is that like the new norm, here? Cause I’m feeling left out. You know, I only speak to people who are LIVE! Like, right in front of me, you know, “ and he rolled his eyes, “like, Tir Na Whatever is a stretch in and of itself, but the whole talking to dead people. Go ahead, Sarah. Please continue to blow my mind” and he sat down with a thump.

He stared at Sarah.

Sarah breathed in and, looking at Jack, nodding, continued. “I can see clearly now that her disappearance is connected to this situation. And that I need to talk to your house and your friend. Mackenzie.”

“WHAT? Oh, my god, why do we have to resurrect Mack again? He freaks me out. He was in my calculus homework last week, for god’s sake, no!”

They both looked at Sarah’s very serious expression, and watched her as she continued to trace the tablecloth in front of them.

“He needs to come through. The house says so. I can have him come and talk to all of us. But you,” and she looked at Andrew pointedly, “you have to believe he is going to show up.” “Yeah, that’s what I was afraid of. No, I don’t believe. This whole thing gives me the creeps. Talking to dead people. I am not a person to get involved in this stuff,” Andrew crinkled his nose, and looked pointedly at Jack, “this is definitely NOT what I was expecting after hockey practice.”

Andrew started pacing the kitchen, and his blonde hair flopped into his eyes as he hurriedly pushed it away. Some of hockey gear was still variably on, and it made it difficult to maneuver around the rather small kitchen. His gait was almost comical, and he seemed deep in thought, obviously disturbed with the scenario.

“Not” expelled Andrew, almost frantically.

“Time is a continuum of space.” Sarah responded slowly to herself and to Andrew.

Jack watched her. She continued, speaking aloud.

“Time is what makes us energy and living in the present. Andrew, that’s why I can speak to spirits and that’s why people that come from Tir Na Nog can exist through time. They have an edge on the continuum. We are all just shifting planes in a time matter. There is a very fine line between the spirit world and the other world. But then there is the world of Tir Na Nog, and that world, well, it’s continuum is still on the same plane. That is the mystery of it.

Both Andrew and Jack watched her, speechless.

“Let’s talk to Mack,” she said.

Chapter 19- Meeting Mack again

“What the hell is she doing?”

Jack walked after her, pulling Andrew along by the elbow pad.

“She’s summoning Mack. I am not sure if I want to laugh or cry.”

Andrew snorted.

“I’ll believe all this when I see it.”

Sitting in the living room, the cat on her lap, Sarah’s eyes were closed. The snow outside reflected on the cat’s blinking eyes, making an almost prism like effect around them both.

Although it was early day, the lights in the house flickered and sparked.

Andrew sat down on a corner chair.

“Whoa,” he expulsed.

There was wind through the fireplace. It came as a great gust. The lights on the sconces above it flickered, although they had been previously off. The toaster popped and the kitchen blender whirred explosively. In alarm, Andrew ran into the kitchen, looking at all the appliances. The microwave was beeping uncontrollably.

“What the…” Andrew shouted, and yelled into the living room, “what’s going on, he’s not coming in through the microwave is he?” He ran back into the living room. The cat had protectively jumped from Sarah’s lap to the stairs overlooking the living room, and was meowing plaintively at a whirling figure on top of the fireplace. Blues and reds and yellows were whooshing together, and Andrew’s eyes bulged as he took a defensive stance.

As suddenly as it had begun, the wind, electricity and trembling of the floors stopped, and Mackenzie O’Malley was sitting on top of the fireplace ledge looking down at them all.

“Holy fucking hell,” Andrew exclaimed, and he grabbed his hockey stick from the nearby hallway, wielding it in front of him. Jack had moved to a chair opposite Sarah, and she had stood up, her arms outstretched beside her hips, as if in a summons. She opened her eyes. Mack smiled a gleaming, translucent grin.

“Well now, Jack, here’s your girlfriend, and **she** couldn’t be happier to see me. Not like you. Oh, I like her better, she’s not a drip like you.” Mack was almost bubbling away as he floated his way toward the window seat in the living room, delighted to have the attention of Sarah. Sarah smiled back at him, drawing a great inhale of relief.

Shaking his head, Jack had to smile. “Right back at ya, buddy.”

Andrew was tottering around in the background, waving his hockey stick, his eyes enormous. He was looking at Mack, and then quickly looking back at Jack and Sarah.

“I don’t believe I am seeing this. What, what? Oh, my god. Who the HELL IS THIS GUY? I think I’m gonna be sick,” Andrew exclaimed convulsively, not taking his eyes off of the ethereal figure of Mack.

Mack squinted his eyes, and came alarmingly close to Andrew.

“Well, now, I dinna believe I know this one, here Jack. I’ve had better receptions at my funeral, and I’m thinking he is related to you, perhaps, only due to his rude manners,” Mack shouted at Jack, motioning towards Andrew.

Jack, never quite used to being visited by his translucent friend, turned towards Andrew.

“Sorry, uh, I guess introductions are in order. Andrew, Mackenzie O’Malley. Mack, this is my older brother, Andrew. Andrew, this is Mack.”

Andrew blinked.

Jack continued, “ He died about a hundred years ago, but he’s hanging out in our house, because, at one time, he lived here. He was a train conductor in Manhattan, and he was murdered; we think by Mordrach,” Jack sat down heavily on the ottoman opposite Andrew.

Andrew’s shocked expression turned toward Mack.

“What ...I mean what the.....,” and then he stopped, looking at both Mack and Jack.

“Murdered?” he whispered.

Mack descended a bit, his head bent. He crossed himself reverently.

“It is true. My last breath was taken on March 19, 1920. In the station beneath the Waldorf, I had picked up heritage and valuable items from the library on fifth and 42nd, and was to carry for secret transportation. We were ambushed, and I dinna remember anything after that,” Mack sighed softly.

“Oh, my god,” Andrew bowed his head.

“Do you,” he wavered, “do you haunt the library too?”

“HAUNT?” Mack bellowed, jumping down from the fireplace, “do you think that I am wandering around with no brain in my head to places that I just happen to land in? Oh, Jesus, help me, Annie. The whole family is daft!” he pointed at Andrew accusingly. Andrew flew out of his chair and charged at Mack.

“Hey,” warned Andrew, “I don’t know what daft means, but I know that we’re here trying to figure this out. As a family, and, well, Sarah’s part of that, and you should SHUT UP!” He stood in a strangely hockey like stance, watching Mack, his brows furrowed.

Mack floated towards him menacingly. “Do ya think you scare me you young twirp? I already died, so don’t tell me what I should be saying or not saying.”

Oh, my god, they are going to have an effing brawl, thought Jack. He stepped in the middle of them both.

“Ok, ok, let’s stop it, please, seriously?” he said, pushing Andrew back carefully from Mack, “can we not have like, a tornado or spiritual explosion here in the living room? I think Mom is working upstairs, and it’s just not going to help anything.”

Andrew threw his hands up, watching Mack with a narrowed glare.

“Yeah, well, tell HIM to be nice.”

Jack sighed. Fun, these two.

Sarah interrupted them all, and indicated that Mack come over. She sat down, looking directly at Mack.

“Did you or your wife, Annie, know my great grandmother? Delia McCarthy? She was married to Edward McCarthy, and she worked at the New York Public Library from 1912-until her death in 1980. She was an immigrant from Ireland, like yourself, and she had the gift of talking to spirits as well as me. She was a truly remarkable woman, and taught me a tremendous amount of information, even though I never met her physically. Did you and your wife ever meet her? I have reason to believe that she was the human that transported the highly coveted amulet here from Ireland...” she trailed off, tracing the two pictures of her mother and her great grandmother in her hand, almost willing information to exhibit itself.

Mack was gazing over her shoulder at the pictures, silent and unmoving. Very unnatural for him, Jack thought. Finally, Mack spoke.

“Well, lassie, I can say with sureness that I have not met that lovely lady in your picture, but I canna say that my wife did not. Now, I canna ask her, but I cannot think but that she was acquainted with your grandmother, as she spent many days in that beautifully appointed place.

We are speaking of the Central New York Public Library on 42nd Street? I ask, dear, because I know there are many locations” he leaned protectively over Sarah as he spoke, moving in a circular motion around her and the pictures she held. Jack stood up and walked over to them both, moving away from Andrew, who was still seething. The air almost crackled between the two, like an electric current, so strong it nearly knocked Jack over. Wow, that was crazy. It was like, what was it like? It was like when you were listening to music and the key changed. He felt like he was in a different zone. He looked over to Andrew, but he was sulking after the entire argument with Mack, and obviously didn’t feel the current.

Mack looked up him and smiled, his teeth white and his eyes as blue as his transparency would allow them to be.

“Yes, Jack, I canna think you know what you’re feeling. It is the energy of the Otherworld, and it’s from Sarah, not me, just so that you know. She’s a descendant of Tir Na Nog, sure as I can tell. There’s no other explanation, for certain.”

Sarah looked over at Jack, and then back at Mack, then to Jack again.

“I have to ask Annie.”

There was an eerie silence, and for the second time Mack was completely speechless since Jack had met him.

She looked to Mack.

He finally spoke in a choked tone, “Dinna think you can, lass. She hasn’t been sent here like me. I know she truly is an angel, and I don’t know if heaven will let her leave. I can only hope I will see her soon.”

“No,” Sarah said, looking upward at the ceiling, “no, that’s not what I mean. I have to speak to her now. She wants to come through. She needs to talk to me,” and Sarah bent her head, tilting it slightly, listening as if to the wind.

Andrew moved back into the circle.

“What the hell is she doing?” he whispered to Jack.

“Shhhh. She’s talking to Annie.”

Andrew eyes grew wider, if they could possibly.

“Who the fuck IS ANNIE?”

Mack was whirling around Sarah, and he came close to Andrew threateningly, the air around him blowing at him like a gust.

“She’s my wife. Now can be shut yer trap so that this one can do what she is called to do?” Mack looked fierce and Andrew stepped back a little. He made a small salute.

“Sorry, general, didn’t know there were more dead people in the room.”

Sarah’s eyes were focused on Mack, but listening elsewhere. She was incredibly still, frozen. Her eyes closed, and she opened them again abruptly.

“She says you have to look in the stairs. The house won’t like it, it’s been protecting it for years, but the house likes you, Jack. It will let you find it,” she continued, almost trancelike, as if she was repeating someone’s words.

“Is that Annie, lass? Is she talking to you?”

Sarah nodded, still in the trancelike state. She continued.

“She is at peace, Mack, and she knows she will see you soon if you can help us. She says : Is brea liom tu. And you are missing a shoe,”

Mack blinked. He looked down at his feet. He was, indeed, missing a shoe. He roared, laughing, and he wiped his eyes.

“Yes, that’s Annie, lass! Tell her she is my starlight,” he whispered. He turned away, as emotional as a spirit could be. Jack, moved, inched closer to Sarah.

“Does she know your great grandmother?” he whispered.

Sarah did not move or answer, and the air around her prickled. Jack remained silent. She appeared to be listening.

Andrew’s eyes were the size of saucers. He had moved into the light of the living room window, and he was seated on the ottoman, watching Sarah and Mack. His hands went to his shirt, convulsively pulling at the corner.

With a gasp, and an explosive expulsion of air, Sarah suddenly opened her eyes. There were tears streaming down her cheeks, and they all watched the aura of white around her deepen and dissolve. She turned, slowly, first looking at Mack, and then looking at Jack.

“She knew her,” she whispered, fiercely.

Chapter 20 – Reboot

Chapter 20 Reboot

Mack was swirling around the top of the stairs leading up to the landing of the second floor. He seemed agitated, and was leaving a trail of blue luminescent light behind him as he flurried from one side to the other.

Sarah bolstered the bottom of the stairs. Jack and Andrew were utilizing a crowbar and various other tools to pry up the nails that securely held the deep, mahogany wood in place on the first landing.

“Remind me of what we’re doing and why?” Andrew sputtered, swearing under his breath and looking up at Sarah. The wood groaned beneath him, and he pulled back the crowbar with an expulsion of air.

“Sarah, are you sure the house wants us to do this?” Jack threw off his hoodie, the sweat running down the right part of his cheek.

“Annie said that you needed to look in the stairs. I don’t often debate instructions from spirits, Jack. And the house said that it’s okay, if you are the one doing it.”

Andrew muttered something unintelligible beneath his breath, swearing. The board that he was attempting to bend slapped back at him, and he yelped.

Mack chortled from the top of the stairs.

“I dinna think the house feels the same way to you, though, brother!”

Andrew rubbed his hand, giving Mack a searing look.

The cat, who had been sitting in the front hallway window, suddenly bolted in front of them up the stairs, chaotically spewing the tools in its sprint.

“Jesus,” Andrew stood up, wiping his brow, “this is an insane asylum.”

A loud expulsion of air came from the fireplace in the living room as a response.

“Be careful,” Sarah admonished Andrew, “you don’t want to get anything mad around here.”

Andrew just rolled his eyes.

“Hey,” Jack finally pulled back a step, “check it out!”

The stair’s wide slabbed board had been pried back, and in its cobwebby niche beneath was a tin box. A shadowy, bulky item was nestled beside it in the corner of the hidden compartment.

Andrew reached in and drew it out.

“A flippin boot?” Andrew sat down on the floor.

Jack took the boot and tin from his brother, dusting first the tin. They were both discernably very old. The box was about four inches square, with a tiny latch on the side. Jack handed it to Sarah.

“Well, if that’s what we are looking for here, I’m not sure if this is even big enough to hold an amulet,” he laughed, “and why anybody would put a man’s old, disgusting, dirty boot in the stairs is beyond me!”

“Boot?” bellowed Mack, and he moved at an alarming rate down the stairs, “it is mine, by God! Well, now,” he laughed outload, swimming around with a blue streak in back of him, “I think that Annie was right, she was! She told me I lost my shoe, and here it is!”

Jack incredulously looked from Sarah to Mack.

“Is he correct?”

Sarah picked up the boot, and held it out away from her.

“It does look like your shoe, Mack. I mean, it looks like it’s about a Men’s 11. Does that sound right?”

Mack chortled.

“It’s possible, lass, but I’ll not be proud of the fact that my wife buried my shoe in the stairs,” and he scratched his head, slightly disappointed, “I might have thought she would have left something more valuable than me shoe.”

“Well, there’s this box. It’s pretty small,” Andrew pushed at the hinge of the tin box with his thumb, not successfully. Sarah took it carefully from him, and ran her forefinger over the top. There was a circular design engraved on the lid.

“Interesting design,” she murmured, “kind of like a three ringed trinity thing. It’s raised too. Wow, neat,” and with that, she popped it open involuntarily.

“Oh.”

“What,” asked Jack, peering around her shoulder, “what is it?”

“I don’t know how you can open the damn box, and I can’t,” mumbled Andrew, sitting down petulantly on the stairs.

“I dinna recognize that box t’all, lass, that’s not something that I remember Annie ever having, to be sure,” added in Mack, passing directly through Andrew. Andrew’s eyebrows raised, and he swatted around his head as if there were a fly buzzing about.

“It’s a key,” Sarah softly whispered, and she held it up.

The grip of the key was fashioned in a lexicon of a triad. It was iron, and somewhat heavier than its small size indicated.

“How fascinating,” she continued, turning it around. The stem of the key twinkled, the wards on the end smooth and extremely intricate. In the light, there seemed to be colors reflected from it.

“Tis no ordinary key, I might say, surely,” Mack softly whistled, “I might wager it was made quite specially for something valuable.”

“Or someone,” chimed in Jack, and the light reflected off the top of the key upward to his face. He leaned on the staircase.

“Do you think,” he pondered, “that Annie left this all for US? I mean, how did she know that Mack would be in this, uh, state?”

Mack, behind him, moved in an agitated fashion.

“How did she have any clue that WE would be standing here, digging up the stairs, looking for ANYTHING? That just seems so incredibly bizarre to me. I mean, there have been some strange things that have occurred, and..”

“You can say that again,” piped up Andrew.

“But,” Jack continued, pointedly staring at the key, “what’s the point of all of this?”

The wind outside blew in gusts. The screen door on the front of the house flapped, petulantly. The silence between the four of them was interrupted by Benson, the screaming cat, who picked that moment to tear down the stairs again, knocking over the boot and scattering the tools all over the stairs. The front door slammed. They all looked at each other in unnerved silence.

“Christ,” muttered Andrew, picking up the tools and throwing sandpaper after the cat.

Sarah glanced down at the boot.

“Look,” she drew in her breath, hurriedly pushing the tools and tin to the side, “there’s something inside.”

“Inside the goddamn BOOT?” squeaked Andrew.

She silenced him with a look, and searchingly looked to Mack for an answer.

He shook his head, looking at Jack and Sarah.

“I didna leave nothin of consequence inside my boot, no. Are ye sure, lassie? What do you see?”

Putting her hand inside, she carefully pulled out what looked like a faded and worn piece of paper.

“An envelope,” she breathed, turning it over, “a letter!”

“Sarah,” Jack, turning slowly to look at her directly, “do you see the front of the envelope? Do you see,” and he began pulling his hair and pacing, coming back close to her, and grabbing her shoulder.

“Yes,” she whispered, and she began to cry, the tears dropping like giant bursting droplets of rain that splattered the pavement of the ancient parchment she held in her hand. She turned to look at Mack.

“It’s addressed to me.”

Chapter 21 – NYC is cold in winter

Jack, Andrew, and Sarah made their way down the wind gusts 42nd Ave towards the New York Public Library, their intentions led by a letter and the ghost of a train worker from the 1921. It was March 21st, and the sun that heralded the skyline of Manhattan peeked over in an illuminated connection to the three.

Andrew, struggling to keep up with the pace of Jack and Sarah ahead of him, dodged to his right as men in suits strode forcefully towards the train station, clutching their coffees.

“Not Cali,” he thought with a laugh, thinking of the leisurely strolling people of LA, sunglasses and green juices abound. The juxtaposition was striking. As if to accent this thought, the March wind bit into his eyes, forcing them to tear up in rebellion.

“Hold up!” he yelled in frustration to his brother.

Smoke rose from the sidewalk grates, ghostly figures in the morning sun. The smell of nuts and pretzels had already begun to pervade the air. Sarah turned her head around quickly, not breaking her pace in the slightest, and inclined her head towards the left. She pulled Jack forcefully behind her with one hand, her other clutching a notebook which Andrew knew contained the letter.

“Whoa,” Andrew breathed, standing before the library staircase.

Jack looked sideways at him, thinking the same but having been there before, just nodded at him.

“Let’s go you guys,” Sarah yelled from the top of the stairs, and Andrew sprinted up with Jack beside him. Patience and Fortitude seemed to grin as Andrew swept past them, marveling.

In the shelter of the library foyer, away from the slicing cold March wind, all three huddled together. It was empty, and the rooms were all closed. There was not even a receptionist in the front marble laden hall. They all looked around.

“Whew,” Jack rubbed his hands together, looking around, “is this where we’re meeting your father, Sarah?”

She nodded.

“He’s supposed to be here. I don’t know how, but he has access to the stairs that lead to the book vaults beneath the Rose reading room. I guess it’s from being part of NYU research, they have a special fob for that area. I just want to do whatever my great-grandmother told me to do in the letter. You don’t usually get a charge from someone who’s been dead 60 years, you know. I better follow instructions,” she laughed.

Abruptly, Jack turned to view Roman Cartwright at the top of the stairs on the second floor, an imposing figure silhouetted against the lights of the library.

“Sarah,” her father called, and made his way quickly down the stairs. His long, camel colored overcoat skimmed his ankles, and he undid the scarf from his neck.

He must be 6 foot five, Jack thought. Man. Don’t mess with that dude.

As if to challenge the thought, Roman turned to look at the three of them. His eyes were gentle and kind, and his voice low and careful. He hugged Sarah closely, kissing the top of her head. She looked up at him and smiled.

“Hey, Dad,” she pulled away slightly, gesturing to Andrew and Jack, “you remember Jack and his brother, Andrew?”

“Yes, of course, how are you both?” he exclaimed, extending his hand and shaking them alternately.

“Great to see you again, sir,” Jack voiced, “doesn’t like there are a lot of people around here, huh?”

Roman smiled.

“Well, you guys are here pretty early, and I am REALLY curious, honey, to know the whole reason why. Your message was cryptic.”

Sarah, pulling the letter out of her mini backpack, brandished it before her.

“What’s this?” he said, looking at the boys and gently taking it from her.

“A letter. To me. From my great grandmother, Delia. Written before even Mom was born. Freaky, Dad,” she looked at him seriously, her eyes brightly shining.

“Hmmm,” he murmured, opening the yellowed paper.

“Where did you get it?” he asked carefully, fingering the contents carefully. He moved over to one of the benches and sat down, opening the envelope. He stared. He breathed. He read the letter for what seemed 10 minutes, at least, and then, he placed it carefully on his knee. He looked around at all of them, his huge shoulders squared, but his eyes were anxious. The depth of the letter and its intent was not lost on him.

“You realize,” he slowly voiced out, “that your great grandmother has left you a charge? A job. Work to do. This is an old Irish custom, Sarah. It’s an ancient charge to you. Look at the insignia at the end of the letter,” he said, pointing to the bottom, “it’s a symbol. This is a rune. A Celtic blessing. You have to accept this, its’s actually written in Ogham, the ancient language of the Celts.”

She looked at him seriously, nodding, but prodding further, she continued pleadingly.

“Dad, it’s the equinox. Today. I mean, do you get it? Do you see the letter? She needs us to go to find this book during the equinox. Because it can stop Mordrach, and he’s on a slow but

steady journey to actually obliterating the natural world. Dad,” and her eyes latched onto his, “he was the last person Mom saw before she disappeared. This is a connection to us. To me. This is real.”

“Well, I can see it’s real. But I know a Celtic rune inscription when I see one. So, your grandmother, Delia, must have had some great knowledge of the history of that region, if she was able to leave you a runic inscription and message. I am concerned as to why she would be leading you into the very, very ancient alcoves of the library, and what she would be sending you to find.”

His eyes searched all of theirs, and Sarah grabbed his hands.

“She said it’s something to do with a deep message from ‘The Otherworld’, which I am thinking means Tir Na Nog. I know,” she laughed at his lifted eyebrows, “ that sounds a little out there.”

“Nonoo,” he drawled slowly, “but it definitely ties in with all the evidence I have seen. Practically, it seems ridiculous, but I actually am on board, knowing what I know about and Celtic history and your mother’s research. However....,” and he paused meaningfully, “I don’t like you going down there all alone by yourself.”

“We’ll all be together. And look, the letter has a map,” she moved it closer to their faces, pointing towards a specific area, “it should be easily visible.” Her eyes were pleading.

Roman rubbed his chin worriedly, glancing from her to both young men. Suddenly, he grabbed her shoulders and hugged her close, whispering down to the top of her head, “okay, sweetheart. I will stay here. On this floor. The entire day...” he looked around, and then continued, rubbing his hair,

“Phone text on, though, I need to know where you are, okay?” and in so doing, he took his fob out of his pocket and handed it to her, with a separate set of keys that looked antiquated. One of them seemed to have an inscription and varied jewels on them.

“Whoa, cool,” whispered Andrew.

“Let’s go,” Jack softly spoke, and Roman looked at him with a heavy sigh.

“Be mindful of the library, Jack. It’s not a place where you want to lose sight of each other. There are twists and turns, and not only physically.”

Jack took his outstretched hand and shook it, “Don’t worry, sir. I got her. And this. I won’t let anyone out of my sight.”

Roman nodded brusquely, and he blinked hard. He bent down and looked at Sarah, locking her gaze with his, his hands on her shoulders.

“You have great strength, daughter, and many gifts. You know you can call upon them if you need them.”

Andrew was looking from one to the other, and, in a panicked tone blurted out, “We ARE only going downstairs to the library shelves, right? I mean, this is not like the Bering Sea or anything? It’s like, bookshelves, guys, right?”

Ignoring him, Jack and Sarah took the keys and the fob from Roman and walked behind him into the Rose Reading room.

“Uh, right? Guys?”

“C’mon, Andrew.”

“Jesus, it’s all drama with you two,” he mumbled, glancing about furtively, and he hiked his backpack over his shoulder. Trudging through the Rose room, he marveled at the ceiling painting. He noted the rows of tables that were aligned perfectly, a green lamp on each one. No

human was here now, he noted, but then caught himself. Argh- he was starting to think like a loon too, now. No humans were here. Funny. Did that indicate that he actually bought into the whole “ghosts” thing was valid? That there were actually spirits that resided in the library? That Sarah could TALK TO?

He slapped himself twice. Literally slapped himself.

What the frig was wrong was him? Like, did he believe this sh*(? Did he believe in his brother, walking around gaga-eyed after this English chick? Did he believe that he actually saw a ghost wandering around his house? The house in NEW JERSEY? That there was a ghost. In a house. That he lived in. In NEW JERSEY. I mean, my GOD, he just moved from Orange County, California. I cannot believe this is happening. This crap. This insanity. This.

This. Is happening.

And I am here. With my brother and his pseudo girlfriend. Walking around the New York Public Library. Waiting to go into the depths of 125 miles of books. And seven floors of stacks with no books. In Midtown Manhattan.

Quite truthfully, he hated books.

He had a great grade point average. Top 10 in his high school class. “Very bright”, “driven”, and “assertive with academics” were some of his recommendation comments. But this was a pathway. A means to an end, and a way to come out on top. That was his “why”. He just wanted choices no one else could get.

So. He was the best on his high school hockey team. He had never missed a day of school. He had a casual attitude. Girls were always still his friends. He was, in fact, a candidate (although he knew he wasn’t the chosen) for valedictorian. But still, he was here. With his low-key brother. In the NY Public Library. Following a rune, a star, and a ghost. He shook his head.

“Andrew,” Sarah called. Her eyes were luminous and grey. Almost mesmerizing. He stopped jabbering in his head. She held up the three keys.

“Come on.”

He slung his backpack over his shoulder and moved towards the library’s underground space.

Chapter 22- The Secrets Below

Sarah's hands were trembling as she clutched the letter and its instructions in one hand, and fobbed into the library's back stairs with the other. Her father had put the fob and a number of keys on a lanyard for her, and she moved with deftness. Opening the door to the library archives, she viewed an enormous staircase, and, looking downward, a spiraling path that led to downstairs 16 flights.

Inhaling the musty, dusty air, she glanced back at Jack and Andrew. Jack's eyes immediately met hers in a comforting assent as Andrew muscled his way through the heavy doorway and out onto the landing.

"Holy shit. Looks like an abyss. Like a friggin pathway to the end of the earth," he whistled, turning to both Jack and Sarah pointedly, "you both REALLY want to go down there? I mean, I'm just thinking we go get out of here, grab a bagel, catch a show.....?"

"Let's go," Sarah said, and Jack nodded at her, beckoning Andrew forward. Andrew shouldered his backpack again and rolled his eyes, demonstratively looking down the spiraling staircase, muttering to himself.

"Isn't this what happens in horror movies?"

Sarah carefully held onto the banister as she descended. Being that the library hadn't opened yet, the glow from her phone helped them all from taking a huge dive into sixteen flights of books.

I am not scared, though, she thought with surprise. Feeling more than empowered by traveling a route that had been outlined for her by her great grandmother, she felt strangely triumphant. To accomplish this deed, this task, perhaps was a step towards knowing more about her mother. A step. A whirling, twirling step towards Delia's legacy for Sarah.

“So, are there any lights in the GIGANTIC NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY? You know, just wondering if there were any LIGHTS in the building that are funded by the entire district of Manhattan. Just saying.”

Ignoring his brother’s sputtering, Jack moved his energy towards steering Sarah safely down the stairs. Where was the elevator? I mean, they must have an elevator? It was a long trek downward, and dangerous. Sarah was muttering something, and he could not make it out. He leaned forward, his head beside her shoulder as they traversed the stairs. She was whispering, holding the letter in her left hand, her right hand holding tight to the railing as they descended.

“No sun sought and no sax stone scarred, Alu, Algiz, Alu, Algiz”.

“Sarah?” he inclined his head toward her again, as she finally got to the landing of the 17th floor. What the hell was she saying?

She looked at him in wonderment, her eyes glazed.

“Sarah?” he nudged her elbow, gently, “you okay?”

Shaking her head, she stared at him in awe.

“I am saying the rune. The chant that she wrote. The symbol of Algiz, what it means. It’s on the letter. I don’t know how I am doing it, but that’s what I am doing. This is crazy, Jack,” she stopped and surveyed the floor.

“You can say that again,” Andrew chimed in behind them. Hopping off the landing onto the floor of the library’s expanse of ancient and valuable manuscripts, “this is definitely the weirdest thing I have ever done. What’s next, Sarah, now that we are down here in the dungeon of novels?”

She looked at him amusedly.

“Well, yes, I have a directive here, “ she laughed, and she pulled the letter out of her pocket, carefully smoothing it on the vacant desk in front of her. He moved over to look at it, and she sat down. The perfectly formed, intricate letters were scrawled carefully across the faded stationary.

“What’s that?” Andrew queried, pointing to one of the pictures. There was a scrawled picture at the beginning of the second page:

“That looks like a weird tree.”

“Yes, so that is a rune,” Sarah murmured, looking intently at it, moving her hand along the raised inscription.

“A what?”

“A rune. It’s magic. It’s used for protection you idiot,” Jack punched Andrew.

“Lay off! I feel like I SHOULD know this, but I DON’T, so what’s going on? Magic, huh? Where are we going with...” and he was interrupted by a creaking of the shelf behind him. All three turned, Andrew unconsciously shielding himself.

“Oh, god. What is that?” Jack stood protectively in front of Sarah.

Something flew in front of them, black, quickly. The whoosh blew Sarah’s hair around her face.

“What the fu...” Andrew whirled around, then dropped to the floor.

“Wait, wait, Wait!” Sarah yelled out, pleadingly.

“You’re telling it to come back? What was that?” Jack was gasping as he shielded his head and crouched down.

“It’s a Rook. It’s the Morrigan,” Sarah whispered, “let it come to us”.

“A Rook? Like a chess piece? What?” Andrew yelled, sputtering, pulling himself to a seating position on the library floor.

Sarah had begun chanting again. Jack was watching her carefully, moving back, feeling best to give her space. He looked in alarm at Andrew, who, staring back at him, gasped again as the dark figure swooshed past them. Crouching and wildly waving his arms for protection, his brother looked at him and pointedly looked at Sarah with a terrified look.

“Tell me what’s happening, Sarah?” he asked, his voice an insistent squeak as the shadow moved over his head again, She did not answer him.

“Amina meze, pacifica reste, benefice et tu, benefice et tu,” she said, loudly, her hands outstretched.

“What the hell is she saying?” Andrew screamed, ducking again as the flying dark shape came closer.

There was a hiss, and a whirling notion, and the shape landed surreptitiously beside Sarah with a loud thump. Its wings outstretched, the dim lights outlined the shining, iridescent tufts of feathers that folded together beside the three.

Andrew did not realize he was holding his breath.

“Jesus,” he said, and it was a prayer.

Sarah moved closer, her arms outstretched, continuing to chant towards creature.

The great wings fluttered, and the large head and beak folded into itself, quiet, waiting.

Sarah was beside it, her right hand caressing the mighty neck that bowed beside her.

“WHAT THE HELL IS THAT and WHY IS IT IN THE LIBRARY?” Andrew shouted. The creature’s head lifted and it turned a knifelike beak towards him. He took two steps back, cowering.

“It’s the Morrigan, Andrew. Shhhh. Don’t disturb it.” Andrew wildly looked at her in astonishment, and she put her hands up to stop his questioning. His fingers were in front of his face and he peeked out between the two center fingers, shaking his head.

Jack was behind Sarah, holding his hands in front of him protectively. He spoke to Sarah in a low tone.

“okay. Any reason it’s in the New York Public Library, Sarah? Any insight on that, because I would venture to say this is weird and unusual, even for us.”

“The rune called it here.”

“Still listening, please continue,” he half joked, his hands moving downward. He stepped forward towards her and the creature, still terrified.

“The rune in the letter. It calls for protection in Celtic and guidance. The Morrigan will come in response to that,” she said, moving toward the animal, soothingly caressing the feathers. Each tuft of feather glowed with a black iridescence. The enormous bird shook itself, and turned its beak and blazing eyes toward her, staring.

“Do we, uh, do something? Cause I’m incredibly low on breadcrumbs right now, you know? I thought we were looking for a BOOK?”

The bird turned to glare menacingly at Andrew, and he squashed back downward towards the floor.

“Of course, it’s nice to have a giant bird here, as well,” he stuttered, glancing in alarm to Sarah.

“Well, it indicates that the book we are looking for is extremely valuable, Andrew. The rune called for good protection, and here it is. So we should feel lucky, really.”

“Yes, oh yeah, I hear ya. I am a feeling like a leprechaun right now,” Andrew muttered, eyeing the immense animal.

Jack continued with trepidation.

“Wait, Sarah, isn’t the Morrigan the goddess of DEATH? Like, I don’t know a lot about mythology, but like, the Morrigan seems to me the one goddess that we DON’T want!” he whispered.

The giant creature looked at him in disdain, flapping petulantly.

“Shhhh,” Sarah responded, her eyes never leaving the giant black bird, “it’s very sensitive. The Morrigan is both protector and harbinger of death, so, if there are any dead people’s spirits in the library, she will certainly be the one to help them. She’s the goddess of three, as well. The Morrigan are three sisters. So, she can triple at any moment. Watch it.”

“Oh, great,” Andrew moaned.

Sarah left Jack and moved close to the bird, her hand extended. She repeated the chant Jack and Andrew had heard earlier, “Amina meze, pacifica reste, benefice et tu, benefice et tu,”. The bird, listening, rustled a bit. Andrew jumped back.

Inclining its head towards Sarah, the bird moved closer to her, rustling again. Shivering, it started, very slowly, very gradually, rolling up from its crouched position. Proceeding to lift its head, still trembling with grandeur, it extended its wings. Its beak pointed upwards, and from deep within its throat came a chilling, siren like shriek. It grew in its intensity, as the shape of the creature began to shift, feather following each feather inward, and a whirling wind began to spin the feathers around itself. The line of the feathers gathered in a pinnacle like peak, and the

folding of each seemed to fasten to another. It formed a black velvet sheath, and the beak shrunk into a pointed chin, with the same black, ebony eyes atop of its small pointed nose. The female figure that had once been a bird descended, and stopped gracefully in front of Sarah and Jack. They involuntarily moved away in deference. The figure's head moved in a clicking motion, back and forth slowly, looking at them all from the side of her eye. She settled atop the table beside the books, where the bird had been, and her claw like, pointed fingers tethered themselves around the spear. Its point resembled the beak of what once was the beak of the creature. The Morrigan stood slowly and outstretched her long, black attired arms over the three of them. Her fierceness was palpable.

“Jesus,” Andrew breathed for what must have been the seventh time that day.

“NO,” said the creature-woman, “turning towards him, searching him from head to toe in wonderment, “no, not Jesus. I am the sister Morrigan: NE main. I am the protector of the dead, goddess of war.”

Andrew just stood quietly, watching the rustling, velvety, dark hair whirl about her beaked and sharp features.

“I think I’m in love,” he muttered with admiration and fear, and turned to Jack and Sarah.

“So, we have the protector of the dead here. Does that mean I am supposed to be dead soon? Cause I’m outa here, bro. I really am done. I mean, ma’am, you’re hot and all that, but I really don’t want to be courting the goddess of death, that happens to be a bird, that will probably start a war. Yeah, that’s not my vibe right now. See ya,” and he turned to move up that stairs.

“STOP!”

He started, and turned slowly around, frozen.

The goddess was pointing the long-tipped spear directly at him.

“I am no harbinger of death, young soldier. I bring you news from the other side, from those who wish to communicate the whereabouts of the gem you seek. It’s power is worthy of a king, and can cross you to the divide to Tir Na Nog. The evil one, yes, he quests after you. He looks to obtain what he cannot through you.”

Andrew looked to Jack appealingly.

“What did she just say?”

The goddess turned toward him again, throwing the spear instantly at his feet. He jumped.

The goddess turned to Sarah.

“Tell this one be wary of the Morrigan, sister. You are whom I seek. You carry the rune, is this true, Sarah of Roscommon?” The intensity of the warrior goddess’s glare seared through Sarah’s green gray eyes. Sarah mutely nodded. The warrior moved towards her, an immense figure beside a diminutive Sarah. Alarming and frightening, Jack controlled the physical urge to tremble. She was enveloped in the shadow of the Morrigan, and Andrew moved quickly in alarm, lest she be taken over by the dark penumbra.

“Let me see the rune,” whispered the Morrigan.

Sarah moved without fear, holding the letter outstretched. She placed in on the library ground floor. She looked up Jack. He moved in closer, his hands on the goddess moved curiously and carefully towards them all, her intense glare burning into the shape of the rune. The Adair began to pulse from the Morrigan, who nodded assent.

“Oh, my god...” Andrew whispered.

The Morrigan grew, shimmering, glowering larger above them all. The black feathers grew, and she levitated, moving her arms across them all. An ancient mist rose around her, a blue

and silver hue illuminating the edges of her form. Her eyes sparked, the wind around her rising powerfully. Books and the dust with them began to fall from the shelves. Her voice spread widely through the archives. The three of them cowered.

“It is the time to move the piece that joins the worlds into the hands of the otherworldly counsel, you, Sarah of Roscommon. You have been shown to defeat Mordrach. Come, Sarah. Your great spirit guide is here and it leads you to find the last jewel that brings you to Tir Na Nog. You are alive, but those who are not tear through walls to reach you and show you. You are the connection. Come forward, Soul Searcher. Delia has left you a path. Will you accept?”

Sarah was motionless, frozen.

“Sarah, you better answer her...” Andrew was whispering, his face terrified.

“Me?” Sarah’s voice was fragile and small, yet she cut through the mist with a wide step forward, “you want me to meet the dead?”

The figure shivered convulsively.

“You are to find the stone that will lead you to Tir Na Nog. Your mother before you has defended the land against the evil Mordrach. Will you continue in this bravery?”

“My mother?” Sarah whispered, whirling about to look at Andrew and Jack questioningly, and then turning back, she squared her shoulders.

“I’m ready. Lead me, Morrigan sister.”

Chapter 23- That Which Leads Us

The feathered, dark female figure whirled up, silver streaks twirling beneath her. She ascended. Another great rush of wind. She had gone, and there were feathers and mist surrounding them all.

Andrew ran to staircase.

“Okay, can we go now? We’re good now. Let’ get out of this hell hole, okay?”

“Stop, Andrew, look.”

The table was a radiating, glowing mass of colors. They all turned towards it.

“Not again. Now what? I thought this was a friggin library, not Dragon quest.”

Jack, marveling, whispered.

“What is that?”

It was, simply, a book. But not a simple book. It lay on the table where the Morrigan had stood. It was sharply defined against the bookshelves: an oversized, pulsing, breathing, and glittering manuscript. It’s deep, glistening black cover shone with luster, illuminated and encased with a protective cover. The front piece had a plaque of some metal on it, attached to a wooden core of oak. It was elaborately decorated with precious stones, animal and human figures.

“Whoa,” Jack murmured, coming closer to Sarah and the table on which the manuscript rested. He twirled around, and watched as Andrew twirled back and forth. He was truly freaking out, Jack thought. Understandable, he laughed wryly, and noticed with amazement, his own hands were shaking. He crossed them in front of his chest, and surveyed both Sarah and his brother.

“Damn, is she gone? What was that? Like, a bird woman leaves a book. Do you think that’s weird? You know, because I want to get the hell out of here.” Andrew paced. He ran his hands through his hair, his brow creased, and he rubbed his temple.

Sarah, ignoring Andrew’s panicked rantings, moved to slide her finger across the face of the casing. Her legs were shaking in response to the visit of the goddess. The book glowered at her. Outlined with painted miniatures, it seemed illuminated from within.

She pulled her hand away, clutching it.

“What?” Jack came toward her protectively. His hand touched her shoulder.

“It’s FREEZING! It’s like an icy hot,” she explained, looking at her hand.

Andrew came over to them both, ducking back and forth. He looked around warily.

“Anybody know where the bird lady went? Just hoping she’s not gonna like flash back in here? Whoa, Sarah, where did that come from?! “

“The Morrigan brought it to us, Andrew. It’s the reason Delia sent us the rune.”

“Okay. OKAY. Bird woman brings book. Weird, but no weirder than any other flippin crazy stuff going on down here at the bottom of NYPL. I wanna go home. Have I mentioned that? Ugh, I’m starving and I need food, “ he flopped on the staircase.

“You have.”

“Well, it’s real pretty, that’s for sure. Cannot imagine where that came from, Sarah.”

Jack scrutinized it closely, walking around the table.

“There’s no call number on it or anything, “ he said with scientific observation, continuing, “Seriously, check out the side... this is crazy. Where DID this come from?”

Sarah was very, very quiet. She finally responded carefully, tilting her head towards them both.

“Well, I can give you a theory. But it may make no sense at all.”

Andrew snorted.

“Oh, yeah, cause it makes absolute dictionary perfect sense so far. It’s like Thomas Paine living his best life. Are you kidding? Shoot, girl, there is NOTHING that would surprise me right now, especially after the bird lady. I am shock proof.”

She looked at him.

“What?”

“Okay, well,” looking around carefully, she took a deep breath, and then expelled, “it’s enchanted. It has to be. I mean, it’s the only conclusion. It was The Morrigan. I called it with the rune, and she brought it. It must have been hidden here for generations under some type of a spell. I mean, there’s no other way I could have pulled this up, right?”

She looked back and forth to both of them.

Andrew shrugged.

“Beats me. Can we go? Let’s just take the book, and go. Like, up the stairs? C’mon,” and he went to grab the book off the table. When he reached the table, he put his hands out over the book and literally screamed as it sparked on it.

“Friggin what the hell? Like, okay, it doesn’t like me? OUTA here, Sarah. The library is haunted, there’s giant, possessed goddesses down here, and this book wants NOTHING to do me. Later.”

He bolted up to the second landing.

“Andrew, wait. I think I am the only one who can touch it,” and she walked over and put her hand on his arm, “Did you hear what the Morrigan said? She said I was from the line of sisters, and that I was the one who was going to have to get rid of Mordrach. So, that’s why she

brought the book. It's only able to be opened by one of the lineage of the Morrigan. That's me. And Delia. And, probably, my mom.... I'm not sure," She said, thoughtfully, looking over at the book.

Andrew was still moving quickly up the stairs. Jack ran up, caught him by the elbow, and caused him to turn and look back. Jack's eyes searched his brother's.

"I need you, bruh. Stay. Sarah is trying to figure out this crazy thing, and she needs our help. I need your help. C'mon."

Andrew stood there, looking around. He paused, and finally stared pointedly at both of them, one at a time.

"Fine," he spat out, walking down four stairs, "I am staying. But you're both absolutely out of your mind, and this place gives me the creeps. I hate libraries, generally. So, okay, Sarah, if that's the truth of it, and you're the only one able to touch the book, can you grab it and we can move?"

"Let me try the key."

Jack looked at her with astonishment.

"You have a key? Where did you get a key?" He looked at both of them, "does ANYONE ELSE THINK that's amazing? Like, where did you get a key?"

Sarah laughed.

"It was in the letter Delia left. Don't you remember?"

"You mean the one in the boot? The one in the stairs in my house? There was a key? I don't remember that."

She smiled. “I quickly removed it from the envelope and put it in my pocket, I didn’t know what it was at the time, I just thought it was some relic. She didn’t give any instructions in the letter.”

“So, there’s nothing we have to do but open it. And say some rune that Delia put in the letter. She said when I opened the book that I should say the rune. She didn’t specify that I would need a key, strangely enough.”

“Whoa, I haven’t seen jewels like that in any recent coronation. Fierce, Sarah.” Andrew was using his pen to probe at it, no doubt worried about a similar reaction from the key that he received from the book.

She looked to Andrew and Jack. She took a deep breath.

“So. Here we go. I have the key. With the letter.” She pulled the letter out. Inserting the key into the book.

“We have to say this spell, “ Sarah continued, “and you two, according to the letter, need to move around me in like a triangle. The power of three.”

“Okay, what? How did your great grandmother know that there we were going to be here?” Andrew’s eyes were bulging, but he acquiesced and moved into a diagonal line from Sarah and from Jack around the book.

Sarah ignored him and put the letter down in front of her. She picked up one of the dark, ebony feathers that had been left from their visit from the Morrigan. She took a piece of string out of her pocket and a sharp bladed knife.

“Whoa,” Jack whispered, “we bringing knives down here? Didn’t know that was part of the whole get up? And did you just FIND that string?”

Sarah continued, placing the string below the book, the feather on one side, and the knife on the other. She did not answer. The book creaked, and Andrew jumped.

“Damn, did the book just like, MOVE?”

“Shhhh,” Sarah whispered, and she held her hands above the book. Again, there was a creaking noise, and she inserted the key into the side of the manuscript.

She spoke in a trancelike state, holding her hands over the book.

“World above, world below,
Energy come and energy flow,
Brightest light circle fast around me
Mountains and sky, flame and sea”

She turned the key quickly, and the book began to shake. She stepped back, as did Andrew and Jack. Andrew involuntarily shielded his face again, and there was an enormous gust of wind around them. The key attached to the lock, it flipped, and the book flew upon, its pages fluttering wildly back and forth. The knife had risen high into the air. Jack drew a breath. He watched as the knife flew up, spinning, its handle a silver gleam. It came crashing down into the center of the binding, on an open page.

The wind had abruptly stopped.

Sarah drew a deep breath, shaking. She smoothed the hairs that had escaped her ponytail and fallen in a halo about her face. Moving closer to the now open and knife severed book. The binding pierced with it, flowing outward in red threads, giving the image of blood flowing from a wound. Jack shivered.

“Well,” Andrew piped up, his arms gesticulating wildly, “now we killed the book.”

“No,” Sarah said, quietly, breathing slowly, as if not to disturb it, she moved closer.

“Come closer, both of you,” she whispered, “Come into the circle.”

The wind began again, slowly, a pulsing, whirling rhythm ensuing.

“The circle,” Andrew said, “I don’t see a circle,” he sighed, yet he stepped forward.

“You will feel it,” Sarah said, and Jack took a deep step towards the book.

Jack felt it. Like a bubble, and that he was in a place of safety. Andrew looked around, nodding.

“This is fierce,” he said appreciatively, moving his arms around, “how’d you do this, Sarah?”

Their hair was wild and the warm wind was flying around them inside.

“You are inside the circle,” she said, and the energy when she said it moved around them.

The light from inside the book was pulsing. She put her hand out, and bravely grasped the knife, pulling it up. A scent arose of myrrh, an exotic and ancient fragrance. A light blue and yellow light burst upward in a straight line, beaming it’s way all the way up the stairs to the top of the library.

“Damn, that’s crazy,” Andrew whistled, looking up.

“Whoa,” Jack croaked.

The books fluttering pages had died down in the wind, and it seemed as if the light was all that was leading them to gaze in wonder upwards, it’s power emanating from within the binding. Sarah put her hands over the light, almost instinctively, and pressed down. In a mysterious transference, the band of light had enlightened her, and she began to glow, her hand strands and arms emitting a radiant eminence.

“Oh, my God,” Jack whispered. They were still in the circle, and now Sarah had begun to fill it with the light blue and yellow, and it seemed a halo surrounded them all. Finally, Sarah clutched both her hands to her chest and spoke clearly.

“Aniz!” she commanded.

The bubble and all that was around them as protection was removed, as if the dropping of a shroud had occurred. Sarah stood beside the table. The book had been removed, by whom or what, none of observed. Jack felt like he had just run a race, and he gasped for air. Sarah slowly lowered her clasped hands from her chest. She stared in amazement into her outstretched hands.

Chapter 24- The Salt of the Earth

“It’s a stone,” she murmured, looking at it carefully. She turned and showed Jack and Andrew the gleaming, smooth and translucent surface.

“It’s beautiful, “ Jack gasped, blinking as the sheen of the stone cast an eerie glow on them all.

Andrew just shook his head. His hands ran through his hair, and it fell into his eyes as he plopped on the stair, leaning forward. His gaze was fixated on the cement floor beneath him, and he heaved a sigh.

“I gotta sit down.”

He looked up suddenly at Sarah, then back at Jack.

“I have no idea where we are right now. That’s a beautiful stone. I’ve never seen anything like it. What are we doing with this, guys? And what happened to the weird bubble we were all in just now?”

The stone began to glow. Sarah held it out in front of her, letting it emit light radiantly, somewhat nervously.

“Oh, fuuu...., “ Andrew’s eyes opening in alarm.

Sarah started to shiver. The stone was glowing at an increasing and alarming rate, and she began to hold it even farther away from her.

“What’s wrong? Sarah, what’s happening? Why are you shaking? “

She WAS violently shaking now, and her eyes were the size of saucers as she turned toward Jack.

“It’s freezing. It’s very, very cold. Hold on, it’s going to happen now. There are many spirits around us here. We are going to be taken there. Be ready....” and with that, she turned

around, holding the rock and turning to her left. The wind rushed up towards her face, and she stretched out her hands to them both. Jack grabbed her vacant hand and Andrew's arm tightly, and closed his eyes. Andrew clutched his backpack. A shrieking noise began blowing over chairs and books, while the strength of it nearly blew Jack into the air. He would not relinquish his hold, however, and watched in astonishment as the blue, green and silver light began to whirl around them even more quickly.

“Hold on,” Sarah whispered, almost inaudibly, her shining black hair whipping around her face like a sail. Her eyes were transfixed by the stone, and she whispered again, “here we go...”

“GO? GO WHERE?” he heard Andrew yell wildly. Chairs were crashing over, books flying about.

Jack's mind was unprepared for what happened next. He had seen a movie in a theater once, some 3D Spider Man action flick or Marvel movie, he couldn't remember exactly, but he remembered seeing the hero crash through a glass window and start to fall. He remembered watching the falling sensation, all this action being surrounded by a fantastical musical score, and he had grasped the theater chair idiotically to prevent himself from hitting flying objects. This experience, was, of course vicarious, and no real threat was involved. The feeling was the same, except this time, he was part of the sensation. Falling through colors, through different temperatures, warmth, and then cold, through layers of stars. He held on tightly to Sarah's hand and Andrew's arms, his eyes squinted shut, barely seeing visible yet unrecognizable objects. Extremely cold air surrounded him, and then an abrupt stop in wind and air, and he felt himself passing through a barrier that seemed like cold water, but was not wet. The outside world whirled around him, and the lights went from very dark to startlingly bright. He had a stomach-turning

feeling of rapid downwards dropping, and then...suddenly...nothing. The falling had ceased. His breathing labored, his heart pounding, he precariously ventured to open his eyes. Instantly he was met with a brilliant sun, the transition from the depths of the library to such being an enormous juxtaposition. With this, he shielded his eyes and looked down at the ground he had fallen into without injury. He drew a sharp breath. Beneath him was an emerald green lush carpet of grass, a soft bed of sweet fragrance, none that he had ever smelled before. Looking beneath his feet, he saw that he was awkwardly seated on a bed of clover.

“Sarah,” he choked out. She was sitting up, miraculously. She turned toward him. The gray depths of her eyes were a lighted pool of astonishment and amazement. Jack was still holding her hand, and he let go and pushed hair back from them that had wandered into her feathered lashes.

Andrew was lying prone on his back, his backpack across his chest, his eyes closed. He seemed, in a bizarre way, comatose. There was no sound from him, and Jack nudged him with his elbow in his ribs.

“You all right? Andrew?”

A low moan and grunt responded.

Her head and spine alert and upright, Sarah’s soft gaze moved from them both to their surroundings. Her mouth fell somewhat, gaping at the flower filled meadows and the lush, forested wilderness that had suddenly flooded all of their senses. She heard birds chirping, and looked to the right at a stream that tripped over the stones that cradled it. How was this possible? Where were they? The stream sparkled in the sunlight, and the water in it was clear enough to visually see the salmon that ran through its currents. What world was this? For certain, this was not New York City. She turned towards Jack and Andrew.

Jack was staring, not at the surroundings, but at her. His hand still was caressing her cheek, and she had not even noticed. His gaze was concerned and shocked.

“Are you all right,” he choked out again. It was more a statement than a question.

“Yes.”

His hand moved to her right arm, he pulled her closer to him on the grass, protectively glancing about. The sun was high in the sky, much brighter than any sun Jack was used to.

“Where are we?” Andrew’s voice was a squeak on the opposite side of Sarah. He was still lying on the ground, yet his left arm flailed around helplessly as he spoke. He suddenly shielded his eyes and sat bolt upright.

“WHERE are we? Hello? Was I not just in the bowels of the New York Public library ? WHERE the HELL are WE? Guys? How did that happen?”

Sarah disentangled herself from Jack, gently putting his arms aside and standing. She brushed herself off, wildly looking around. Her right hand was still holding the stone, but it had subdued in its glow. The dew on the tree beside her glistened with diamond like intensity in the sun, and she drew a deep breath.

The air was honey sweet, the water crystal clear and the music of the animals hummed around them soothingly. The cobalt blue sky was interspersed with inlays of feather white clouds and twinkling, light filled orbs that travelled both upward and downward, creating veils of illumination everywhere.

“It’s like fireflies without the bugs here,” Andrew, who was looking left and right, commented as he touched the air.

“It’s absolutely magic,” Jack said in awe. This was like earth, but not like earth. This was an unadulterated version of the world they lived in. A place of wonder, magic.

“I have never seen colors like this before,” marveled Sarah, reaching down at the flowers below them, picking one, lifting it. “I mean, look, it looks like a violet, but have you all ever really seen a purple like this? Everything is so vibrant. There’s like a, uh, like, a…”

“A pulse. A beat. It’s like, living,” Jack finished her sentence, knowingly. She nodded, awestruck, fingering the pixie foxglove. Andrew just shook his head.

“Holy friggin Wizard of Oz, uh, anybody have a clue how we got here? I seem to be mostly intact, and you guys are def alive, so we are actually HERE, in this, gah, PLACE. Where is here? And how did that actually happen? And why did that happen? Just wondering if any of you know about that, cause last I know, I was talking to a bird woman on the bottom floor of the New York Public library, opening a book with a knife in it, and surrounded by a bubble with a glowing stone. You know,” he sat down on a moss-covered rock, “I am just wondering where my day is going from here, is all,” and his panicked eyes bespoke the facetious effect of his words.

Jack didn’t answer immediately, as he was gazing ahead of them, in the distance. He breathed a heavy sigh.

“Buddy, I think we are going to find out.” The three of them turned, quickly, and Sarah gasped at the image that was descending towards them.

Chapter 25- The Legend of Tir Na Nog

The figure that was descending appeared consumed by a voluminous fusion of colors and air, scents of deep woods, fir pine, lilies and honeysuckle. A breathtaking mixture of light and mist carried the female shape towards them, bringing with her a vibration none had ever felt before. Jack's heart quickened, and he tightened his grip on Sarah's shoulder, as she had stepped forward. Andrew had moved back, but he was clutching at his backpack in a protective stance.

The mist was heavy but not overwhelming, and there was a coolness of wind as she touched down in front of them all. The enormity of her stature was wondrous, emitting a ray of light that lit up the lush green fields and grass that surrounded them. Her hair surrounded her in a halo, mixed with deep rivulets of varied oranges, yellows, silver and gold, flowing currents electric energy. She radiated youth, yet her eyes were pools of deep water, depthless in their strength and intensity. Circling her forehead she was a ringlet of gold and four intricately carved sapphires. She held a spear in her right hand, shining with an unknown, mirroring the silver and green dress swirling around her booted legs. As she came closer, Jack, Andrew and Sarah drew back in wonder.

“Whoa,” Andrew croaked.

“Greetings,” she spoke, and the earth resonated her fathomless voice, “I am Danu, ruler of Tir Na Nog. The oracle bespoke your forthcoming. You are welcome here, and expected. Present yourselves.”

This was not as much an invitation as much as a command.

Sarah quickly looked at Jack, who was squeezing her shoulder protectively, and Andrew, who had dropped to a bent knee by sheer inclination. She stepped forward with the stone clutched to her heart, bowing.

“I am Sarah, Danu. This is Andrew and Jack,” she said, gesturing towards them both.

Jack bowed, while Andrew remained kneeling, muttering to the ground, “This must be a fever dream. This cannot be real. I want to go home. There’s no place like home. There’s no place like home.”

Jack looked at him furiously, and Andrew glared back at him.

“What?” he whispered, “you cannot tell me this is not out of control, can you? Tirna WHAT? I mean come on, where are we? I still cannot feel my feet,” and then hastily looked up as he saw Danu approaching, wriggling his head back down to a position of reverence.

Danu came closer, and leaned to speak to Sarah.

“I can tell you are part of the prophecy of the Tuathe, young Sarah. I can see you bring with you those with gifts of intelligence and,” she gestured her sword towards Andrew, “bravery.”

Andrew’s head shot up like a cannon.

“I like this lady,” he said to Sarah, moving into a standing position.

Jack muttered, “Yeah, you are a regular Hercules, buddy,” and he too, stood up.

Danu swung her sword over the land surrounding them, throwing her head back and laughing.

“There is much consternation here. Do not be concerned that you have journeyed to this realm, Sarah, Jack and Andrew. I see you do not realize where you are. You are safe.”

She swept her expanse of arms over the landscape before them, her sword glinting in the rays of the sun orbs as it travelled. Her voice was a booming speech to them all, vibrating through the viridescent and grassy slopes and valley.

“This is Tir Na Nog. Take note. A land forgotten, unknown to many, but integral to your world’s function and existence. This land is a lush existence of all that has been lost in the Inner World. Youth pervades here, waters of knowledge and the eternal spring abide in the wells and streams. The creatures that are here have lived centuries of your time, and the warriors and inhabitants of this land have no match in the bravery and knowledge. It is a place of the ancients, but they are not elderly. Many years here are just seconds in your world, so do not be concerned that you are in our presence. Come forward, Aisling and Mairi. Help me to welcome the three brave travelers,” she beckoned from the whirling mists behind.

“Holy Wizard of Oz, this is friggin crazy,” Andrew yelled, watching as two female warriors appeared beside Danu as if they were part of the air that surrounded her. They bowed their heads to him, and he saluted back. They looked puzzled, but remained perfectly still beside Danu.

“Why are we here,” piped Sarah, unexpectedly, and she moved forward to Danu with the stone in her hand, continuing, “Andrew’s right. This IS crazy. I mean with all due respect, Danu, thank you for making us welcome, and this land is insanely beautiful. Breathtaking, mesmerizing and,” she stopped, looking around, then suddenly looking back at her suspiciously, “addictive. Why are we here? What do you want with mortals? I was following a letter written to me by great grandmother, who said I was the last piece in the puzzle to defeat Mordrach. So we followed her instructions in the New York Library, and called up a book, and like, HERE WE ARE. It’s been a really crazy day. I need to know why we are in Tir Na Nog,” she gasped, and rubbed her head.

“Gah, please don’t pass out, Sarah,” Jack’s hand went to the small of her back, and he put his arm around her waist, defensively looking at Danu.

Jack turned to Danu, bowing, and continued, “ From what little I know about Tir Na Nog, humans are not allowed here. So, what’s the deal with that? With all due respect, are we ever going to be able to leave? I mean, I have a run on Saturday, and, seriously, Physics II homework due Monday. Our parents are gonna call the police, for sure, if we don’t show up soon.”

Danu was silent, staring upward. As she stood, birds, butterflies and lights emanated about her in reverence and melody. Jack shook his head in disbelief, thinking it was similar to a childhood fantasy. There was suddenly a gypsy downpour of rain, and she stood with her arms upraised, beckoning spirits and guidance. There was a sudden cease of rainfall. After a good minute, she looked toward them, and beckoned to her guards. Nodding understandably, she motioned them to follow her, and they, in turn, propelled Jack, Andrew and Sarah forward.

She began speaking, throwing in a various backward gaze as she let them through the fields, up a small inclined hill, and up towards a waterfall crashing. The air smelled of grass, musky scents of woodburning, and the wind breathed of chamomile and clover. Sarah took a deep breath, inhaling the air. Her lungs had never felt this pureness, a searing, life affirming opening of her heart. Sarah grabbed Jack’s outstretched hand and hiked her legs after the goddess. Andrew flew beside them in helpless acquiescence.

“These are the paths to the great waterfall and well of Tir Na Nog, “ Danu continued, gesturing to the surroundings, looking at the trio in solemnity, “listen and I will tell you of the land you now reside, and the story of the downfall of Mordrach, and why you are the only link to save your world from his evil plan of hate and misery.”

“Shit,” Andrew muttered under his breath, “I knew this was more than just a friggin trip to the library”, and Jack looked back at him, his eyes scorching him to silence. He returned his brother’s glare with a snarl, sighing as he followed them all up the grassy plain, towards the

gushing waterfall. The blue and green and white spray around it roared in his ears, and he sighed, shielding his eyes from the radiating sun that glinted with a rainbow halo the orbs of light that surrounded it.

Chapter 26- There's a Castle, a Waterfall, and a Bad Guy

Danu was moving swiftly towards the waterfall, its iridescent light and spray surrounding her as she came closer to the center. The three teenagers struggled to keep up with her, and strained to hear her speak through the rushing water that crashed around them. She turned when she reached the bottom of the falls, where blue and green illuminated her in a pulsing intensity. They stepped back, Andrew, Jack and Sarah gawked in wonder at Danu's vibrant voice.

"This is the place of entry to the Kingdom of Tir Na Nog. Consider and realize the weight of this, young warriors. There have been only three humans that have transcended this far and this close to the opening. Tir Na Nog's creation was before man. It is the Eden of Earth. What humans have left behind them as they moved into their current realm was the Otherworld. Tir Na Nog. Nature is ruler here, young guests. Knowledge flows is as ancient as the water here, and stronger in its depth. Great warriors, male and female, walk amongst you, and are able to defend all aspects of war. Druids and their offspring are busy creatures to whom we are beholden for their preservation of this world and yours."

Andrew, struggling to finally catch up to Danu and the rest, whispered to Sarah, "Why does she keep calling us warriors? It's kinda freaking me out, you know," and he gestured to Danu with an outstretched hands as she strode still more rapidly and closer towards the gushing, streaming waterfall.

"Whoa, are we going in there?" Jack questioned in a low tone to Sarah, pointing to the waterfall.

"Yeah, it kinda looks like it," Sarah responded, rubbing her forehead, "get ready to get wet," she laughed, and Jack scrunched up his face.

“Fantastic,” Andrew muttered, catching a breath and shifting his backpack to both shoulders, “I cannot imagine a better ending to this day.”

Danu was moving in a rhythmic motion in front of the falls, singing in a low and mesmerizing song. The white foam and the dark, shadowed water continued to roar around her. As she continued, the pulsing water became consistent with her movements, and it lulled to a stop as she slowed.

“She just stopped a waterfall,” Jack commented, astonished.

Andrew’s mouth was agape, and Sarah grasped Jack’s arm.

“Wow,” she breathed, and looked reverently at the goddess.

Danu turned, opened her sky blue, glittering eyes, and murmured something inaudible to the druids and guards surrounding her. The one, a tall woman regaled in a breast plate and helmet that showcased her dark, ebony eyes and glinting dark hair, looked very intently at Andrew, and moved toward him with her spear folded against her chest, standing a good two feet in height over him.

“Hey,” Andrew choked out, with more than a small amount of trepidation, carefully looking up at the magnanimous female, and he carefully pushed the tip of her spear away from his chest, his eyes never leaving the female’s eyes as he did so. She grunted in assent, and gestured for them to go through the open arc. She whisked close to Sarah, Andrew and Jack. Danu had turned and was standing inside the waterfall’s entrance, and she raised her hands to showcase the splendor of the city.

“Take heed, humans. You are travelling to a world apart, a sacred ground reserved for gods and goddesses. You are protected by the stone of earth to be in a land where humans do not tread. For all three of you to walk amongst the Tuathe here, among land, citadel, and sea, you

must walk with two more stones, as you no longer have the triumvirate shield surrounding you” she stated, and took out her spear.

“Oh, Jesus. Interpretation? Do we have to kill another book? Is that why we’re warriors?” whined Andrew in a whisper, moving backward from Danu.

She gazed solemnly at him, and smiled, indulgently.

“No, Andrew, that is not what you need at this time. With willing hearts, you and your brother will travel with the stone of sea and the stone of sky. I remove these from my spear, which is crafted by ancient druids from the beginning of creation. These are protection; you will not age, and the stones will enable you to move with freeness amongst the Tuathe. These stones are timeless pieces of the moon cycles, extracted on the sixth day of the Druid moon. Do not fear of time, for it is of no consequence in your world. Hundreds of years in this world will be seconds in the human existence,” she stated firmly, and took her spear, grasping the beautifully adorned end, and removing a blue and green gem from the tip of it. She extended her hands to them both, while Sarah held the diamond like stone in front of her as well.

Sarah tilted her head, watching Danu closely.

“Do you mean that the way we came here, in the bubble, that was the shield?”

“Oh, my god, what did she just say,” Andrew expostulated to Jack wildly, “are we walking around here with rocks from, like, the elves? Merry Christmas? ”

Jack’s eyes glared him to silence, and he moved towards Danu, hands open to receive the stone. Danu placed the blue stone in his palm, and he, like Sarah, felt its varying degrees of warmth and frigidity. Glancing over at Andrew, he, likewise, had bent on one knee and extended his palm. Jack grinned, knowing how hard that must have been for his brother, and watched as Danu’s tall, lithe figure bent over to place the sparkling green stone in his palm. Andrew, in

wonder, rose to his feet. She towered above him and beckoned him to follow her. He nodded, never taking his eyes off the stone, transfixed on its essence and aura.

There was no trail forged as they moved under the suspended waterfall, and the ancient mist created from the halted downpour made being guided by Danu and her guards necessary. Sarah moved through bravely, first, followed by Jack and Andrew. Taking broad steps, they glided past the waterfall's arch into what seemed like another universe. Sarah gasped. The city's outline against the crystal-clear azure sky was breathtaking, and beneath this idyllic skyline the warm wind pushed green and lush golden trees in a swaying motion. There was an island like quality, yet the pines surrounded them, and to the mountains she saw snow.

"This is so beautiful," Jack exclaimed, his hands still clutching the stone close to him, exhaling in sheer amazement. The warm wind lifted his face to the sun.

Danu turned with a gleaming, benevolent smile and gazed over the citadel and surrounding landscapes. She nodded, quietly assenting.

"Humans, the last of your kind to come here and visit was Oisín, lover and husband to Naimh. Upon returning with the horse of his love to the Otherworld, he came back to Earth 300 of your years later, as time has no essence here. With the stones you carry, you are protected from the time continuum, and may travel between the worlds. The gem stones will take you through Tir Na Nog and its portals back with no repercussions, as they were crafted by the Elder Druids from the part of Earth yet unknown by mortals."

Andrew was transfixed. He looked over at Jack, mouthing, "what?" and shifted his shoulders as to embrace the oncoming task, peeking at the gemstone in his hand once again.

“The Land of the Youth is Tir Na Nog. Watch as you travel the paths of Faeries, druids and Gods. These are the people of the ancient land, and there are few who have visited and returned. You three will be part of those few,” Danu continued.

Her golden white hair glistened, her eyes reflected the palest blue. Sarah’s breath was drawn despite herself. Danu and the emerald land that stretched out before her were magnificent in their splendor. She could see the peoples and creatures moving about the citadel’s castle. The glory in such an image of a structure bespoke words. Jack shielded his eyes, as it was reflecting a searing sunlight toward them, a morning glow magnified many times by the castle’s mirrorlike sides. The low tones of purple and yellow, pink hues surrounded by white reflection were enchanting to view. The lake that encircled this wandered toward the ocean, and Jack’s logical left brain went haywire.

“How can this be here?” he questioned out loud, looking toward the water’s crystalline path sauntering into the sea’s mix, “how can we not have this on a map? Where is Tir Na Nog? I mean, that’s definitely an ocean, and it’s on earth, so where is this place in the world I reside?”

He rubbed his head in disbelief, and a feather haired guard came to stand beside him her armor glinting. Danu threw back and laughed deeply, depths of worlds reflected in her twinkling eyes. The guard moved Jack to follow her as she spoke. Jack walked beside Danu, towards the city, listening intently.

“Jack, I see your disbelief. Tir Na Nog is a parallel world to yours, only accessible by the ocean during your moon shifts. It is in this way that we have been untouched for millions of your years, there is only accessibility here during what you call the equinox. It is where the worlds collide. Through an opening on the Mag Mell, the ocean’s path, the rider makes its way across the water from your earth to Tir Na Nog. So many thousands have thought to find it, it opens to

the seldom few. There are portals made by Druids in your worlds, various places beside the Mag Mell, but they are difficult to travel through without the knowledge of the stones and the equinox. Come, see the fountain wherein resides an eternity of knowledge and life.”

She moved at an accelerated pace, and they all raced to keep beside her as she walked with immense steps up the nearby hillside. The grass was a longer and a deeper green here. Waving to the citadel, she gestured them upwards towards the top of the hill, and as they walked, procession like, the wind became stronger, a force to be reckoned with as they climbed. Sarah reached for Jack’s hand, and with her free arm held back the hair from her face. She sensed a shift in the air, and suddenly a cold enveloped her, as always when she could feel the spirits come.

She stopped.

So many spirits.

Ancient ones, surrounding her. Thousands, each a singular energy, almost a burst, downloading themselves to her attention. With the wind and the souls around her, she moved toward the fountain, the water stone glistening in her hand. The wild mountain tide of air was a waterfall of spirits, enveloping her. Sarah stood, her long, dark hair lustrous in the sunlight, absorbing all.

Danu had turned and was watching her intently. The goddess nodded, pausing respectfully.

“These spirits will be your singing to your soul, young Sarah. When they find you can house their voices, they will make their way to your vessel of spirit. It is unadulterated here in Tir Na Nog,” Danu called to her.

Sarah turned to her, her eyes fixed on a distant orb in the sky.

“It’s different here, though,” she whispered to them all, and Danu nodded, understanding. Sarah caught her breath.

“It’s almost like they are inside me,” she whispered.

The wind and voices and singing dulled as quickly as they had risen. Sarah felt the stormy rush leave her, and her knees buckled. Jack moved quickly to her side, his face concerned. She gratefully grasped his outstretched hand as he pulled her up to face him, and they stood, for a windy moment, atop the hills of the Otherworld, their hands clasped. She leaned her head against his shoulder momentarily, searching for strength, which he returned by stroking her hair, his hand supporting her back carefully.

Andrew bellowed ferociously at them, “Hey, lovers, we need to move on here. No time for all that. What’s the deal, Sarah, you talking to dead people again? Cause we don’t got any time for such things, let’s go,” and as he strode up between them, he faced Danu.

“Danu, with all due respect, uh, are we there yet? Cause I am starving, you know, and like, do they have human food here?” he bowed at her awkwardly, and smiled. She did not smile back, and he moved cautiously back from her, examining his I watch with great determination.

“Young Andrew, it is not your place to question our whereabouts. It is your place to follow and protect your brother and Sarah. See in front of you lies the fountain, so many have sought and failed to find. Consider yourself in the presence of the divine, and activate your power,” she commanded, motioning him and the others forward to view the crystalline fountain that adorned the tip of the hill. Majestically spewing water from the center rose a statue of pure gold, the variations of deep blue and green and white rose in an arc.

“Activate my power...”Andrew looked pointedly at his brother, shaking his head and whispering “what are we, Ninja Turtles? What the f...”

He was interrupted by Sarah, who had glided into the sphere around the fountain.

“What do you mean, Danu? Do we have power here? What type of power do you mean? This is something that my grandmother wrote me about, and I’m not sure why this sticks in my head, but she wrote about our “ascension” when we reached the land of youth. Is that what she means?”

Danu nodded, wisely surveying the surrounding plains and landscape.

“Dip your hands, earthlings, in the water of life. The “fountain of youth” for some. It is variable as the people who are privileged to its waters. It is, in its essence, the very height of what you can become! To some, that is their youth. To others, most similar to yourselves, it is where they realize what is their very essence and core.”

“Oh, my god, whatever,” Andrew mumbled.

“Young Andrew, come forth. Do you have the stone I bestowed upon you?”

Andrew looked up with a panicked look.

“Yes ma’am, I do, “ and he pulled it out to show her.

“Well done. Immerse the stone and yourself in the fountain, then.”

“Sorry, huh? Ma’am?”

His brother punched him.

“Get in the fountain, fool. She’s telling you to get in the fountain with your rock, dude,”

Jack whispered.

Andrew looked terrified.

“Are you serious? Danu, you want me to.....”

She interrupted him with a command, pointing toward the fountain with her spear,

“Immerse yourself, young Andrew!”

“Jesus,” he muttered again, and he moved to the fountain with the stone outstretched before him. The air around the water whispered to him, whooshing a caressing, lulling rhythm, pulling him.

“I cannot believe I am doing this,” he growled to the fountain, preciously taking his shoes off, ascending the steps toward the ledge. The water pooled an aquamarine blue, glistening, coolly beckoning him. He started to feel the stone become cooler in his hand. He took a breath, raising his foot, and plunged it in the water. His one foot was assuaged of any pain and strain, and he felt this coursing through the rest of his body. He let the other foot follow, standing knee deep in the water, and he involuntarily raised the stone above his head.

Chapter 27- The Castle of Tir Na Nog

Andrew gasped as the rush of spray rose and covered him from head to foot. He was propelled upward and the sheer icy quality of the water made him think he was turning to stone.

“Holy shit,” Jack shrieked, moving toward the water’s edge, “Andrew!”

Sarah ran after Jack, grasping his jacket sleeve.

“What is happening?” she murmured to the surrounding creatures questioningly.

Danu moved them back and stood before the suspended figure of Andrew, her hands moving and outstretched.

“Let the fountain release him from his constraints,” she breathed out, beckoning them to watch.

The color of the blue stone, an icy blue, had wrapped Andrew in what looked like an icy cocoon, yet he was apparently weightless and suspended.

“Release him from his constraints? What?” Jack was worriedly looking upward at his brother, whispering, “Oh, my god, what is happening?”

Andrew's shell began to form tiny cracks around him, and the crystalline cocoon commenced a whirling motion, pieces of ice flying out in various directions. Jack and Sarah ducked a dagger like icicle propelled from Andrew's swirling form.

Diving downward, dodging ice left and right, Jack observed his brother spin to the ground with dizzying effect, glimmering and finally alighting on top of the grass beside them with a lightning like flash.

He was transformed. A braid of gold encircled his blonde head, and he had somehow shed his hoody and baggy jeans for a tunic of gold and silver, covered in an animal skinned vest, with long boots and a breastplate covering his chest. Around his forearms were gold and silver wrist guard bracers, which looked heavy. Oh, my god, he carried a sword. Jack watched his brother descend, and stepped forward, protectively.

He need not have done so, and with an unsheathed weapon, he watched what resembled his brother, yet not his brother, move forward with a singing swish of the sword. The blue stone that he had previously held in his hand was centered on a wide leather belt with swirling patterns on it, encircling the gem.

"Behold, Orna, the sword of the Fomorian King Tethra, humans," Danu swiftly moved in front of him, bracing herself against his new personage.

Jack shook his head and stood in front of Andrew in shock.

"Andrew?" he said to him, and Andrew looked down at him, his eyes glazed over with a powerful expression of intensity. He raised the gold, light filled sword in his right hand, and laid it gently on Jack's left shoulder.

"Be clear, brother, I am changed, I stand before you a warrior of the Tir Na Nog."

Jack looked back at Sarah, saucer like eyes and mouth agape.

“Andrew. Bruh. Are you okay? Are you, like, in there?” and Jack walked around him, looking him up and down in consternation. An unrecognizable stance and a clear picture of assuredly projected a changed image of his sibling. He drew in a breath.

Danu stepped up, speaking and gesturing to Andrew.

“He has become his ultimate self, and this Otherworld assists him to learn in this manner,” she explained. While she spoke, Jack watched Andrew deftly remove an arrow from where his backpack had been slung and pull it back into a bow that had been at his feet. He pointed it in a wayward fashion into the air, propelling it into air and consequently hitting an unsuspecting bird. It landed behind them all with a thump.

Jack’s mouth was agape.

“Bruh,” he said to Andrew, in awe, gesticulating towards the bird.

“Yeah, I know,” Andrew finally answered, “and I can do it again. Dude, I am like a god here, I have like super powers,” and his teeth gleamed at his brother, flashing a confidence Jack had previously not even detected.

“Whoa, Andrew, you are an assassin, here,” Sarah breathed, admiringly.

“Yeah. It’s like I have a different blood in me now,” Andrew boasted, surveying his body armour and outfit, continuing with assurance, “I feel so much stronger.”

Danu interrupted them, urging both Jack and Sarah towards the fountain.

“You must all move into your elevated form. Become the gods and goddesses you have within you,” she commanded, and Jack looked with a smile towards Sarah.

“Okay, well, Geronimo, I guess!!”

“It is time we move to the oracle in the castle. You must both submerge in the fountain with your stones so to meet the seer of Tir Na Nog. Jack and Sarah, be of haste,” she urged, and moved them physically toward the spewing water.

Sarah carefully walked toward the fountain, and Jack brushed up by her side, grabbing her hand. Ascending the stairs, they moved in unison, reaching the ledge. Looking back, Jack could see Andrew shooting arrows towards the forest, and he smiled in expectation. Not such a bad turnaround, he pondered, marveling at the grace at which his brother was moving. Then, he turning his attention to Sarah, her profile took his breath away. Her dark hair and small, slender frame was outlined against the backdrop of Tir Na Nog’s green expanse. She fairly prickled with energy, it seemingly shooting off from her like in sparks. She saw him staring at her and smiled back, taking a step into the deep, billowing sphere of the aquamarine pool.

“It is time,” Danu urged.

There was whirling wind, and the span of mystical world in which they stood faded as Sarah and Jack immersed themselves, a baptism of some new sort. Shooting up from the water within seconds, they were catapulted into the air with great force. Andrew starkly turned, observing the transformation with intensity, stalling his arrows.

Sarah was now clothed in an arrangement worthy of any Grecian statue, her white tunic tightly bound around waist, epaulets defining her shoulders, leather straps around deerskin hide boots. Her hair was woven back with gold wirings, moved back in a long braid which cascaded down her back, over a deep purple, hooded cape. She, too, had arrows and a bow, but was also adorned with a bejeweled necklace that encircled her neck. In the center of it stood the stone of the sky. She was breathtaking, Jack thought, and he looked down at his attire. A strange sort of energy, something he had never felt before, moved through his veins. The oxygen he breathed

seemed even purer than any he had breathed before, and he looked in wonder around his feet. The boots he wore bound his legs carefully, and there was a cape bound by a clasp at his neck, a hood of velvet like material its adornment. The clasp held the stone at his neck. He felt a pulsing where it closed near to him, and he moved to touch it, its icy fire of intensity burgeoning through towards his neck and shoulders.

Weird, he thought. I feel, well, sharper than I have ever felt before. I feel as though I have gone to another level in terms of senses and acuity. Like, hard wired for his senses, he thought. Almost electric. Whoa. His fingers almost sparked, and he looked around at what seemed an even keener visual world than ever before. Whoa.

I don't have any arrows, thought, he noted. Hmm. It looked like Andrew's highest form was that of a warrior, and the grace of Sarah and her slender arrows glistened in the white of her glow. Me, well, I kinda feel like, uh, a wizard or tactician or something, he thought.

Worried that he might temporarily have lost his mind, he moved his hand over the robe. It was a velvety softness, yet a tingling sensation at the neck.

Chapter 28- The Oracle

“So, what's the deal with this Mordrach dude?” Andrew was pulling his bows out of his sling and aiming that as he walked behind Danu and her guards toward the castle. The warm wind rose and billowed their capes behind them.

Jack's swirled around him, an entity unto itself, as he moved beside him. I am faster than before, he thought, and marveled at this new self he had merged into. My vision is clearer, too, he realized, and as he looked around it seemed like there was a sharper edge to everything visual. Andrew continued with his query.

“Is he here? Is he here on Earth? Where did he come from? And why do we think he has any connection to Sarah’s Mom?” Danu and Sarah had strode ahead a few yards.

Jack shook his head.

“Yeah, I don’t know, bro. He has this ability to shift in time. So, where he came into that power, I don’t know, but he’s been like the worst criminals in history, according to Mack. Like not the obvious ones, the ones that were like the accomplices to the worst guys. He’s been like a scientist for the Nazi’s, and like a billionaire mogul now for one of those crazy agencies that fund bio destruction by selling chemicals that damage the earth. Mack said he undermines all efforts for the earth to flourish, and he wants to gain power by slowly and carefully influencing and advancing so that he takes over people’s minds.”

Andrew paused speculatively.

“How does Mack know all that?”

Jack sighed.

“Well, I am pretty sure that Mordrach killed Mack in the 1940’s. He killed him on the train that was carrying the book that brought us here. That’s what Mack said to me a while ago, but I didn’t understand him. Now I get it, “ Jack sighed, rubbing his head.

Sarah chimed in, her white and gold shimmering in the sun’s clear rays.

“Yes, and that’s why all the spirits in the library were warning me when I was walking through the first time, Jack. They were telling me to beware of Mordrach, cause he was following us and he was there. He was THERE that day we were there together. I cannot believe this is becoming clear to me just now!”

She suddenly turned to Danu.

“Danu, he isn’t here now, is he? And why are we here?”

Danu nodded solemnly at Sarah.

“You are right to question, young Sarah. He is NOT here, he was banished long ago, and has been unable to return. On the night of the solstice, he attacked the people and myself, taking the dark knowledge with him, and the tip of my spear. This tip was forged by the ancient Celtic God To return to Tir Na Nog, he would need the three stones that open the Mag Mell and allow him to cross to the Otherworld. The stones you now possess. The stones your great grandmother hid inside a grimoire in the New York Public Library, where she was a gatekeeper to souls as well as books.”

Andrew sputtered behind them.

“Wait, Danu, you mean that this guy Mordrach was once here? In Tir Na Nog???”

Danu nodded with notable sadness.

She continued speaking as she wound their path toward the giant gates of the glistening castle, a citadel glittering in the sunlight and protected by stones of deep blue and green hues. Stepping onto the long-boarded bridge that led to the castle, she gestured to the luminescent structure before them.

“Yes, Mordrach is what you might call a fallen angel, perhaps, in that he was born half god and half human, but lived his early life in Tir Na Nog. He was son of Oisín and Niamh. Niamh was the daughter of our sea God, _____, and enchanted Oisín and fell in love with him in your world many years ago. She brought him to Tir Na Nog and they had three children, Oscar, _____ and Mordrach. Mordrach was the only child who was not fully a god, and with this ancestry, it is rumored that he was easy prey for the dark Fomorians who dwell deep inside the earth, beneath the sea. “

“Prey?” Jack struggled to keep up with Danu, yet intrigued by the ancient story.

“Yes, he was drawn the Well of Life, the immortal water of Tir Na Nog, just as you were. There are three sources here, one deep in the forest region, one atop the mountain and one inside the castle that you now enter. Mordrach would spend time as a child at each of these, gaining immortality, yes, but also, I suspect, reaching to communicate with the darker elements beyond the fortuitous water that you now have just emerged from. He has learned the dark magic, and consulted with the prophetic demons that are beneath the water’s core, hoping to bring the Fomoroians back and rule with evil intent again.”

Danu sighed and looked at the three of them sorrowfully.

“It seems that he has moved into your world with the hope of raising the malfeasant phantoms of another time period back to today. A battle I thought had ended so very long ago, but rears its head yet again under his sinister ways.” Taking a deep breath, she beckoned them within the castle, “so, come and see what lies within the ancient magics of Tir Na Nog’s castle, whereupon you may obtain more information about your mother, Sarah, and consult with our oracle.”

Jack’s eyes widened.

“Oracle?” he repeated, and Andrew shrugged, throwing his shoulders back.

“Bring it on, Danu. I gotcha here,” and he lightly punched her shoulder comradely.

He was immediately surrounded by three women guards, their arrows raised and heisted toward him.

“Whoa, whoa, whoa,” he declared in panic, throwing his arms up and frantically looking at the enormously muscled and adept female soldiers that stood beside him.

Danu had swept towards the gate and opened it, looking back amusedly at Andrew.

“ You should be wary of your actions towards a goddess, young Andrew. You are not immortal here in Tir Na Nog, and my guards have little mercy towards insubordination, however amiable it may seem,” she laughed.

Andrew mumbled, “Yeah, yeah, I hear ya,” as the three lowered their arrows slowly, their gaze still intent on his actions.

“Geez,” he murmured, “they really don’t fool around here, huh?” and he swore beneath his breath.

“Ok, bro, let’s go, we don’t have time for you and your new found hero complex,” Jack whispered to him, grabbing his arm and pulling him through the gate behind Danu.

Andrew assented with a grunt, and Sarah watched him, wide eyed, as they all entered the domain of the Castle of Tir Na Nog. The steps before them were made of glass, and they could watch the orange and buttery colored salmon fish below them, swimming through the streams that surrounded the castle. The alluring blue green visage was tranquil, undisturbed. In the center stood a fountain, and beside it, amongst various lush greenery and birds of all colors.

In the corner, behind the lush green tapestry of the fountain’s surrounding plants and flora, a hooded figure sat beside a board, his fingers interlaced, almost prayerlike in his stance. His hair hung out from the hood, silver and long, intertwined at the ends with various beads and jewels. His hood cloak was a deep azure teal, and its folds surrounded him in a great length. As he stood, Jack could see he was incredibly tall, majestic like Danu, and as the cloak’s hood fell back, his eyes, a deep and luminous grey, fixated on the three humans. He strode forward and back beside the fountain, pacing, in a lightning like speed, and Jack was reminded of another who moved in the same manner. He struggled to remember, and then, in shock, recollected the very person.

Mordrach.

This was another being like Mordrach, when he had seen him at the Dean and Deluca in Manhattan the day he was with Sarah. He moved with the same alacrity, and with the same stealthy, hunting quality. But he was not hunting anyone, and right now, he was moving at a rapidity that resembled a cheetah, back and forth in front of the table and the fountain, jumping up to the ledge to survey what was within the great mass of water, touching it oddly with outstretched fingers, then bringing it to his temples.

Danu gestured the three of them towards this figure of mysticism, and stood before him with reverence. His back was turned, and the looming figure in the shimmering cape was commanding in stature beside them. He turned, and with an intense stare, stood beside the water, stock still, his hands clasped before him. Jack could almost feel the cooling gaze of the cobalt and sky grey eyes upon them, and his skin was as if it was rubbed with oil, it shone with such luminescence. Sarah gasped, moving closer to Jack, and he understood why, as the stare was unravelling. Andrew threw his shoulders back broadly and but his hands to his belt, oddly clasping the stone.

“Bow,” Danu whispered to Jack, Sarah and Andrew, and they acquiesced.

At the genuflect, he strode forward. The quickness of his stride was disconcerting, and his voice was deep and bellowing. It echoed towards them with warmth and command.

“Greetings, young travelers. Long have you traversed, I see, and great is your expectation of this generous land. There are few earthlings that have entered upon these glass steps and envisioned these halls, so consider yourself, if I may, in the presence of the gods and goddess of the ancient world,” he announced, and swept his glittering robe to the side revealing a lithe, tall physique swathed in silver cloth.

The wind rustled behind him.

The wind seemed to alive here, thought Jack, and he watched as it whirled around this giant of a sorcerer.

“Yes, Jack, I agree. The wind has its own body here. It can be commanded as you wish, and it may be the most serendipitous messenger, if needed,” and he laughed a great, long laugh.

Jack’s rose in shock.

“Did you just read my mind? How did you do that? How did you know that was what I was thinking?” and he put his hand to his head, as if to contain his own thoughts.

Danu stepped forward.

Bowing again, she turned to the resplendent figure before them, announcing to Jack and the rest, “Behold, those of the Otherworld, here is the mighty Luganus, Oracle and Seer of Tir Na Nog, and he shall be addressed as a god,” she added.

Above the great brows and silver hair streaked with red the god Lugh exhibited a wreath made of green and red flora that encircled his brow. He wore a brooch of white silver, and his cape flashed between green and teal back and again. He was breathtaking. Behind him came a sudden yelp, and a bellowing, giant dog appeared, teeth bared and snarling at the humans, its golden fur glinting in the glow that was the fire in the great room oblique from them.

They all stepped back, but the dog then sat, and tilted his head in a thoughtful manner, looking at the humans with interest and no malignant manner. Lugh laughed again, and his laughter echoed within the hall. Sarah breathed a sigh of deep relief, and let go of Andrew’s arm.

“Falinias, this mangy animal’s name, dear humans. He has traveled farther than you, to be sure, and seen more lives than all of you combined,” wherewithal he stroked the head of the creature fondly, pinning his great grey eyes back again upon them, and looking to Danu.

“Sister, do you bring me those from the rune? Do you bring me these three from the Otherworld finally? Those that the rune foretold long ago, that will defeat the evil Mordrach and stop the death of the Otherworld? Are these they, great Danu?” and he eyed them with doubt, clearly concerned with their stature and youth.

“These are they, Luganus. They have come through many ways of magic to enter Tir Na Nog, and they seek your guidance.”

Jack stepped forward, looking back at Sarah and Andrew.

“Sorry, Danu, I uh, I thought you said rune? I thought we just followed a rune? Like, in the letter that Sarah had? What rune are you speaking of? Does this guy have another here? “

Danu looked at him quietly, and then, briskly, turned back to Luganus.

“There is the ancient story of the three in one who descend of the Morrigan. They come to defeated the Fomorian monster, and this is what the great Luganus is speaking of...” She sighed and looked to Luganus, pausing.

“Let Luganus, great teacher of light and keeper of wind, remind you of your destinies, earth children,” and with that, she encircled her hands towards the fountain, producing a great flash of silver lightning, and was gone.

Andrew turned in alarm. He stared at Jack and Sarah.

“Where did sis go? Like, what just happened? Are we here on our own now? With this guy? Lugie?”

With a roar, a squall of wind surrounded him, snow flurries in a tornado like fashion lifting Andrew up with ferocity that knocked over both Sarah and Jack.

He was face to face with Luganus, suspended over the fountain, the snow driving at both of them with white hot vehemence.

“YOUNG WARRIOR, YOU ARE DISRESPECTFUL TO A GOD? DO YOU NOT SEE WHERE YOU ARE?” and he moved him with a wild swing of his enormous arm towards the fountain, throwing him towards it with a high splash of freezing cold water.

“Ahhh, whattttttt, the ffff.....” Andrew sputtered, frantically standing up in his warrior attire, shaking himself and clutching his shoulders with intensity, “what the fuck was that? Like, WHAT, was THAT?”

He jumped out of the fountain and drew his dripping bow and arrow, pointing it directly at Luganus. Sputtering and shaking himself out, he spit, his glare at Luganus intense and fixated.

“Listen,” he said, shaking his hair out of his eyes, eyeing the suspended god with fury and clearly no remorse, “listen, you. God or no god, I don’t care. Don’t mess with me like that, I have no doubt that these arrows probably sting a little, even if you’re a god, and you’re gonna look like a porcupine if you every try that again,” and he stood there, brilliant and fervently ferocious as he eyed the descending Luguanus, whose stance bespoke thousands of years of regality, and he moved his hands in front of him as he removed the snowstorm from around Andrew. Jack and Sarah gaped before this faceoff. After what seemed like an eternity, the god sighed. With a great sweep, he consigned Andrew to the corner beside the fountain, and waved forward a gleaming board. Andrew stood looking wildly looking around him, transported to the side of the great fountain and the ledge, leading to what looked like an enormous game of chess, but not chess. He was placed upon a square that was elevated, where he was able to view the depths of the waters on his other side.

Luganus narrowed his eyes, pulled his staff down, and alighted at the top of the fountain’s ledge. He quickly moved his hand to his belt, and removed a blue velvet wrapped case, in which he removed three shining small bottles, each crystalline blue, green and diamond.

Jack gasped in recognition. They were the color of the gems given to each of them. The diamond was opened by Luganus and he beckoned them close to Andrew with a sweep of his great hand.

“You will do well,” he said to all three of them, “to observe and learn, not to battle with the gods. There are few who have ventured this close to my presence, and survive,” and in saying so, he poured the diamond bottle into the water, its contents bubbling and creating a spray of white, churning water.

“What’s in the soup?” Andrew asked, looking over the side of the ledge, trying to disentangle himself from the chess creature who had wrapped their arms around him. He swatted at the giant horseman, and turned his attention to the water.

Sarah’s eyes were incredulous as she watched the changing forms shift within the depths of the fountain. She drew in her breath.

“It’s a scry,” she said to Luganus, and he nodded back to her, ignoring Andrew.

“It is, young Sarah, it is a view, a piece of the lifetimes of those who descend from the Tuathe, or of the Tuathe themselves. It is only those that I am able to envision,” and, so saying, he made the water encircle the bubbling and effervescent liquid.

A hissing, serpentine sound, and the group watched the water rise high, settle, and move on to a clear, pristine surface. Shapes began to manifest themselves, beckoning them closer. As they watched, the water churned, and soon smoothed out to reveal a pristine scene atop a mountain. A rock mound surrounded by green and blue. The colors became clearer, and the late day setting infused shadows beside the rock sculpture.

“What IS that?” Jack queried, mesmerized by the colors and shifting shapes. His new vision enabled him to clearly make out what was a scene from the past.

Sarah's hand had pulled him closer. His cape, having a mind of its own, encircled them both as they viewed the scry.

In the moonlight and mixed sunset, two large stones, white and gray and gleaming, atop a hill, green grass swaying beside it. The background of a setting sun induced shadows to form shapes around it. From the shadows came a figure of a woman, her hair somewhat auburn, her figure small and tiny. She was carrying a satchel of some sort, and dressed in working pants and a turtleneck. She glanced furtively around, and made her way towards the sculpture, quickly skirting from shadow to shadow.

"Wait," Sarah's voice trembled, and she pushed forward to view the scry better, "that's, that's my MOM! That's my mother, Jack," she said, pointing to the picture, and looking at Luganus in disbelief. Her grip on his had tightened, and he felt her tremble. The caped pulled them closer.

Jack's voice was low, "Didn't she disappear on the night of an anthropological dig? Isn't that what you said? This looks like..."

Sarah almost hysterically interrupted him, her voice higher than usual.

"The night she disappeared. Oh, my god, Jack, Andrew. Luganus. Stop her! Tell her to go back! Mom, go back!" she yelled into the water.

"She can't hear you, Sarah," Jack's arm went around her shoulder, and he desperately spoke to Luganus, his tone pleading, "is she right, Luganus? Is that the night?"

Luganus bowed his head in heavy contemplation and assent. His hands clasped in front of him in an acceptance, he nodded to Sarah.

“Yes, Sarah, that is the spring time shift of many of your years ago. I believe your world calls it the equinox. Your mother, yes, she was guarding the stone. She is a guard, of the dead and life, that is her purpose in this world,” he voiced.

“Wait, what? Do you mean this is the night that my mom went missing? Is that what I’m watching? Oh, my god, why do you have this in a scry? What happened? But,” and she stopped briefly, staring intensely at the ancient one, “you said IS. IS? She still is a guard? Is SHE STILL HERE?” Sarah’s tone had a quavering pitch to it.

“Watch, young Sarah,” the ancient Luganus tilted his head towards the water, and he raised his hand to silence them, “it is Zoey that you see during the equinox.”

“Zoey,” Sarah whispered, and she looked into the water, her hand over her heart, exhaling, “Mom, mom, mom.”

The water swirled and in front of them, and mix of colors turning into shapes. The descending sun and the ascending moon brought eerie shadows and a mystical quality to the grassy plain. Zoey had reached the dolman structure, and, pulling out the satchel, removed some instruments and a pick from within it. She furtively glanced about again, and moved toward the entrance of the structure, which resembled a door beneath the three stones.

“Oh, my god, look. She has on the necklace! The necklace I have! Look, she has it, Jack, Andrew, do you see?” Sarah had

Luganus nodded.

“Yes, Sarah, that is the necklace that your mother received from her grandmother. This is the forged tip of Danu’s sword, stolen from Mordrach thousands of your years ago. There was a great battle between them both when Mordrach decided to leave Tir Na Nog, and the three stones held in it enable transport between the two worlds, without death. Danu was able to retrieve two

of the stones and the Triumvirate tip of the spear, but she knew that Mordrach would be able to return to Tir Na Nog if they were still there. So she sent them with your grandmother to keep them, and hide them.”

Zoey, in the scry, had taken out the necklace, and laid it at carefully at the edge of the dolman’s doorway. There was an insistent beat in the background, and Zoey was aware of it.

“What’s that noise?” Sarah queried, her eyes never leaving her mother.

The great Luganus spoke low.

“It is the Tuathe. The people of Tir Na Nog. They are playing the druid’s songs to welcome the equinox, as you call it. It is a night of openings and conveyance.”

Sarah looked at him, tearing her eyes away from the scry, “but, Luganus, she isn’t in Tir Na Nog. How can that be? Why does she hear that? She’s in Ireland, isn’t she?”

“The stones are the portal, young Sarah. She hears Tir Na Nog because she is part of the transference, and she holds the spear beside the opening. The Otherworld is beckoning her from within.”

Sarah’s eyes went back to the scry, and tears coursed down her cheeks as she watched her mother’s swift and furtive movements.

Brilliantly, moonbeams were beginning to dance around the dolmen. Zoey had laid the necklace upon the ground beside it, and was speaking in a low tone. Wind and moonlight surrounded her, the night a cloak, and then, swiftly, a deep rumble and a flash of lightning lit up the setting sky.

“Whoa,” Jack breathed, watching the water twirl and shift the scene.

“What’s that? Shit, what IS that?” Andrew , pointing to a dark swirling shadow moving towards Zoey. It was a large, venomous looking shadow, and

“I don’t know, but it doesn’t look good,” Sarah murmured, wringing her hands.

The shadow came closer, and the picture (almost like an iPhone, Jack thought) moved to view the looming figure.

“It’s friggin Mordrach,” Jack almost screamed in realization, and he involuntarily clutched the shoulders of Sarah beside him, who was trembling.

“Bastard, get AWAY FROM MY MOTHER!” she screamed at the scry, and Andrew took a giant leap forward, moving them both aside. He pulled out his bow, and aimed at the scry.

“Andrew, stop, that’s not going to wo.....” but Jack was interrupted by the swish of an arrow and a piercing of the scene.

“You bloody bastard!” Sarah screamed, while Andrew’s arrow had made it’s way into the scene and illuminated the entrance of the portal. Mordrach stood, his catlike eyes looking piercingly through the night sky, seeing the arrow from beyond, and then, striding, catlike, towards Zoey.

Andrew drew another arrow and shot at him. The arrow landed directly behind Mordrach, and gleamed in the rising moon.

“STOP,” thundered Luganus, and he strode in log steps and bounds to where Andrew stood beside the scry. He waved his arm broadly, moving them all away, his giant shoulders barreling them asunder, and his eyes were dagger like, aimed towards them all.

“You must not disturb what is past in your time. You must not construe the time continuum! You are mortals, not gods, remove your arrows, young Andrew of the night sky, they have no place in this viewing!”

“The hell I will,” Andrew retorted, and he moved back in front of the fountain and the scene, standing squarely looking at Luganus, his eyes blazing, “you think that we’re just gonna

let that happen? Just let whatever happened to Sarah's mom HAPPEN? No way, Jose. If I can change it, I'm going in," and with that, Andrew took a running jump towards the water.

Luganus swung his sword in three circular motions and created a tremendous gust which blew Andrew forcefully across through the castle to the other side.

"Be still, human! You foolish child of man, you have no respect for the balance of the time and memory associated with this rip in the struggle! You must remain removed, or the disruption could be made worse. Be wary of your power, it is not developed like the Tuathe, it is acquired through association. Young Sarah, daughter of Zoey, descended from the Morrigan sisters. It is YOU that Mordrach quests for. Only you can obtain the stones that open the gateway to this world. Watch, be it painful, and denote his ultimate evil."

Sarah's face had lost all of its color, and she stood beside the fountain in a helpless manner, her hands wringing in front of her in resignation and despair. Jack's heart broke as he stood beside, enveloped in the unravelling story that enveloped them both. Andrew was shaking his head side to side and seated on the opposite side of the castle, notably winded and addled. He finally pushed himself up the crystalline wall to his feet. With a searing glance at Luganus, he rubbed his head and returned to the triad.

"Some of us gods are friggin nuts," he muttered venomously, and he swore his way beside the other side of Sarah, putting his arm protectively around her shoulder while Jack held her hand.

The sun had set in the panorama, and the moon shone high and full, directly above the dolman. Mordrach, glancing about in a feline matter, had scaled to the side of Zoey's jeep that was parked about 10 feet away from the site. As she paced back and forth in front of the opening of the structure, he moved behind her. As the moon was directly overhead, there was not a

shadow. At lightning speed, his dark, towering figure moved behind her, and Sarah, watching, screamed.

“MOM,” she sobbed, screaming, thrusting her hands out.

Mordrach stood behind her, and with a swift, heartless movement, pulled her head back by her hair, standing over her with a Cheshire grin.

“Hello, Mrs. Cartwright,” his oily voice drawled.

“Let go of me you bastard,” she shrieked, flailing her arms at him.

“Well, that’s true,” he whispered tersely into her ear, “I am a bastard. So there we have it, right dear lady?” and he wrapped his enormous hand around her throat, lifting up towards the base of her chin.

Zoey gasped as he continued to cut off her breath, and he tightened his hold on her. He continued to whisper to her, and the three teenagers watched the scry in horror as the scene unfolded further.

“I so sorry that you won’t sell me your beautiful necklace, Mrs. Cartwright, .I unfortunately will need to then remove it from your neck. Whatever way might be necessary,” he laughed, and she gasped further as his other hand cut off her air supply, and jerked the necklace savagely with his primary hand, breaking the back part of its clasp. It dropped with a snap into his hand, and he held it outstretched, in front of her, watching it glint in the moonlight.

“Yes, we shall open the portal to the Otherworld tonight, shan’t we, Mrs. Cartwright? You and I will watch as I let the Formorians back into Tir Na Nog, and take it over so I will control the lost empire,” and he waved the necklace to and fro in front of the opening of the rocks.

Zoey was barely breathing, as Mordrach’s hold had tightened to a strangulation point. She slumped to the side, starting to pass out, and then suddenly, an arrow of pure lightning silver

landed directly at the feet of Mordrach, in front of her. Her head jerked up, and before she completely fainted, envisioned a blacklined, raven figure in the sky, suspended above the dolman.

From outside the scry, Sarah screamed again, pointing.

“It’s the Morrigan! It’s Nemain! The same goddess that visited us in the library! She’s there, with my Mom, oh my god, MOM,” she moaned, looking desperately into the image, while Jack wrapped his hand around her shoulder, his gaze fixated on the horrific image in front of them.

“The friggin Bird Woman, again,” Andrew whispered, and he stood frozen in fear as Mordrach tightened his hold on Zoey’s neck, muttering, “Goddamn bastard, let go of her, you maniac.”

Nemain had landed atop the dolman, and her black feathered outline illuminated by the moon, and she stood directly in front of Droch, resuming the shape of a female.

“Mordrach, of timeless iniquitous past! RELEASE HER!” and the screeching command shattered the air like broken glass around them.

Droch let go of Zoey on command, and she slumped to the ground. He glided in an enigmatic movement towards the goddess, his eyes fixated on the fearless creature that towered above him, her majestic spear in hand. He seemed to grow as he did so, and he held the necklace in his hand.

“And do you supposed to command me, benefactress of all those things dark? How will you be protecting the gates of Tir Na Nog now? Do you think that you will be defending the opening from the powers of the Formorians as they rise? You shall not, Nemain!” and with this declaration, he rose into the air. Zoey remained on the ground and did not stir.

Sarah moaned, and clutched at Jack's arm.

"Why can't we do something? This happened eight years ago? Why can't we do something, oh, my god," she cried out loud, the scry continuing maddingly in front of her.

Jack turned in alarm to Luganus.

"He can fly? Droch can fly? What's that about?"

Luganus shook his head ruefully.

"This is Mordrach, he has shifted, as you know, to the persona of Seymour Droch. He still maintains all the powers and knowledge from Tir Na Nog, and can utilize them in your world with the powers of the stone he holds. You can be assured he attempted to steal the stone in the necklace left to your mother, Sarah, it would only heighten his power and enable him to enter the portal back to Tir Na Nog during the equinox. It is, perhaps, his only way to enter," he stated plainly, gesturing to the scry, and continuing, "this, what you see, it has already occurred more than a decade ago in your time. This is why you are here, to view the past, and see your opportunity to defeat him."

Sarah wailed, looking into the screen, "He's going to kill her! He's going to kill my mother! For a necklace!??? What could he want with the necklace?"

Luganus looked at her wisely, and counseled further, "Not just the necklace, gracious Sarah. No, there is deep and valuable knowledge of the portal and the equinox that your mother possesses, and Mordrach quests for. There is the innate knowledge that only she is aware of. She is of the lineage of the Morrigan as well as he, though she does not know. She leads to the magic that transcends the Morrigan soul's shadow, and she is not even aware of this path" he said, gesturing towards the pool of water, "watch, and see."

As Zoey lay on the ground, she groaned in agony, and pulled her head up to watch. Seymour throw off his jacket, glancing about furtively, and suddenly, breathing heavily, expelled a growl, and enlarged himself in height and combat to the level of the Morrigan Nemain. They both faced each other.

“Do you think I am frightened of you, Mordrach, you evil, damaged soul? You are of mine in legacy, and I can abolish you just as I gave life to you!” she challenged him, striding atop the dolman, lifting her spear and wielding it with a shimmering, gleaming smash of powerful wings, she hurtled the golden tipped sword toward him, pinning his foot to the ground.

With howling atrocities, he screamed and groaned, and Zoey watched as his eyes became an animalistic orange and black hue. His teeth had seemed to grow more pointed, in addition, and she now noted there were claws where his hands had been. What was happening? Seymour Droch was no human at this time, and she suspected he never had been.

Droch removed the spear from his foot, and he howled to the sky as he shot up into the air.

“Huh?” Jack watched the billionaire levitating above the dolman and the grassy plain. So Seymour Droch was truly one of the gods of the ancients, “cause billionaires don’t fly,” he mumbled under his breath, horrified at the power and size of him in the scry.

“He is in his most evil form,” spoke Luganus, glancing at Jack as though he could read his mind, “he has moved to become a Fomorion god.”

“Formorians?” Andrew shouted wildly, “he will be treated then as such!”

Jack looked at him in wonder and astonishment at the declaration. Who was this Andrew? How did he know about the Fomorians? Where did he get that knowledge?

“Is this how she died?” Sarah spoke with hardly an audible tone, “is this how she left this earth? By Seymore Droch’s evil agenda? I will KILL him,” she said, and Jack knew she meant it.

The scene now displayed Nemain and Droch, suspended above the dolman, while Zoey lay in a crumpled heap upon the grass beside.

“Go back,” Droch proclaimed to Nemain with snarling intensity, sweeping his clawed hand over the landscape, “go back to where you reside, bottom dweller. You cannot pierce me with the golden sword, I hold power over centuries of time. And now, I have the lineage of the Morrigan to enter back into the gates of Tir Na Nog,” and so saying, he grabbed Zoey’s hair and lifted her up beside him.

She screamed in agony, and Sarah, watching, screamed as well.

Droch moved in suspension of the air, his figure illuminated by the moon behind him, and he dropped Zoey on the top of the dolman with a thud, his eyes fixated on Nemain.

“She will bring me, this keeper of the amulet, to the land of Tir Na Nog, Nemain. This one holds the amulet, she is my passageway back. I have this side of the Equinox beneath me, and now I shall transfer the Fomorians back to the OtherWorld, and we will rule all of this universe,” he stated malevolently.

Nemain rose higher over the dolman, making a wild, high-pitched call. Suddenly, the sky was filled with a swooping of black birds, thousands of ebony-colored wings behind her chanted in a strange rhythm. Droch lifted his arms in defense, watching the thousands of black wings coming closer .

“You will not, under my watch, evil son,” she pronounced, and with her arms above her head, she circled a sphere of moonlight into a giant, flaming ball above her, and threw it at Zoey.

There was a rush of light, a vision of moonlight as if through a fan, and Zoey lifted her head and arms, outlined in the circle of lunacy. With an explosion of pyrotechnic effervescence, she was gone. Swizzling lights remained where Zoey had been.

Sarah screamed.

Jack moved toward the scry, and Andrew raised his bow at the figure of Mordrach. Oh, please let me stop this, Jack thought, as his gaze moved back and forth between the horrified face of Sarah and the Irish plain of ten years prior. He did not know who he was praying to, but he pressed his hands against his forehead and closed his eyes tightly.

Mordrach let out a howl, and he moved his hands together, forming a black sphere, a pulsing and insidious round ball that he threw back at Nemain, his intentions malevolent, yet she moved very adeptly and avoided it.

“WHAT HAVE YOU DONE, Nemain? Why have you taken the life of the only living connection to Tir NaNog? And with her, treasured amulet in which three stones reside! You are, always, a foolish hag! No warrior would kill their own, their link to the equinox transcendence,” and with that, he rose quickly into the night, and vanished.

“What the fu” Andrew shook his head, clearly confused.

“Watch,” commanded Luganus to them all, as Sarah slumped on Jack’s shoulder, her hands covering her face.

Jack and Sarah and Andrew moved closer, and the birds that has landed on top of the stone shone brightly in the moonlight around Nemain.

She glittered in the luminescence of the moon’s rays, but moved quickly to the ground. Looking inside the dolman, she commanded,
“Come forth, Prince Aed of Lir, God of Death.”

A slow, steady pulsing light was seen in the entranceway, and what emerged was a star cloaked, giant figure clad only a glittering black tunic and cloak, with a single ringlet around his head, his dark, long hair lushly falling to his shoulders. His face was astonishingly beautiful, and his movements swift and deft. Walking with a fire driven step, he strode forward and turned to Nemain. In the moonlight, he was a pale, fair countenance, startling an onlooker with what resembled a beam of light emanating from the circlet around his head.

Nemain bowed low before him, and he swept his ivory arms across the scene.

“There is evil that was here. I have saved her, Nemain.”

Sarah gasped from outside the scry.

Nemain bowed again, but her gaze upon him was not without worry.

“How, honorable Prince of Lir, will she be saved if she is in the land of no return? She is not in death, and so, where does she reside and in what state?” Neman’s wings fluffed up and down, and she shook herself out from exertion. She was obviously on guard from the encounter with Mordrach.

“Is she talking about my MOM?” Sarah whispered, and looked quickly at Lugh, who nodded.

Sarah drew a shuddering breath.

“Do you mean, does she mean, that my MOM is NOT DEAD? That she just disappeared 10 years ago? And that Seymour Droch was the instigator behind that? And that she is floating around somewhere with this Prince of Lir guy?” Sarah’s eyes were incredulous, and Lugh motioned to all of them to watch the scry, as it was starting to shiver and ruffle, which Jack assumed was the end of the vision from the fountain.

“She has been sent to the Land of the Dead, and I have told Donn, Lord of the Dead, to care for her spirit and body through mystic protection. She has been encrypted into the stone dolman above the entrance, and she will be released during the equinox and solstices only. It was the only way to remove her from Mordrach’s sinister grasp, and Donn will ride with her over both worlds in his Lightning Chariot during the edges of the the celebrations. She has become a vessel unto both worlds, sadly.”

There was an eternal pause from the three humans, and Sarah final broke silence to softly speak, looking at her hands as she did so.

“So she is NOT dead. She is not dead. My mother is alive. She is alive,” and so saying, she turned to Jack and Andrew, continuing, “you see? That’s why I could not contact her? I talk to many people who have passed over. She didn’t, right? It’s like she caught in the edge of two worlds. She is in the land of the dead, not in Tir Na Nog, and not on earth. “

“The dawn of the solstices and the night during the equinoxes. That is when she truly lives, and when you can, if she can find you, see her,” Lugh advised her gently, and he turned to all of them, his arms wide. The children were slumped, and Sarah looked as if she might faint. He moved his gaze worriedly away from the fountain, and with a slight of head, slowed its flow of glistening water and cast a shadow over the background of it, dusking the area and propelling the three of them forward.

“Let us rest and dine now. You are all in need of nourishment. It is much to understand and comprehend, and we shall talk now of how to combat Mordrach and return your mother to the earth,” he moved to the center of the castle, away from the fountain, and beckoned them follow his immense figure in a centered room, with a dome like glass ceiling, from which the rays of the sun dappled upon them like butterflies between the leaves of trees. A great table had

been prepared, goblets and fruits were abundant and displayed in Renoir and Manet type fashion. Strawberries and luscious pears were succulently draped with grapes and leaves, while flowers and hearth baked breads, pungent and enticing, wandered their scents through the air.

Sarah slumped into one of the oversized chairs beside the table, pale and despondent. Jack sat beside her, and Andrew, contrary to his normal caveman eating patterns, carefully slide in on the other side of her. She was poured a goblet of something that smelled divine from one of the elven assistants around the table, and she drank it, gratefully.

Lugh clapped his hands and beckoned the many servers to avail themselves of the food and drink and to put it lovingly in front of the three visitors. He then, himself sat at the head of the table, and to their surprise, stood and bowed at a figure descending the twirling steps toward them.

Chapter 29 FIDCHELL

“Hail, Oenghus, who dwells in Bruigh na Bóinne,” trilled Luganus, and gesticulated that the rest of the table stand. The young, stunning god that stood before them was ensconced in a long cape, closed with a Celtic clasp, and his eyes were a depthless blue. His hair, golden white blonde, fell below his back, and was clasped in a ringlet studded with variations of green, so that he embodied ray of sun on sweet morning grass. He was larger, as were all the Tuathe gods, than the humans before him, and as he descended the stairs there was a warmth emanating from him that lit the room.

Andrew was peering at him with recognition, even as he glanced back at Luganus.

“Hey,” he said, appealing to Oenghus, “hey, you, you look familiar. I’ve seen you before.”

Oenghus laughed with a hearty bellow, and strode over to put his hand on the shoulder of Andrew.

“Your godlike form, perhaps, human?” He eyed the three of them with mirth, the fur that surrounding the top part of his cloak blowing fiercely about him, and picked up a goblet as if to toast. “Luganus, what brings these sons of Adam to cross the threshold of Tir Na Nog? What mighty deeds have they accomplished that they are with us during the equinox celebration?”

Luganus somberly stood, and gestured to Sarah, specifically.

“We have the line of Morrigan, daughter of Zoey, in our misty hills, brought to us by an ancient rune, She seeks her mother and they are all here in opposition to Mordrach. He has been following them, as they have knowledge of the last stone from the amulet, that which will open the gates of Tir na Nog from the Otherworld.”

Sarah stood from her chair, and warily walked toward Oenghus. Her eyes glistened with weariness after watching the scry, but her head tilted also with recognition.

“I know you,” she pointed to him, and shakily assented to Andrew by nodding her head.

“You, you, you were the figure. The figure within the dolman. You,” and her voice rose in a tone of desperation, “you were what took her! My mother. You brought her away from Mordrach! My mother! My mom! You know where my mom is!” and Sarah ran over to him with startling swiftness, grabbing the edge of his robe, pulling him in distress, “Please, please, sir, you are the god that took her! Where is she? You took her from the scene we were watching! From the scry! You were the one who took her!” and so saying, she dropped to her knees in anguish from the realization.

Jack and Andrew rapidly stood up from their seats at the table and stood beside Sarah, beneath the swaying robes of the god. They all looked up at his tall frame, waiting for a reply or explanation.

Suddenly, Oenghus clapped his hands above his head, and, as they watched, he even grew larger, and the glass ceiling above them became dark with night stars, the chamber light now only candles and firelight. The surrounding castle shook, and a slow, insistent beat surrounded them, calling forth the sons and daughters of Tir Na Nog's night,

Sarah, Jack and Andrew had jumped back in alarm, feeling the floor tremble beneath them.

"Is this like a Tir Na Nog earthquake, or what," Andrew whispered, shouldering his bow and moving back.

The table they had just been eating at had lowered into a cavernous split beneath them, and what had suddenly lowered from the spacious and starry night above them was three-dimensional plane, its surface a broad expanse of blue and shining silver, moonlit figures atop of it.

"What the fugggg," Andrew looked at Jack and Sarah, their mouths agape. Jack shrugged, but his cape swirled around him in blazing protection. As an aside, he realized his cloak had a strange personality, and Sarah had begun to glow, her hands emitting a silvery stream.

Luganus had also moved away from the descending table, and was watching as the gleaming and blinding surface dropped in front of them all. There was a painful screech as it settled itself midair before them, and Oenghus had levitated up, a fearsome sight above it,

“Behold, humans, creatures of the night, and most revered Luganus. Do you see before you the great battlefield of Fidchell? Do you view the warriors past atop the board? They will lead you to the answers you seek, and you shall compete to clear an edge of night, that you might see your mother again, young Sarah, and gain access to the plans of the evil Mordrach and the Fomorians...” and he swept the board in a tilted manner in which they all could watch.

“It’s a friggin chessboard,” Andrew exclaimed, throwing up his arms in exasperation, “you mean you want us to play giant chess to kill Mordrach? This is like some crazy Alice in Wonderland dream.”

“It is Fidchell,” boomed Oenghus, “and it is a great battleground for centuries. You will pick your opponents on this board, and you will battle their secret powers. Only mighty warriors are given the opportunity to use this vessel of war in Tir Na Nog. You three have proven yourselves worthy to step upon this bridge front,” and in so declaring, he placed the spear on the edge of the board, and a small staircase, seemingly smoky and lighted, appeared beneath it.

Sarah opened her eyes wide, staring at the entrance, “You mean,” she said slowly, “I can battle Mordrach here? I can call him here and get my mother back?”

Oenghus nodded, but replied with consternation, “be careful of whom you choose to battle, young Sarah, as your mother is in a protected state. She will not be accessible until Mordrach has been removed from your world, permanently. If she were in his hands, she would be forced by him and the Formorians to open the gates of Tir Na Nog forever, thus ruining the balance that already precariously prevails. It is she, the key in her possession, that will lock or open the gates during the equinox. She has become a living key. Be prepared for a great battle, should you call upon this evil lord. He will stop at nothing to control both worlds.”

Andrew interrupted, “So you’re saying that if I wanted to battle my third-grade teacher, I could call her and she would be here? Cause she was nasty, just saying,” and he shook his head.

There began to make form a tremendous amount of smoke and blueish light upon the surface of the board, and an older woman with a diminutive grey hair bob materialized upon one of the squares, holding an elongated pencil and a stapler. Her expression was one of bewilderment and anger.

Andrew jumped back in sheer alarm.

“Holy shit, it’s her!” he yelped, and he drew his bow with a stun arrow immediately. He pulled it back, aiming directly toward the woman, and as the arrow sailed through the air, she vanished, tiny blue particles scattering in the moonlight.

He sat down.

“Whoa, that was so scary,” he looked around at Jack, who was eyeing him with the greatest contempt.

Oenghus laughed a hearty laugh, but he turned his brilliant blue eyes toward them all, advising them, “Humans, be very careful who you wish for in battle in this game of kings. Fidchell is not only a game of strength, but also a game of wits. You should be warned that your opponent may come to the game with unknown strengths and beings,” and in so saying, he turned with a soft swoosh, and himself vaporized into the stars of the night.

Jack turned to the others in alarm.

“Like, where did he go? Now what are we supposed to do? Most games have instructions, like rules? And a box cover? I would really like a box cover,” he sighed, looking quickly around, but Sarah was not looking at Jack, or listening in any way. She was staring intensely at the table.

In a whispered tone, she asked, not specifically to any person, “so, if I called forth Mordrach, I could battle him? I could kill him here, on this chessboard?” In so saying, she turned to Oenghus, who had reappeared beside her, questioning him with her gaze.

“Sweet and brilliant young Sarah. Fidchell is the game where Cuchulainn lost to the god Lugh, the mighty and wise god who invented this challenge, and had to return to the earth. This is the field that can end lives and generations. One does not contemplate one’s battle lightly. Should you choose your battle participants, you will need to also choose your own eight players for defense against them. The field is sent only on the equinox, tonight, and it is played under the full moon and over the ocean. Parts of civilizations both here and in Tir Na Nog may most certainly be affected by this collision of souls. The equinox is the fixed pattern where the portals, whether through the stones or water, are opened. Be wary of your choices and your guards.”

Sarah blinked back tears. Her voice rose in frustration.

“How am I supposed to pick a war team? I don’t know any guards. I don’t have any clue about that?” she trembled, and looked from Oenghus to Jack in despair, whispering “ I just want my mom back.”

Jack’s cape began to flutter nervously, and he patted it unconsciously, almost as if it were a dog. They didn’t know of any warriors, and if they did, he was not sure that he would feel strongly enough to call them. I mean, what did they know about warriors? My biggest accomplishment so far has been passing advanced calculus and finding a letter in a boot from a ghost in my house. He rubbed his forehead, and contemplated this further. Wait, he thought, that’s it!

“Sarah, Oenghus, Andrew, the rune! The letter! What Delia sent to Sarah many years ago- she said to use the ancient rune to open the library and the portals. Couldn’t we use this to

call on warriors to help us? I mean, Delia seemed to be able to assist us every single time, and we know that her words have the magic of this place in them,..” and as he spoke, his cape swung back and forth in an excited manner.

Sarah looked around at them all, her eyes shining.

“Yes, I think that WOULD help, Jack,” and in so saying, she fished out the parcel from what remained of her backpack.

“I found it!” she whispered, and she pulled it up out of the satchel. The letter glowed in the moonlight, almost translucent. Jack tilted his head, grabbing his cape, which had seemed to gather an energy of its own. It trembled in almost a recognized state. Chill out, cape, he talked to it his mind, and it despondently acquiesced to him. He grinned, and patted it approvingly. It slapped him, aggressively removing any thought that he was in control. Suddenly, he started, and he came closer to the letter and Sarah.

“Sarah,” he whispered, and he moved quickly to her side, “do you see the back of the paper? Do you see in the moonlight? Can you see through the paper? There are some marks on the back, do you see?”

Andrew came over to Sarah’s other side.

“Yeah, Sarah, it looks like the friggin Rosetta Stone, what the hell? Do you think it’s like Egyptian or something? How weird,” and tilted his head carefully to one side, examining the paper in the beams of moonlight.

“No, Andrew. That’s, oh, my gosh, no.....it’s another rune! Why didn’t I see that before? THAT’S THE RUNE. The one Danu and Luganus were telling us about! Oh, Andrew, Jack, that’s it! This is what we need to defeat him, to get my mom back! To defeat him!”

“Yeah, okay, Sarah,” Andrew said, pushing his hair upward, and scratching the top of his head, “that’s awesome, but, uh, how do we INTERPRET that? Like, you said that runes are ancient code.....how are we supposed to know what that means? I mean what the hell? If these are old Welsh or Irish code, who is figuring that out? You gonna call on some ghosts here? Cause from us here, none of us are too fluent in like “rune”.

Sarah’s eyebrows were knit together in thought, and she was holding the letter high.

Jack felt his cape move back and forth, and he involuntarily patted it down. It flapped up and hit him directly face, demanding attention. He looked down at the wildly demonstrative velvet that was comically moving around him.

“What?” he asked it, throwing his hands up in abandon, and Sarah and Jack looked him with a strange glance. The cape had opened up in front of him, it’s span like wings around him.

“Behold, young Jack, you see this before you? You see your great intuitive nature is embodied in your cloak. You have the capability to shift time and space within your frame of mind. Look inside to view what your inner thoughts have prospected for you!” Oengus directed him with a great bellow.

When he did look squarely at the inside of the cloak, he could see that it trembled with flashing symbols that shimmered against the ebony dark of the velvet.

“Dude, it’s like a rune key,” Andrew stated matter of factly, and he deftly moved toward the cape, crouching and looking at it intently, “you see? So cool, it’s got symbols and words with it. It’s a guide to Delia’s letter. It’s like a math problem or something. Your favorite, bro, just a calculus equation.”

“Yeah, I see, “ Jack marveled, “Sarah, let me see the letter,” and then he laughed, “actually, you are way better at math than I am, you probably will be able to work this out in a second, “ and he turned the cape towards her.

She nodded, gravely, comparing back and forth the symbols on the letter and the symbols on the inside of the cloak.

“So these lines were also on the side of the dolman, I don’t know if you know. This is Ogham, which my mom had also been studying. It’s an ancient language of the Celtic tribes, and it has great power when wielded on the solstice and equinox. The word, “rune” means whisper or secret. Many archaeologists and historians have tried and not figured out how to interpret these, but, Jack, your cape, it shows the medial line in the rune, and therefore it’s translation by words, “ as she spoke, Sarah could have been a college history professor, so specific was her reasoning.

Andrew swept his arms toward the game of Fidchell suspended above them.

“Okay, cool, Sarah, but uh, you better start reading, cause we gotta play chess, girl. It’s kind of looming here, and it’s making me freak out.”

She had already begun reading the words.

“Gabala can righ rinna ulcha ilmoigi beola bron, feda cin mes.”

Both Jack and Andrew looked at her quizzed Ly, and she continued in English:

“The Morrigan,

I bind unto myself today to

Virtues of the starlit heaven

The glorious sun’s life-giving ray

The whiteness of the moon

The flashing of the lightning free

The whirling wind's tempestuous shocks,
The stable earth, the deep salt sea
Around the old eternal rocks
To call upon the invocation
Of the Three in One and One in Three

With this declaration, the god Oenghus bowed his head, and the sky rang with lightning and thunder. The fidchell board rose in a slanted viewing manner above them, and there appeared a misty figure in the middle, shimmering and vaporous in a mysterious cloak.

“They are here,” whispered Sarah, and her eyes took on a strange light, her deep brown eyes almost gold.

“Who is here?” Andrew yelled, and he turned around quickly, clutching his arrows. His eyes flashed in recognition, then, when he viewed the board above them all.

“Buddy, I think we are going to fight with some old friends,” Jack countered him, and he shouldered his cape, stiffening as the shapes became clear.

A stormy wash of wind and air moved away the vapor, and in the center of the board stood Nemain, the Morrigan, her black feathers arched around her in a stunning frame. Beside her, she sheltered two female shapes, one draped in white, her long white hair whipping brutally around her opalescent cloak, the other, a radiant and resplendent figure in sky blue and pale green, her long red hair waving peacefully in the shelter of Nemain.

“Nemain, Badb and Matcha,” Sarah whispered, and she bowed.

“What the frig is going on? Bird woman and her sister’s here? Sarah, who are these three?”

Swatting his brother to silence, Jack looked expectantly at Sarah.

“It is the Morrigan. The power of three. We have called the Morrigan to our aid. To fight Mordrach and defeat the Fomorians. To bring back my mother from the thin edge of the land of the dead. I called them, and they are here,” she intoned, slowly, with amazement, “I did it.”

Chapter 30- Visitors

Oenghus exclaimed with reverence, “The sisters Morrigan. The three that guard the gates of Tir Na Nog. With grateful heart, do we acknowledge these three goddesses before us,” and he bowed again.

The three sisters, Jack thought. He remembered that earlier this year (wow, that seemed like years ago, but it was only months) when he had met Mack, he had told him to find the three sisters. This must be what he was talking about. How had Mack known about this?

“Wait, so the bird lady is one of the three sisters? The lady we met in the library?” he added, pointedly gesturing to Nemain, her eyes raven dark and intense in the night.

Sarah whispered, “they are three in one. One in three,” she nodded, and took out the necklace, with its three-pronged tip, then looked at the three stones that were placed at her waist, Jack’s neck, and the collar of Andrew’s belt.

Sarah continued, “Danu said I am in the line of the Morrigan sisters, as is my mother, and my great grandmother. How is this so?” and she looked towards Oenghus for clarification. He shook his beautifully adorned head and moved towards her.

“Do you see, young Sarah, I sing to you the spirits of your ancestors? You are from the line of Delia, whom you call your great grandmother. Remember that some of the gods and goddesses that are half human and half god, as they have found faith and love in mortals. These are the lineage of the Morrigan, in many more aspects than your line, specifically. You are part of the line of Nemain, the most powerful of the three sisters. From this line comes the goddess of the Fairies, Oona. This goddess of gems, she is called the goddess of diamonds. It is as she is covered with gems, with golden hair that reaches to the earth. She is ensconced in silver. She is breathtaking to behold, and met the grandson of Oisín in the woods of Ireland. He himself immediately fell in deep love with her, yet he was mortal. The obstacles of his mortality required him to leave Tir Na Nog and yet leave of his children here. Mordrach is of that lineage. Your ancestors, those from the line of Delia, are of his sister, who was human, not half god, as was he.”

“So that’s what enabled us to do godlike things. Like me, talking to spirits,” she acknowledged, not just to Oenghus, but herself. The board had lifted and glimmered higher above them still, and Andrew was staring at her fixedly. He had strung an arrow as a he watched Nemain rivet her gaze upon him.

“Yes, as I see it, you are part of the reasons humans are separated from the gods and goddesses, Sarah. You have godlike qualities, but you are human,” Jack said, nodding his head. A starlike, pulsing light travelled past him as he spoke, and he felt an insistent rhythm begin around him. He looked around quickly, and ducked as another shooting light burst from the board of Fídhell flew by him. The power was daunting to absorb, and his cape pulled close around him.

Andrew drew nearer to Sarah also, assenting this knowledge, also feeling the energy stored in the board meshing with the sky and wind.

“Yeah, Sarah, I get this, and VERY COOL, but, uh, we got a pretty active bunch of goddesses here. What the next step in this game, please?” and he whispered close to her, “bird

woman makes me nervous, just a little.” His eyes pleaded with her, and he was nervously looking at Nemain.

“Magic. These runes, they are not only help, but they are a prophecy, don’t you see? We have to call on the ancestors it gives us, they’re on our side, and Sarah looked hard at the paper, illuminated in the light of the Fidchell board. The symbols danced in front of her eyes, a ghostly apparition in front of her, almost comically. She began to take quick breaths, and her heart pounded. I can’t see the signs, I can’t see in the eerie background of the moon, she thought, and she wrung her hands in frustration. The wind started blowing at a faster pace, and the letter fluttered, almost leaving her hands. The Morrigan sisters ruffled, shifted, and they looked toward Sarah, awaiting her next call.

Be careful, she thought, they will sense your fear. The Morrigan were good, but they were also vicious. Stand, think, Sarah, she thought to herself. This is part of me. This is on me. Ugh, why can’t I read these words? The figures danced in front of her like ghosts jumping wildly in an eerie dance. It had begun to snow, and she watched as the flurries made the letters and figures in the light of the moon. Ghosts. Spirits.

“Wait. WAIT! THAT’S IT! GHOSTS! It is the spirits that I should be calling on! The ghosts! I call on the spirits of ancestors. I call on The Spirits of Tir Na Nog’s ancestors, the humans that were part of the of this world that defied the odds. The spirits of ancestors like mine, that had children that were human, yet lived with the powers of the gods within. Through the ancient power of the Morrigan, I call the three great masters to defeat the evil Mordrach in the mighty game of Fidchell!” and in so saying, she began to levitate, herself.

“WHAT is going ON? Come back, Sarah? Oh, my god, where is she going?” Andrew spewed in alarm, watching as the board and Sarah lifted higher in the Tir Na Nog night.

Jack looked around. The spinning board, the lightning, the snow reflecting moon rays everywhere. It was a firework of tiny white lights, and he inhaled the crisp air that had cooled the terrain of Tir Na Nog. What was she trying to do? The beat increased. It’s like being at some

weird supernatural concert, he bemusedly thought, and as he watched Sarah ascend, his cape began to flap incessantly.

“Oh, shit,” he said, and he also, began to rise to the side of the board.

“Hold up, bruh,” Andrew yowled, and he grabbed the side of Jack’s cloak with a leaping jump. Jack bent over, and grasped Andrew’s forearm, pulling him toward him. Andrew scrambled up next to him, his hair a blond halo in the wind’s rage. He squinted toward the board.

“What’s she doing? She’s saying some weird enchantment again. Look! There are more people now on the board!”

Jack watched as a shape materialized in front of all of them. It was directly adjacent to the Morrigan, and he blinked in astonishment. The snow was white around the three of them, and the wind howled its protest, a barrier being broken, an unseen rip in time’s clockface. Who, or WHAT was that appearing on the Fidchell board. He squinted.

The figure metamorphosized from an orb of clustered skylights into tiny particles of a body. A bearded figure, a robe of white, and sunken eyes looked up from examining his hands.

“That could not be,” Jack exclaimed, rubbing his head, “I mean, I could swear that is the spitting image of ...”

“Pythagoreans!” Sarah yelled out, and the figure looked up at the mention of his name, his sage and wise eyes blinking in recognition at the exclamation.

“Look,” Andrew pointed, “there’s someone else! There’s more! They are all coming now, look!” and the crystalline outline of the figures became clearer in the snow and white beams of the night, whereas Jack could see another formed shape.

“It’s the descendants of Tir Na Nog’s gods and goddesses throughout time,” Sarah spoke with disbelief, “It’s their ghosts...their spirits...the people that were thought to be immortal or

rare or gifted...they're descendants. Of Tir Na Nog," it was a whisper and acknowledgement, and she stood in shock as Andrew pointed again to the orbs of light that were materializing in a circle around the Morrigan sisters. Their isolated forms glowed with swirling centered light, and Nemain's feet were flanked by crows. She was an icy crystalline figure of black amongst the others.

Jack shook his head. Could this be? How was this this possible? He knew there was no time to wonder, only to believe, and to work with the swirling wind and the sky and the land that he previously didn't know existed and now he was an integral part of. His cape moved impatiently, and he turned his attention to Sarah, beside him in midair. As she beckoned him forward, he grabbed Andrew's elbow and Sarah's hand, and the cape fluttered them closer to the Fidchell board.

The board showed a young woman's shape materializing into tiny particles, in a coat of armor and a man's tunic. Her hair was cropped to her neck, dark, and her eyes were luminous in the moonlight. She was small in stature and carried a shield and a French flag. Her eyes pierced the night and she looked about in amazement at the board and the suspended three before her. She turned toward the Morrigan sisters and immediately fell upon one knee, making a cross.

"It's Joan of Arc," she breathed, "Look, it's Joan of Arc. These are all ancestors but they're from the lineage of Tir Na Nog. Oh, my god, look at her, Jack! I cannot believe this," and she grabbed his shoulder. He turned toward Sarah, and her face was luminescent in the moonlight and the snow. My god, she was so beautiful, he thought, and he brushed a piece of hair off her face in a ridiculous attempt to move it away from her cheek. The wind whipped mercilessly around them both, and another figure began to materialize opposite Joan of Arc.

"Bruh, check it out, it's somebody else- Sarah, where the heck are you getting these people from? Were all these humans half gods? It doesn't seem possible?" Andrew was shouting in the wind, and the snow stung his face with icy blasts, making him shield his eyes and face. They were still suspended, together, beside the board.

The shape had a great height to it, and was cloaked in black, a man with a beard, holding a black hat. His face was drawn, his hands slender, and he blinked unbelievably as the board began to be visible in front of him.

“It’s freakin Abe Lincoln!” Andrew spouted, and he laughed maniacally, “how the hell did that guy get blown to the board? What? Oh, man, he must be so confused,” Andrew tilted his head and looked at him empathetically.

“Dude, I think they are all confused! Going about their daily lives, and then, bam, they’re in the middle of the sky, on a fidchell board in Tir Na Nog? I mean what the hell could be weirder than that, huh?” Jack shook his head, and he looked again at Sarah, and then at Oenghus.

Oenghus nodded, declaring, “Sarah, these are the greatest of those that have seen humanity for what it can be. With your three elevated powers combined, the three Morrigan sisters and the four great master descendants, you shall battle the Fomorians, and Mordrach. But you must call upon them only when the board has traversed over to the Mag Mell, which is the passageway to Tir Na Nog. The battle cannot be here. This fight will be over the ocean, between the divide, on the night of the equinox. You must descend upon the board, call your army and enemies, and begin the game,” he nodded toward the board, and, sweeping his arm, moved the three of them towards it, rushing in the air as they all alighted on the board.

Andrew, almost tripping as he was swept unto the lighted board, turned to Oenghus. He bellowed against the wind at him, “I am thinking we better do this soon, cause the board is starting to move,” and he gestured to the Morrigan, the three goddesses holding their spears aloft, with Nemain at the venter, the lightning behind her illuminating her against the night.

The board’s glistening face gleamed in the moonlight, and the creatures and humans atop it appeared alarmed at the rushing movement beneath them. Lincoln crouched low to the board, his broad fingers splayed for balance. Jack watched as Joan of Arc put her shield in front of her against the gushing wind, her red cape streaming behind her. Pythagoras stood straight up, watching the sky and stars that flew by with wonder. Sarah, Jack and Andrew were on the edge

of the board now, and Oenghus was travelling midair beside them and the board, observing them all as it gained speed.

Sarah's face turned to Jack.

"It's time," she whispered to him, and she strode forward, balancing precariously on the board as they flew in the air towards the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, towards the Mag Mell, the thin line that divided the human world from Tir Na Nog.

Chapter 31- Crossroads

"Sarah," Jack called to her intensely, "use what Delia sent you! They're coming!" His cape flew around him

Andrew, his face to the wind, looked toward the Morrigan in panic.

"I can tell you those ladies are NOT happy, bruh. Those ladies are gonna rip somebody to shreds pretty quickly, I can tell, and I am hoping it's not me..." and he turned toward Sarah urgently, "we gotta move, sis."

Aengus stated clearly to Sarah, "you will need to harness the power of Tir Na Nog choose the Fidchell board's opposing side. Should you call upon Mordrach, Sarah, the dreaded Fomorians will come with him, and be waiting below the sea level for us to lose. Be aware Mordrach will call upon his own team of hate as well, and the battle will be difficult. You have," and here he gestured to Andrew, "the sword of light, and the spear of Lugh," and in so doing, the spear attached to the back of Sarah's knapsack. She hurriedly removed it, and all three stood at the ready, spear, sword and cape.

"You must call upon your enemy," he prompted her, "and be ready. We are almost there, at the Mag Mell. They cannot cross the line of Tir Na Nog, so we battle the Fidchell of Kings over the ocean's path toward it and toward the earth. The crossroad between two worlds, only to be found during the equinox," and in so saying, he moved with swiftness to a corner of the

board. Jack watched as Danu materialized as well on the other corner, while Lugh had appeared in the second row on the side, behind Joan of Arc.

Sarah brought out the letter again, and held it up to the moonlight. The Fidchell board was moving at a quickening pace, toward the middle of the ocean, and they all held strong against the snow of moonlight and wind that surrounded them.

“Hold on,” she whispered, “hold on. Here we go.”

“Whoa, this is like a messed-up roller coaster,” Andrew shouted, his hands pressed against the board. He saw Joan turn towards him, and he smiled brilliantly. She looked at him with disdain. He shrugged, and then saw the Nemain glancing back at him with glittering black diamond eyes, and he mumbled, “damn, the ladies around here just don’t like me.”

“I place myself, “ shouted Sarah, reading from the letter,
“in the grace of the Tuathe.

Mordrach, descendent of Balor

To come to the ancient game of Fidchell

where evil will be no more!

As Sarah declared this, it seemed as though the earth itself rumbled with fury, and Jack viewed the lightning and the wind and the moon and the snow whirl around the giant Fidchell board, drawing it upward towards the sky, stopping abruptly in a slow twirl directly above the Atlantic Ocean, where a moon illuminated path glowed upon the water. The ocean was furiously moving all around it, but the path was calm and clear.

Sarah gasped at it, seeing calm amongst the chaos.

“It’s the Mag Mell. Look, Jack, Andrew, look! It’s the path to Tir Na Nog across the ocean! It’s so beautiful, I cannot believe we are seeing this!” she breathed, and looked around, seeing the darkness of the waves around it.

“Yeah, but, hey Sarah. Don’t know if you noticed, but we got COMPANY!” and Andrew shielded both of them with his body as a black streak ran parallel to the lightning, and a helicopter with a very familiar symbol came out of the sky, followed by screeching winged creatures of all horrible shapes and sizes.

“What the hell is that?” Andrew shouted, “damn, he’s got some really ugly friends, that guy,” and in so saying, he pulled out the sword, and weighed it in front of him, “and man it’s gonna get uglier!”

The helicopter’s doors opened and Seymour Droch stood, in resplendent attire, his arms bedecked with what looked like some sort of bracelets, and he hovered over the Fidchell board in amazement, his evil and yet beautiful visage glowing in the lighted night.

He laughed while he descended with panther like smoothness, surveying the board game and the players thereupon.

“Could it be,” he declared, seeing Oenghus, with Danu behind the characters of Lincoln, Joan of Arc and Pythagoras, “could it be that you think to battle the entirety of the Fomorians? Do you wish to raise the beast upon which you slayed so many years before?” he moved off the ladder, and alighted upon the board, wielding his cuffs of many jewels in the air, “you” and he pointed to Sarah, “you wish to lose her now forever? You are all so helpless, I cannot but pity this sorry bunch of you” and in so doing, he raised his arms up, and the paradoxical black lightning attached to his wristlets, and he grew larger and shed the clothes that confined him to humanity, instead attired in a great black and silver robe and tunic.

Around him appeared the screeching creatures, perhaps 12 in number, their figures grotesque and terrifying in the orange and purple that flanked his sinister and nefarious frame.

“Let the games begin, then,” Mordrach bellowed, and the rumble beneath the ocean was interrupted by a giant splash, where huge malevolent black and grey shapes emerged from the water’s depths. Sarah looked back in terror at Jack and Andrew, and Joan squared her small shoulders as to brace against the onslaught of what looked like monsters from the depths of hell.

Jack gasped, looking back at Oenghus. Oenghus moved in an immediate fashion behind him, standing close to his shoulder.

“Do not be afraid, young Jack, I have fought the Mordrach and Fomorians before without the leveling of the board, and have conquered them. You will prevail, do not let their darkness outweigh your light. We are in the equinox’s benevolent guide, and we shall return Mordrach back to where he is destined,” and suddenly, before them both, there arose a wall of what looked like glass, but was of a gel like consistency.

The Fidchell board trembled, and the Morrigan sisters turned to Mordrach with piercing eyes and birdlike shrieks. Nemain’s many crows were suspended around her, and her dark and penetrating gaze watched as the three of them lifted their swords and spears.

“Who shall begin?” Mordrach bellowed viciously, picking up a huge and translucent blue stone in front of him. He watched as the monsters and grotesque figures gathered around him, their sounds ranging from grunts to screeches as he raised himself to hover over the board, circling the Morrigan sisters. The sisters three together crouched low, watching him with venomous stares, and Nemain pulled her spear high above her head in readiness.

“Ah, I see we have my favorites, all here! How absurdly tiresome of all of you, calling upon an old enemy without a formal invitation! Well, let me RSVP with a little gift! Nemain, I shall move my first stone, see if you can still remember the rules of this ancient king’s game, being that you are no king,” and he picked up one of the glittering silver stones around the Morrigan, and dropped it with a deadening thud in the diagonal crevice for the pieces. The Morrigan crows shrieked at him, and Nemain moved to the other side of the inner circle of the board, picking up another huge, crystalline like stone, and dropping it without words onto the

other side. As she did so, one of the horrifying creatures came flying at her, and Andrew, seeing this happen, swiftly broke through the gel like substance that surrounded him and made a fractional swipe with his sword, running towards the center, and sliced the creature neatly in half.

“And with his vorpal sword in hand,” murmured Lugh, and he followed Andrew in giant steps. The creature lay on the board, writhing, but Andrew now stood beside the Morrigan, himself diminutive in stature. Nemain turned to him with a glance that looked somewhat grateful, partly enraged. Andrew grinned, giving her the thumbs up sign, and she rose high into the air, throwing her spear quickly at the creatures that surrounded Mordrach.

“Be wary of your tiny creatures, Mordrach! You will not have the opportunity to play the game if you are slain first, even the immortals can be vanquished!” and in so saying, she jumped off the center circle stone of the board, and threw another giant rock to the other side, making a diagonal line of the luminescent stones. The moon shone behind them and illuminated the shadows from the rocks.

The figures of Pythagoras and Lincoln were intent on the movement of the stones, and Pythagoras, in a calm voice, called out to Sarah and Oengus.

“Noble servants of the Masters, druids, hear me. Your most dark opponent in this game leads you to form a ray of rocks towards the corners, but I tell you that to win this conquest, you will need to mathematically move a stone so the moon and sun of the equinox will double the shadows of the line, and thus increase your winnings one hundredfold.”

Oengus looked at him puzzled. Jack moved in quickly, breaking the protective bubble just as Andrew, who was standing in the center, shielded Nemain and her sisters. An onslaught of Mordrach’s creatures were coming quickly towards them.

“Your move, buddy,” Andrew taunted Mordrach, and he was instantly thrown off the board by a hot, white stone that had been picked up by Mordrach.

“Humans do not tempt me, and you, young simpleton, you encourage me to destroy you?” he added, throwing a ball of fire at Andrew, which was instantly blocked by the shield of Joan of Arc.

Andrew turned and looked at her thankfully, and she nodded, her eyes brightly looking up at the sky.

“Fire cannot destroy us,” she whispered, and he looked at her ironically.

“You can say that again, sister,” he mouthed to himself admiringly, and turned his attention back to the Fidchell line.

The second Morrigan sister, Badb, had picked up a shining silver stone during this time period and placed it in the diagonal line moving towards Oenghus. The stones were over halfway to the corner already, and Jack waved Andrew away from the center of the board. Mordrach had since himself picked up a stone of pure black, its opulence and great size magnifying the reflected night, and had positioned it to reflect against the Morrigan. The drumming had gotten louder, and the reflection dulled their ability to see, as Badb shielded her eyes, a purplish creature came swooping down from Modroc’s still suspended helicopter with claws open. The creature’s teeth and claws looked like an old-world gargoyle, and it descended quickly upon Badb and grabbed her by the hair. Ripping at her clothes, the gargoyle moved quickly to bite the arm of Badb and swing her around by her hair. The sister screamed, and in what seemed to be a millisecond, Nemain had turned and lifted herself, her spear piercing the creature directly between its eyes. The resulting thud of the dropped Badb on the board and the splayed creature lying in the line of Mordrach’s stones was not a pretty sight. Sarah turned her eyes downward, watching Nemain as she lifted herself above the creature and direct the crows that surrounded her to eat the remains. They did so in a screaming gust.

In horror, Jack and Sarah watched Mordrach during this diversion, pick up the last silver stone from his side. Andrew had his sword in hand next to Joan, and the sisters were wildly moving Badb back to the middle circle. Mordrach laughed, looking upward into the sky, and

moved to place the stone strategically in the diagonal to the last cleft of the board. There was a great rumbling, and beneath the waters there began to emerge large, ominous shapes. Dark, giant sea raiders, monstrous and hideous looking, the shapes were moving on the side of Mordrach. They carried clubs and were accented by geysers of water propelling them upward. Some had the heads of animals and the legs of giants. They emerging in the thousands, and moving towards the MagMell in ferocity and chaos.

Amongst this, Jack's cape was starting to light up. Trying to ignore it, and watching Mordrach in dismay, Jack patted it down. It slapped him in the face, and he finally moved to look at it. It was blinking inside, and he sighed, opening it up. It revealed a triad of numbers, even pictures, and he saw the swirling possibilities of equations, and then he realized.

This was the solution. The possibilities of getting to the corner of fidchell. He watched as he saw the possibilities of getting a diagonal to the corner. To the stone. There was evidently one way left, and he rushed in to stand by Abe. The tall figure looked at him inquisitively.

"We can't give up, right Mr. Lincoln? We gotta keep our heads even in the face of failure, right?"

Lincoln grimly smiled, and searchingly put the tips of his very long hands together.

"This game has elements of the Royal game in it, Jack...I know only that we need a powerful piece to give us the advantage. A stone of greater value, that can move quickly. Capturing the king, that is what I see," and he gasped as he saw begin to emerge from the ocean, being grabbed by the flying creatures, and moving towards them at great speed.

Jack was looking around, and then he said to himself, "The stones. Together," realizing in a lightning moment that the only possibility lay in their working as one in three.

Andrew moved quickly across the board, eyeing Jack and Lincoln converse. Sarah, channeling the wind, also swiftly flew to Jack's side.

An enormous serpent fell upon Joan's head from Mordrach's creatures, and she quickly wrestled it to the surface of the chess board, pummeling it senseless with her spear, and hastily beheading it. Green liquid oozed from the remaining serpent's body, and she turned her head away in disgust and yet triumphant. Andrew waved at her appreciatively.

"Man, slay it, Joan!" Andrew yelled. She nodded, modestly, back at him. She picked up the serpent and hurled it in the water, but it was an ominous sight that more were being transported, hissing and snarling, carried menacingly by creatures of chaos.

"Damn, that's crazy, we are in SO much trouble, girl, Sarah, what are we doing right now? We have to win, but we are being completely slaughtered right now, Jack. Dude, why are you looking at your weird cape?" Andrew's voice held an edge of hysteria, and his head was switching views between Mordrach and the Morrigan.

"So, the only thing we can do now, buddy, is that we have to put the stones together. In the necklace. It opens up the negative and the positive. The sum of two parts. We have to have a place to open up the Mag Mell and get rid of these- what do you call them, Oenghus?" Jack was watching the wise sage listen beside them.

"The Fomorians," and with the word came an explosion of water around and beneath the giant board. Great figures emerged in droves, some with the heads of goats and the bodies of giants, others just grotesque monsters fairly floating up out of the water, stepping in giant strides of wind to the board.

The stones together. The power of three. The Morrigan. Each one a part yet all as one. Sarah grabbed the stone from her necklace, and Jack from his collar. Andrew tore his from his belt, and together, they moved with clarity toward the center of the board.

Juxtaposed against the dark night, Sarah, in her white tunic and cape, stood in the center of the board and held the jewels up in the moonlight.

Lightning crashed. Sarah was thrown off the board, and the Morrigan clutched the great stones already placed on the game. She stood again, and Danu and Oenghus had moved to her side. She breathed the words written at the very end of the letter Delia had sent her:

“Tosaigh!”

Let it begin, Sarah murmured. Let it begin, and let it end. She felt a shimmering beside her, and looked, with amazement, to see Zoey materialize beside her frame.

Sarah stood frozen in shock.

“Mom?” she whispered, and the figure of Zoe glistened in recognition. There was a warmth, a deep ripple, and she watched as Zoe tried to respond to her. The words came in strange wave.

“I love you, Sarah. Don’t give up, he cannot fight the light,” she seemed to exude, and then, she was gone.

“Mom!” Sarah grasped at the air where Zoey had been, and in frustration, turned to Mordrach.

With a jolt, the board tilted slightly, as Mordrach had stepped on the other side.

Mordrach’s giant steps were alarmingly close, and Sarah moved her hands above the stones again.

“Please, please, please, begin. Begin the end of these creatures. Of Mordrach, and the Fomorians. Please, do something,” she murmured, almost a prayer, knowing that only she could hear herself. She immediately found herself surrounded by the Morrigan, and they each had

wings upon which encircled Jack, Sarah and Andrew. They begin to sing, a slow, eerie chant, and circumvent the three of them and the stones.

The stones had begun to smoke, and suddenly, a burst of flames emitted from the triad, and the water from the ocean began to raise high enough to reach the board. There was a screeching, and a shrill noise arose from Nemain. There was an incinerating puff of fire upward, and then an all-out explosion of flames, sent out hundreds of feet into the night. At the top of the fire, there was a shape outlined in red, and it rose higher in the night, bellowing with such thunderous volume, the very heat and breath from the bursting, firing blasts moving them all back onto the board, Mordrach and his men as well, lying on their backs, and the arc of the flames fanned into a shape.

“It’s Lugh,” screamed Sarah, shielding her eyes, “he’s back!”

“Yeah, but not like before. Man, he’s a sun, that’s all,” Andrew was covering his face from the heat, and he had to drop his sword as it had turned into a flaming, glowing metal.

“Shit, man, that’s hot,” he yelped.

Lugh was high in the sky, and his hands held rays of fire. His emblazoned hair shone about his face, and his eyes, of blue and green, pierced Mordrach with their gaze.

“You have returned?” he roared at the evil figure of Mordrach, pelting him with fiery blasts, “do you not think that I would guard you from this realm? I, who invented the game, will destroy you with it!” and with a hurled movement, he drew a silver white horse from the sky, giant and powerful.

“Do you not wish to finish the game,” countered Mordrach, warily eyeing Lugh, yet buying time as his winged goat headed creatures, serpents, and monsters began to flank him, “great Lugh, I did not think you one of bad sportsmanship? What shall we bet upon, let us say? We are at the ending, and the one last stone that is moved is the captured King. Which side shall take it? I

think, I know, but your horse needs a companion before you begin your descent,” and with a howling laugh, thousands of giant wolves showed up on the board below Lugh, howling and screaming, their teeth in the moonlight pointed and fearsome. They moved in on the humans, and Danu rose beside Lugh, with Oengus, all hovering skyward.

“Wait,” Modrach continued, “now wait, I think there is collateral here. Yeeessss. I feel that the one being that we need is in the space between. In the edge of the equinox’s night and day, and she embodies the very pathway we need, or need not. I feel that I call upon Mrs. Carmichael to be our compromise, and that the very soul of her be spared if you will let me in onto the pathway to Magmell. Shall that be all we need? Then the game is finished, and there is no need to continue,” and in so saying, the shimmering figure of Zoey was placed in the center of the board.

“NO! MOM! NO!!!” Sarah screamed, and she jumped the great circles of stones to the board’s center, screaming at Mordrach, “NO! You won’t have her, not today, you bastard!” Sarah jumped onto the center of the board and shielded the translucent and golden form of her mother, her hands outstretched.

Pythagoras, silent until this point, silently pointed to Sarah’s mother.

“She is an element of time. In a “thin place”, she can transcend time, Sarah of the otherworld, you must send him to where she does not reside,” and with that being said, he began to vanish.

Sarah stood in wonderment beside her mother surrounded by starlight and gold flashes, but seemingly frozen, and the great god Lugh looked down upon the wolves and the creatures descending upon the board. Andrew suddenly looked at Jack, and Jack looked back towards him, understanding. Math. Math was more powerful than the gods, as it always had been.

“Relativistic space time is a two-dimensional theorem,” Jack murmured, and he looked quickly at Andrew, nodding, yelling to him, “we gotta make him go back! Get the black stone!” and they

both charged across the Fidchell board, grabbing and lifting that last black opulent stone onto the center of the board, and threw it to the Morrigan sisters.

“Check it, ladies! He’s gonna see a whole side of the mountain now!” Andrew yelled, and Nemain nodded at them both, throwing the black boulder swiftly to Lugh, who then held it in front of him.

The stone immediately turned white and blazing, and Lugh, his eye gleaming, declared, “you shall see the time wherefore you shall return, son of Balor, there is no place in either world here for you henceforward,” and with that, the stone was hurtled with blazing glory to collide with Mordrach and hit him squarely, and he fell into it, grasping quickly the roundness of the ball, its flames burning his clothes and hair, and he screamed a horrendous, blood curdling yell that shook the very heavens they all were ensconced in.

He moved to turn, but Mordrach was engulfed in a blinding super nova of light, a whirling collision of auras from the sky, and they all shielded their eyes, as Lugh, with a mighty throw, sent his horse downward to catch him, and watched it carry Mordrach into the depths of the night, out into the space of the stars, his howling still echoing as he left the atmosphere of earth and Tir Na Nog.

The creatures and serpents had already begun creeping back into the water, and the board was beginning to shiver, rapidly getting smaller and smaller. Lugh remained in the sky, and watched as Mordrach was banished to the universe and the creatures and Fomorians were trampled back down into the sea, and then, bowing quickly to the humans and deeply to the Morrigan, he retreated as quickly as he had come into the depthless night of the equinox’s end.

Chapter 32-The End

The board was smaller, and the figures on it were quickly vaporizing into figures of the night.

Andrew breathed rapidly, crouching as he felt the board begin its smaller, quicker ride back to Tir Na Nog. Jack did the same, yet he viewed the expanse of the Fidchell board in front of him.

Sarah stood next to her mother, looking through the golden luster that enveloped her form, and watched as Zoey extended her hands out to her helplessly, mouthing “I love you” through the starlike, shimmering mist that had begun to pull her away from them all. Sarah yelled to her, but she had disintegrated into starlight, and swiftly been removed from the center of the board.

As Pythagoras had already left, Joan and Lincoln were also fading, and Andrew waved at Joan tragically, knowing all too well the fate from both of their lives on earth. She lifted her sword to him, and deemed him, as if a knight, with it. She then rippled into nothingness.

Lincoln moved his hand in a wave to Jack, and Jack raised his hand high.

“Thanks, Abe, you’re a hero,” he yelled, but the tall lawyer had smoothly faded away as well.

The board, now room size, was wildly transporting Jack, Andrew and Sarah towards the lustrous sunrise of Tir Na Nog’s expanse of trees and woods, and the inhabitants had gathered their welcome around Danu and Oenghus as they landed squarely inside the open castle walls. Danu came forward quickly, and her giant frame, tall and elegant beside the three, was of great comfort to the astonished travelers.

“You have done well, young brothers and sisters of man. You have come to us as children and will leave as kings and queens. We have left for you a space within the walls of Tir Na Nog’s castle for eternity, and you shall be able to return with the gift of the stones at any time,” and in so saying, she handed them each a dark blue gem, powerful and radiant as it rushed to their collars and belts, situational as the earth stones before.

“But,” Sarah said quietly, “that’s all wonderful, Danu, but are we going back to earth? I still don’t have my mom, “ and she brushed a tear from her cheek, her eyes staring into Danu’s brilliant ones.

“She is safe in the thin place right now, dear Sarah. She has protection of Lugh, and Mordrach, banished to our other universe, is jailed and sentenced for thousands of human years,

will be brought before council at one time. She cannot leave the thin space, as she herself, is a part of the entranceway to Tir Na Nog, and would open the gates again to the evil that lurks in the Otherworld,” Danu gently spoke, and caressed Sarah’s waves of hair as she did. Sarah sobbed, hiding her face in Jack’s shoulder, but she nodded.

“So, “Andrew was looking incredibly uncomfortable, “uh, how are we going back? To, ugh, New JERSEY? You know, that really could not be more paradoxical if I tried,” he muttered, and Oengus stood before him.

“Young warrior, you have still much to accomplish in your own time, and then, perhaps, well, you shall come and bring your knowledge of this, this other world to the Tuathe so that we may all partake in its glory,” and Andrew, Jack and Sarah, watched as the scene in front of them began to shimmer with an amber morning glow.

“Many thanks, young Sarah, wise Jack and warrior Andrew. We will look to a brighter future because of all you have done,” and they grabbed each other as the inhabitants of Tir Na Nog waved brilliantly at them, and they found themselves sleepily looking at one another.

“I am so tired, “ Jack said, and Sarah put her head on his shoulder.

“Me too,” she yawned, and Andrew punched his brother and put his arm around Sarah’s shoulder.

“I need food,” he gasped out, and with a whirling sensation, the three felt a huge drop, a powerful wind, and a freezing cold moment where they were suspended between the ocean and the sky, when all went suddenly black.

