

CELTIC EVIL:

A FITZGERALD BROTHERS NOVEL

Roarke

By

SIERRA ROSE

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## Dedications:

I would like to thank everyone who has helped in the creation, the growth and of course, the magic that is my first book.

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May all of you and all that read this series accept and keep the blessings that come your way everyday of the year.

Blessed be.

## Prologue

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## CHAPTER ONE

### **Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland:**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

At 5'6" with wavy blond hair that the sun often turned to a lighter color and reached his shoulders, he was used to the girls at school staring at him. In fact, he was often making his classmates upset by turning away dates but Ian just wasn't ready

for that. He dated when he wanted, did well in his classes and loved acting.

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

"So, still having the dreams?" she asked after they'd passed a group of students.

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

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

"Talk to the Sullivans about them?" the girl asked carefully, being careful to phrase that right since she knew that even though her friend had been a toddler when his parents died, he never considered his foster parents as his real ones.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

### **Fitzgaren, County Kerry, Ireland:**

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

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

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

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

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

Now at thirty-four, Kerry mainly kept to himself at the family manor in the small Irish town his ancestors created. He worked private businesses or investments mainly as amusements or to take his mind off troubles, and as he stepped outside to the cobblestone patio that was filled with roses and other flowers

planted by his beloved mother and tended to by the housekeeper, he knew trouble was brewing closer than he liked.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"You always eat breakfast on the patio on Tuesdays, boyo," she replied, setting glasses of fresh orange juice and strong coffee in front of him. "Just like your Da you are, Kerry."

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

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

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

Patting her graying red hair as she took a seat next to him, she gently laid a hand on his arm. "Your Da was a great and

gentle man, Kerry.” She began easily, a soft smile forming as she recalled his parents. “Toryn loved life to its fullest and he loved his family. He’d be proud of you.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Child's game," he sneered. "You want to impress me, try something else."

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Kerry?!" Deirdre was by his side, concerned. She hadn't seen or heard the entire event but knew by the way his eyes were still slit and his fingers sparked that something major had happened. "Are you alright?!"

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

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

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

### **Cork, County Cork Ireland:**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Maggie blinked bright green eyes as she paused to think then she remembered the glasses. "I'm near-sighted, really but I

only use ‘em when I’m working.” She replied, sitting back in the chair to look closer at her host.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"All?" Mac's brow rose. "Like what?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“What?” Maggie stared at him, “Why?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

Maggie didn't care for that much but she considered. "So who does it consider the weakest?"

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

Maggie Cavanaugh began to wonder if she shouldn't have left this assignment alone while she wandered around the downstairs after her host had disappeared upstairs.

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

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

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

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

### **Monte Carlo, Monaco:**

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

World known for its Royal Family and also for its casinos, it was where a lot of people came when seeking to lose

themselves for awhile in noise, in the luck of cards or slots or table games. Some went away with much less than they arrived with and those very few who came away from a night at the tables with much more.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Almost to his car, Ryan stopped in the lot to look around. Having been in security for awhile now and having had his time in learning the ins and out of being a thief he knew when to accept that his sixth sense was warning him and right then both his sixth and seventh senses were screaming, and it was that last one that really irked him.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Another hard blow took his breath and he felt his vision blur and his nose bleed as the power sought to hurt until his temper finally got his feet under him again.

His hand shot out to send a wave of electric energy from his fingers in a burst like the ones he hadn’t had to use in years.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“You have much of your father in you, Ryan. Toryn and I were bitter rivals but I respect the way you’ve handled yourself

here.” Sebastian watched the boy closely to see he had his attention. “I offered your father a choice long ago. A choice that had he accepted your family wouldn’t have been torn asunder like it has been.”

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

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

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

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

Confident of his win, Sebastian smiled easily. “Just join my cause, Ryan Fitzgerald,” he held up a smooth hand to help his would-be apprentice to his feet. “Accept the offer your father so stupidly spurned that day on the island when he could have saved your mother and his self by letting fate have its day and all that you wish can be yours.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **The French Quarter, New Orleans, Louisiana:**

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

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

Relaxing on a bed in one of the French Quarter’s more colorful townhouses, Roarke Fitzgerald felt at ease. Something he hardly ever was on any given day.

At twenty-six years of age, he'd been many things so far in his life. The more colorful included a singer, a spy, a security engineer, and his current favorite hobby, ghost buster.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"No, never any reason to worry about that." He replied, finally opening his eyes to watch his twenty-six year old friend.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

He sat back on the bed to watch Jessica finish what he knew was a nightly routine. Roarke was silently considering how to go about conning his friend into spending the night in his room,

which was something they'd never talked about before, when something from the mirror made him look.

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

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

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

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

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

"Roarke, what's wrong?" she asked, shifting on the seat to look at him fully and not liking the sudden feeling in her room. "Roarke!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Jessica had been struggling against the cold power that gripped her throat and was slowly pulling the life and power from her even as she saw the shadow close to Roarke. Unable to use her powers that she rarely used or scream for Roarke, the panic was about to set in when the first loud shot was heard hitting the sealed bedroom door.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



## CHAPTER TWO

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

Kerry Fitzgerald knew the stalwart Mrs. O'Connor would do her best to keep things running smoothly and he, himself, made sure things were as normal as possible. Even if he couldn't get past the dreams of dread that filled his nights and his days with apprehension.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Um, hello, I’m...” he greeted, seeing and feeling her startled emotions.

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

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

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

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

“This is your home. You need never call to come home, little brother,” Kerry assured him, holding out a hand then waited to see what the younger man would do.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"This has something to do with what happened fifteen years ago, doesn't it?" Ian asked, although he was sure it did.

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

"I'd rather wait for the others so this can be told once," he rubbed the bridge of his nose where a dull pain was building.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Maggie caught the shared look. "Something's wrong?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ian blinked, Maggie stared, and they both exchanged looks. "Your brothers get along at all, luv?" she asked curiously then could have kicked herself but the eighteen-year-old only shrugged.

“Got me, I only have fleeting memories but...” he hesitated next to her on the steps. “The biggest one is of feeling safe with them.”

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

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

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

## CHAPTER THREE

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

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

Scrubbing his face in a tired motion, he recalled arriving at the local airport only hours beforehand:

**Farranfore Airport, County Kerry, Ireland, Four hours previously:**

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

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

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

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

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

"You know that's not true," Jessica Hadley spoke softly from behind him, lightly placing a hand on his shoulder and felt



it shaking. "You're not alone and we won't leave you alone, but we do need to talk to Kerry."

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Roarke, you don't want to make this harder 'cause if you don't move it or keep giving me grief on this, I'm going to remind you that you still hold reserve status on the Mavericks, which makes me your damn leader. So if I say get your ass down those steps and into the car then you damn well better do it!" he snapped, in a tone only used infrequently.

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

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

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

That was exactly what Roarke was worried about but finally he scowled and started down the steps. "Fine, but when this

backfires, it's on your heads," he returned, refusing to sulk but looking close when his friend just smirked at him.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **Killarney Hospital, Present:**

"Sit-rep, Peter?" Cameron Young brought himself back to the present by the approach of his main medic and wanting a situation report.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Jessica's eyes shot to his and she explained about seeing the bird, hearing the wind and what she's felt since then. "It's destroying him, Kerry, and I can't block this out. It's not like the

shadow creature in New Orleans that made him see your mother.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"This hurts," Ian whispered, rubbing his head but nearly recoiling as strong fingers gripped muscles in his neck and squeezed. "That's worse!"

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

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

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

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

"No, I can help," Ian started to argue but Maggie had grabbed his arm. Instead of pulling it to leave, as he feared, she shoved a weathered old leatherbound book at him. "What's this?"

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

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

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

He unbuttoned three buttons in order to move his shirt aside and show her the Claddagh medal he'd had since childhood. "What's the spell?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Catch her!” Ryan snapped as he entered the room, shooting this toward Mac who had already been doing that even

as Kerry was heading for the bed. "That won't keep it down for long but maybe long enough to bring his control back to the surface."

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

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

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

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

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

"Kerry, that thing is still in him," he warned lowly.

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

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

Cameron Young's head snapped up after figuring what this meant. "Oh, this won't be pretty."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Oh, bloody hell," Ryan groaned, starting to move when Kerry shook his head, and then Roarke's fingers gripped his hand in a nearly bone-breaking hold.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Recalling some of her earlier investigations into his family, Maggie knew that meant it had come from Fiona Kerrigan; a powerful wise-woman from up further in Clare, and she

wondered if any of them also knew the legends associated with it.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Well, that should be interesting if all five of you do that," Maggie laughed, wondering if the brothers were aware of the shower of lights that went off right then. 'I doubt it,' she thought to herself, wondering what else would happen.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### **Fitzgerald Manor, Fitzgaren, Ireland:**

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

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

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

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

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

"I've prepared the rooms as you suggested and told Mick to clear the garage for those death-machines the lads use," she spoke to Kerry briskly but her eyes were looking around, frowning as the Mavericks carefully unloaded the stretcher. "He should still be in a hospital, boyo," she admonished sternly.

"That's what I said," Peter muttered wincing as a hand smacked his head.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Let's go hero," she grinned, patting his arm. "I don't think that's a lady you want to mess with."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In the silence, Roarke began twisting in his sleep, whimpering. "No. Don't...hit...Don't...touch..."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"That day, when we got to the Walsh farm things felt odd. Their oldest son was doing his usual swaggering until Cam put a gun in his face, but wouldn't say where Roarke was. I found Roarke laying in the barn where they had tied him and he'd been beaten to a raw bloody pulp. His back, legs, chest, anything exposed was just raw and bloody and that's when I learned they'd also been selling him."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I don't know," the eldest brother admitted as he headed downstairs, his temper beginning to spark as he again thought of what he'd been told, what he'd seen, what he'd felt and above all, what all he hadn't been told these past fifteen years.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"All older, I fear," the red-haired reporter replied, surprised to see lightning flash. "I'm the youngest of ten."

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

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

"Kerry's ticked about something," he sighed, reaching for a cookie and meeting Ryan's gaze. "It takes a lot to cause his temper to make lightning."

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ian was frowning. "The house is tense," he spoke quietly, but both his brothers seemed to feel it.

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

"Been awhile since anyone remembered us that way," he lifted his cup to her in mild salute and smiled at her; also not missing the look Mac gave him at this and catching the underlying meaning to this. 'Well, well, this is new,' he thought.

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

Mac's eyes narrowed at the lightning but caught Ian's look. "What's up, lad?"

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mac considered that, knowing that he could probably ease some of the pain, but that would have to be after their brother learned to trust them again. "He had retrograde amnesia after the

island so it stands to reason that he'd push the worst of this back too."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Da wasn't supposed to be there, Mac," Kerry murmured, an uneasy feeling going through him as something bothered him

about that. "Remember, Kathleen was coming that day so Da was supposed to stay home."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Stroking a finger down her face, he saw how pale she was and felt the weakness. "Sleep now, *muirnin* (sweetheart)," he

whispered. Still partially asleep himself, he wandered out of the room to see where he was and went on feeling, knowing where he was on instinct.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The eldest Fitzgerald had entered the room in the middle of this exchange and was now giving Ryan a very familiar glare.

“You shouldn’t have done this tonight,” he spoke lowly but they both knew their brother was deep into his memories again

as he laid his head on the couch arm. "Roarke, let Mac take you upstairs. Stay with Jessica."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Push too hard, push too fast and you won't be any good to them," he chided lightly, causing Maggie to frown and Cam to roll his eyes.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I'll cope, Doc," Maggie teased, wanting to relieve some of his tension and was pleased to see his small smile as she stood

on her tiptoes to lightly kiss his cheek. “You know how to show a lass a good time.”

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

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

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

“No, I don’t think you should either,” she replied, stepping back but not immediately breaking eye contact. “G’night, Mac.”

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

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

## CHAPTER FIVE

Always an early riser, Kerry Fitzgerald rose slightly earlier than normal.

Having showered, shaved and dressed in his normal casual wear of slacks and shirt before going downstairs, he could tell that none of his brothers were up yet, and the few Mavericks that were had already started checking things outside.

The low singing from the kitchen was a relaxing normal activity that he had been hearing since childhood as Deirdre prepared food for breakfast and got things ready for meals all day since she had more to feed now.

After finally settling down for sleep, Kerry had thought things through more and knew he owed the woman an apology.

Humming as she rolled fresh dough for her biscuits, Deirdre O'Connor looked up as Kerry entered.

"I wasn't sure when anyone would be up but the coffee's ready and I can make you some breakfast right quick enough," she told him, careful to keep her tone neutral since she expected his temper would still be upset.

Pouring his own coffee, Kerry walked behind the housekeeper and leaned around to gently kiss her cheek. "I'm sorry I snapped last night, Deirdre. It wasn't you I should have taken my anger out on."

Setting the rolling pin aside, the older woman turned to lay a hand on his face. "I did wrong for hiding those letters lad, but..."

"You could have destroyed them and I'll want the other stuff but for now I'll handle my grandmother," Kerry replied, tensing as he felt something approaching and it was only a feeling he got once or twice a year. "Damn, she's early."

Deirdre frowned as she realized what he meant. "Your Gran's visit isn't until another few months."

"Yeah, it's bloody convenient how she shows up right now," Kerry scowled, putting his cup down and leaving the kitchen just as Cameron Young was coming in.

"Mike says there's a Rolls Royce coming up the drive," he reported, knowing who that would be.

Kerry rubbed his neck and nodded. "Go up and stay with Roarke. If he wakes up while she's here he could get upset."

"No doubt on that, pal," Cam muttered but he did so without question, which was odd for him.

Kerry paused at the front door to gain his full strength and center his power, looking up the stairs and glad this happened while his brothers were asleep.

Dealing with Kathleen Murphy Fitzgerald's arrogance and temper would be bad enough without having to cope with Ryan's temper since he learned what he has.

Stepping from the manor, Kerry walked slowly down the steps so he was waiting when his maternal grandmother's large black Rolls Royce pulled up and stopped a few feet from him.

Born in Carrick on Shannon some seventy years ago, Kathleen Murphy married Sean Fitzgerald when she was seventeen and of their six children, only their eldest son, Toryn, lived to marry and have children of his own.

Her beloved husband had died many years ago, leaving her mistress of the ancestral home in Fitzgaren until her son's marriage to the Kerrigan girl.

Kathleen had moved to Waterford with her son's marriage as was custom but she always tried to keep a stern hand in his marriage and life. After the death of her son and daughter-in-law, Kathleen made the choice for her grandsons' living arrangements even though Kerry had fought her bitterly about it, but she had won as always.

Pleased that she still had some control, she still traveled to the grand manor that would one day be hers again a few times a year. Though she had to admit her eldest grandson's attitude had been less than friendly the last few visits.

Stepping from the car, she patted her salt and pepper hair that she kept tied in a tight bun before lifting a regal hand to wave to Kerry, who was waiting for her.

A tall woman, Kathleen was nearly 5'9" and proud to say she could still do as she did thirty some years ago. Dressed in a pale blue silk suit with a matching pair of low-heeled pumps, she smiled charmingly as he approached the car.

Coming from a family long with magical powers, Kathleen had always had powers and used them to her advantage. Her



smile faded a little when she realized that a shield existed on her eldest grandson's thoughts.

"Kerry, my darling, it's been so long," she held out her arms to him and smiled as he leaned down to lightly kiss both her flawless cheeks. "I know I'm early but I was sure you wouldn't mind," she waved to her chauffeur to begin unloading her bags. "It's been so long since we've had a real chance to visit."

Staring at the older woman who he came to realize long ago was keeping her flawless, ageless looks with the use of glamour spells, Kerry stopped her with a hand on the arm before she could breeze by him into the house.

"Actually, I do mind," he replied, stopping the driver with a single look. "I told you last time that there was no reason for you to keep visiting like this."

Kathleen frowned slightly, not caring for his tone or attitude. "Kerry, you know as I get on in years I treasure these visits with my eldest grandson," she tried to soothe but encountered a brick wall in her attempt to get past his shields.

Kerry could have laughed at that but kept his face neutral. "Really, and how many times have you visited the others?" he challenged.

"What?" she stared at him.

"How many times have you visited your other grandsons, Grandmother?" Kerry repeated, his tone going colder. "I'm especially curious on how many times you visited Roarke."

This time there was no mistaking how his grandmother looked at that question as she pursed her lips and turned to look toward the horse fields.

"Darling, as much as I adored you boys, I'm much too old to be going all over the country to visit each of them," she waved it away casually.

"Well, that's just odd since you were in County Mayo enough right after it happened to visit your friends the Walshes," Kerry returned evenly, his eyes changing as he fought to stay calm. "I'm guessing you saw Roarke enough then. Was it before, during or after one of his so-called 'punishments'?"

Kathleen clasped her hands in front of her, not caring for this discussion. "I do not know what you are talking about,

Kerrigan, and I do not care for your tone. I will have tea in the parlor so please..." she stopped when he stepped in front of her.

"You do not give orders to me in my house, Grandmother," Kerry informed her, his tone going cold and firm. "You stopped giving orders in this house the day my mother moved in, and it became mine when they died, and you will not step foot in it while my brothers are here."

Her temper simmered but the last comment made her turn quickly. "Your brothers?" she repeated, clearly upset about that. "How many are here? Why?"

"Sebastian decided to return as I'm sure you know," Kerry shrugged. "The spell Mum and Da cast to banish him must have worn off and it's time to face it again. He made moves on all five of us so it's only natural for all five of us to be under the same roof, right?"

"Kerry, you don't want to go through this," she argued, pressing her thoughts forward but gasped, as they were repelled. "I tried to warn your father to let it go but that woman he married just..." remembering where she was and to whom she was speaking with, Kathleen was quick to correct herself.

His eyes flashed dangerously. "You mean my 'mother,'" he stressed lowly. "You wanted my Father to ignore the threat Sebastian posed and to let him break the Circle of Five even though it meant the death of one of his sons. That's why you were so angry that day when you arrived to learn that Da had gone to Skelling Michael with Mum and Roarke."

There was no longer any question or doubt in his mind as he stared at his stone-faced grandmother. There was just a slow burning anger.

"You knew what would happen on that island," Kerry stared at her in disbelief. "You expected Sebastian to kill my mother and brother. Why?"

Kathleen didn't reply at the accusations, waving them away. "Clearly someone has been manipulating your thoughts, darling," she laughed, again trying to go around him but his fingers caught her arm. "Kerry."

"Why did you do it?" he asked again, more demanding this time. "Dammit, tell me why!"

"Because she was never good enough for my son, that's why!" Kathleen snapped back, whirling away to glare at him with a hatred he had never seen before. "Ever since I married your grandfather I heard about the prophecy of the Five and what it was expected to do. Well, Sean and I had six lovely children but only your father, my beloved Toryn, survived."

Kerry remained silent as the older woman began to talk, rant actually, in her anger of his attitude.

"Toryn had so much potential for his future but he went and met that Galway whore," Kathleen was so angry that she was unaware that her emotions were causing the sky to darken. "Then he defied me and married her when I had picked out a beautiful girl that would have matched him perfectly."

"Then they had five sons and you realized that the prophecy would happen with us and that Da would protect his sons with his life," Kerry sighed, having hoped he was wrong in his assumptions.

"I knew that Sebastian and your father had been battling for years and after Ian was born I knew what would happen if not stopped," Kathleen twisted a ring on her hand and saw nothing wrong in her actions as she explained so the boy would understand.

"You must understand, darling. I had forbidden your father from having any other children after the whore bore him his first four but again due to her, he disobeyed me and Ian was born," Kathleen shook her head in disgust. "I knew what would happen so I had, of course, to protect my son and his sons."

His eyes went flat as he listened to his grandmother's words. "Protect his sons? How did you figure on doing that with his wife and one son dead?" Kerry demanded.

Kathleen clucked her tongue at him as if chiding. "Darling, I had to choose the lesser of two evils. If Toryn only had four sons then the prophecy wouldn't happen and Sebastian would be happy to leave him alone so another generation could take the risks of the Circle. Plus your father could be with a nice wholesome girl as I had chosen."

"But it didn't work out that way, did it?" Kerry asked, stomach flipping as he hoped his brothers stayed asleep. "Da decided to go to the island."

“Yes, again he defied me by going with your mother and brother to that island,” she stomped a foot as she recalled, shaking her head. “I had to keep you from going until later than you planned, hoping to salvage what I could but... Sebastian failed.”

“He killed my parents so I don’t think he failed,” Kerry snorted, feeling her anger as she whirled back to him.

“He was supposed to kill the whore and her brat, not my son!” Kathleen snapped angrily. “Kerry, I had to protect you, Ryan, Patrick and Ian as best as I could after that dismal failure, so that’s why I sent them away to be raised by nice families and your lovely brothers prospered so much, didn’t they?”

There was silence as he digested this. “What did Roarke do to you that you would want him dead?” he finally asked.

A wave was his answer but finally she did look over her shoulder. “He wasn’t supposed to be born, darling. He was supposed to die in the womb but your Mother’s power and her own mother saved him. The mark of evil was on him since that night, so it was alright for him to die.”

Kathleen sighed in disgust. “That boy was meant to die that day but instead your father died in his place. For those sins, it didn’t matter what happened to him and you shouldn’t concern yourself with such an evil, twisted boy that...” She drew off as she saw the anger flash in his eyes.

“Is that why you sent him to Mayo to friends of yours instead of letting Bridgett and Padric take him in when they asked you?” Mac Fitzgerald’s voice asked from the top of the steps where he had been sitting during most of this conversation.

Whirling at the unexpected voice, Kathleen Murphy Fitzgerald started to smile at her second born grandson but stopped when she saw that Mac’s normally handsome, smiling face was unsmiling and hard.

“Darling, how handsome you look,” she cooed, but got nothing but stony silence in return. “Bridgett had eight little ones to care for and then you. She couldn’t have handled another, much less one as wild and untamed as that one. Ida and Felan were much more capable and had less to care for.”

"You mean, they had more land and needed the slave labor to do the work so their own worthless brats wouldn't have to," Mac threw back, standing slowly.

Narrowing her eyes, she pointed a long finger up at him. "Now, you watch your tone, lad," she warned, sniffing. "They were a wonderful couple that had their hands full constantly with that boy and had to react accordingly. Spare the rod and spoil the child, as they say."

"Or in this case, it was use the rod, the whip, hands or whatever else they could on the child," Kerry murmured, recalling the scars he'd seen and what he'd felt. "You ordered them to abuse him. Your eleven year old grandson who had seen his parents murdered and you knew he was being abused and raped and did nothing!"

Kathleen whirled and on instinct and anger raised her hand to slap but had it caught. "He should have died and needed that sin destroyed so what did it matter how they used him?" she screeched, some of her glamour spell fading and making her true age show. "I wanted him dead and he would have been if that interfering girl and her friends hadn't come. Now Sebastian or I'll have to..."

Lightning seemed to come from the morning sky as Kerry's eyes darkened and Mac started to come down the steps. "You will not touch that boy again, Grandmother," he spoke lowly, anger plain. "So long as I'm alive, so long as my brothers live, this house is ours and for this betrayal you are not welcome here."

Shocked by this, she was silent for a long time then laughed. "You honestly think all your brothers will agree with this?" she asked, almost mockingly. "Ian doesn't even know him and Ryan has hated him since that day so..."

"Maybe, but he's been my little brother for twenty-six years and I'll tell you the same thing I once told Liam McCarthy, who was fond of being a bully; Roarke's my bratty brother and no one picks on him but me," Ryan spoke from where he was leaning in the now open manor doorway just finishing buttoning his shirt up.

Unknown to Kerry, his three brothers had felt the emotions raging outside and had been hanging around eavesdropping until they felt he needed backup, and while both Mac and Ryan had tried to get Ian to stay inside, the boy had shown his stubborn Irish roots.

"No one lays their bloody hands on him again," Ryan finished, eyeing his grandmother coolly. "You hated him. You hated our mother so to get back at Roarke for not dying you ship him off to a damn hellhole where your mates used and abused him to their hearts content until the pretty little girl came along to save him, because you made sure his older brothers never found out what was going on up there."

"You ordered the staff here to destroy any letters either we or Roarke wrote to Kerry," Ian had stayed by the door so he could watch the steps in case his older brother woke up and he could watch outside in case those brothers needed help. "Not cool."

Mac could have laughed at that but right then he struggled on staying calm while also making certain no attacks came. "You didn't count on Roarke's letters being kept and be glad you didn't show up last night."

"Bloody hell, Kerry wouldn't have thought twice," Ryan snorted. "He'd have tossed the 'may it harm none' rule out the window and flash fried her."

Kathleen faced her four grandsons with an even look. "You still look at things with basic eyes. I am looking out for you for the big picture," she argued, eyes slitting up to the manor as if searching and took two steps back when a giant wall slammed down. "Kerrigan! How dare you!"

"You will not touch him in any way and if you try I will ruin your precious reputation so fast," Kerry warned, jerking a hand toward the car. "Just take your driver and go back to Waterford."

"This is my land, my house and..."

"By the long-set Fitzgerald rules of succession, no it isn't." Mac cut in smoothly as he came down the steps the rest of the way. "You lost all claim to this land, the house and the things on it and in it the day our father married our mother. That's the way

it works and that's how it's always worked. The first son to marry claims the land, etc."

Ryan groaned and rolled his eyes back at Ian. "Saint Mac is now in lawyer mode," he muttered darkly, but the younger boy could tell he was teasing.

"Does he do it often?" Ian asked curiously, seeing Maggie coming down the steps.

"Probably, but I bet it gets confusing when he starts giving legal advice when he's playing medic or vet," Ryan returned, also seeing the fiery haired reporter coming down the steps. "Hey, Kerry!" he called suddenly, winking at Ian. "You better get a girl soon or Mac may be inheriting the house with his little red-headed reporter."

Ian stared dumbfounded and saw Maggie freeze on her way to the kitchen just as Mac turned to throw a glare up at his smirking brother.

"You will hurt for that," he vowed, then saw Kerry's smile and knew it had been their brother's way of breaking up a very dangerous situation.

"Kerry, you can't possibly..." Kathleen couldn't believe this was happening.

Again nodding to the waiting car, Kerry just stared at her. "Leave and don't even step foot on this land again because I will never forget what you allowed to happen to my brother."

"I am still your grandmother, boyos," still haughty, she lifted her head into the air and tried on final bout of intimidation but felt the wall of stone increase.

"No, you aren't," Kerry's voice was sad as he was raised by a loving mother to honor family above all else, but he couldn't ignore this. "Our grandmother would not have broken us up for personal, selfish reasons and she wouldn't have sent a helpless eleven year old boy into a den of abusive sadists and known what was happening."

Silence filled the air until finally, Kathleen eyed each young man before nodding and stepping in her car, but before the driver shut her door, she looked back.

"This is a mistake, Kerry," she warned coolly. "You, your brothers are making a serious mistake by shunning me."

No one spoke as the car drove off and was well out of sight. Ryan broke the strained air. "Well, that was always fun before breakfast. What do we do for lunch?"

"I hope sit down and talk this through," Kerry sighed, running a hand through his blond hair as he turned to face his three brothers. "I was hoping to keep you out of that."

"One saint in the family is enough," Ryan waved that off, sniffing the air as scents from the kitchen wafted out to them. "Lord, Deirdre made her famous cinnamon pancakes. I have died and gone to heaven."

"No, but you might if you don't back off of Maggie," Mac shot back, following him into the house. "There is nothing between us."

Ryan sent one look over his shoulder and just smirked which made Mac want to slug him right then, but then he recalled the kiss between them and had to wonder how true that was.

"You guys go get some food," Kerry urged, looking upstairs. "I'll be in soon."

"Is this good?" Ian asked, deciding to let Ryan enter the family dining room first just in case Maggie was waiting.

Neither Mac nor Ryan had an answer so they could only shrug and hope Kerry knew how to handle this best.

Knocking softly, Kerry waited a full minute before opening the door to his brother's room. "Is he still asleep?"

Jessica Hadley had been awake for some time but had remained with Roarke to shield him as best as she could from the emotions and voices coming from outside.

Still tired and emotionally weak from the events of the prior evening, Jessica still looked pale to the Irishman and he knew that shielding his brother would have taken its toll on the girl.

"Yeah but he's starting to shift like he does usually before waking up," she yawned, turning from the window. "So is the wicked witch gone or what?"

"Gone for now but I doubt if she'll stay gone," he sighed, running a hand over the still burning candle until it went off in a puff. "Da always said his mother was an obstinate, hard-headed woman. Now I know what he meant."



“Why don’t you go change, Jessica?” Kerry suggested. “Your room is next door since I doubted you or Cam would want him to be alone this soon.”

The girl easily read the unspoken questions and was glad Kerry wasn’t asking them yet. She didn’t like leaving Roarke to wake up alone but she also knew his brother would stay for that and she did want a bath and fresh clothes before dealing with the day.

“If he wakes up too badly just yell for Cam,” she told him, hesitating at the door. “Kerry, despite things he still blames himself.”

“I know, luv,” he assured her gently, closing his eyes and trying to find a link that had been dim for fifteen years. “Mac.”

Still shooting Ryan evil looks and trying to ignore the way Maggie was acting way too sweet, Mac winced at the sudden voice as it came as a surprise.

“Lower it a little,” he urged silently, sipping tea with lemon and not letting on. “Is there trouble?”

“Not yet,” Kerry returned, pleased his brother was picking up his thoughts more easily. “Ask Deirdre to prepare Jessica’s drink, be it whatever she chooses, with something to help her regain some color and strength.”

Considering this, Mac understood. “I’ll handle it,” he assured him. “Being linked with Roarke could cause her issues.”

Kerry knew this as he watched his younger brother’s eyelids blink a few times before opening slowly to look around warily, and he could notice his unease.

“Would it do any good if I said you were safe?” Kerry asked from where he was standing.

Roarke knew he was safe but his biggest anxiety was waking up in a strange room and not knowing where his friend was. Sitting up slowly, he let his senses adjust to the bedroom before letting them focus on his oldest brother.

There was a long moment of silence as the two men just looked at each other until finally Kerry broke it. “Hello, little brother.”

Knowing this homecoming would be the hardest on Roarke out of all of them; Kerry was prepared to give him the time he

needed. "Breakfast is probably ready unless Mac and Ryan have destroyed the dining room."

Moving slowly to test his strength and any injuries, Roarke slowly shifted a look at his brother. "Where's Jess?" his tone quiet as it always was when unsure.

"She went to change clothes then probably went to breakfast." Kerry could have looked but didn't want to take too much attention off his younger brother.

He could recognize the signs of Roarke being wary by the way he moved. Kerry tried to shield his own emotions when he noticed finally that the boy would not turn his back to the room fully, which would have left him unprotected from that direction.

"Roarke..." Kerry began but wasn't sure how to address this fear or if it should be this soon.

"I thought I dreamed seeing Ry last night," his brother broke in quickly, as if sensing what was coming. "He said I hurt Jessie, you and Mac at a hospital."

Silently giving Ryan a stern thought, Kerry shook his head but slowly did take a step forward. "Mac and I were caught off-guard and mainly suffered from wounded egos."

"But she's hurt," his brother frowned, still trying to recall those events. "I...can't remember that."

"You won't," Kerry replied, carefully reaching to put a hand on his arm, but stopped when he caught the tightening body language. "Jessica will be fine and you'll see her soon."

Pushing the fears aside, Roarke finally looked at him fully. "I'll be down as soon as I've changed."

Knowing this was his brother's way of asking to be alone, Kerry nodded but paused before leaving the room. "Mac or Peter will more than likely want to look at you, and Roarke?"

"Yeah?" looking toward the door, he saw his older brother's eyes were serious.

"You really are safe here." With that, Kerry closed the door and just hoped he could keep that promise.

Roarke watched the door close and waited several seconds before closing his eyes and leaning his weight on his arms on the dresser. "I haven't been safe anywhere," he whispered to himself.

Accepting that his friends had done the only thing possible by returning to Ireland still didn't make Roarke happy, especially given recent events, yet he knew eventually he'd have to face his past and hoped his brothers could.

Looking for his bag, he quickly pulled his T-shirt off to change it for the denim-blue one he dug out of the bag; he paused when he saw the scars on his chest and wondered just how much any of them had learned while he was out.

"Damn," he muttered to himself, pulling himself back and deciding to face the music and go downstairs.

Deirdre O'Connor had been brought up in a house with twelve children and had worked in this house for many years, but as she served breakfast in the family dining room she was admitting to herself it had been some time since she'd heard this much noise.

Standing in the doorway that led to the kitchen, she just watched the goings on with a small smile.

"An actor? Are you kidding me?" Ryan was staring at Ian as if he'd grown a second head. "Why in Finn's name would you want to be an actor?" he demanded, motioning with a piece of bacon. "You have above a 4.0 grade average in all your classes but you only want to be on a bloody stage."

"I like being on a stage," Ian replied, not taking offense at his older brother's attitude as he'd heard it a lot times. "Acting, singing, it's all performing to me so I can do that until I get bored then fall back on my geography knowledge or something."

Mac buttered toast with homemade jam even as Ryan was griping. "At least he can fall back on something," he muttered then smiled. "How'd the last casino trip go, Ry?"

"I was at a disadvantage that night. Evil witches were playing with my karma," Ryan countered with a scowl then turned a smile on Maggie. "He's just jealous because he never could beat me at cards. Big brother's poker face sucks."

Maggie Cavanaugh nearly laughed at the playful banter the brothers were going through but managed to keep a straight face even as Mac was shooting his brother another look.

"Does it really? Maybe I could teach him since my poker's pretty good," she smiled back at Ryan but her real look went past him to Mac.

"And he says there's nothing there," Ryan spoke lowly to Ian who was grinning behind his glass. "Ah, now here's what a man wants to see first thing in the morning after a dreary night. Two beautiful women having breakfast with him, certainly a dream come true."

Jessica rolled her eyes at the black-haired gambler as she entered the room after taking some time to clean up and change. "You flirting this early in the day?" she asked, accustomed to Ryan Fitzgerald's casual flirting.

"It's never too early to admire a woman's beauty, lass," Ryan smiled, standing as he went over to take her hand and kiss it lightly; then, because he had known this girl for years, winked as he gave a quick pull to bring her into his arms. "You should know that."

Kerry lifted his eyes over his coffee cup to watch this scene, nodding to Mac who knew to watch for what was bound to happen next. "Ryan," he called lowly.

Laughing, Jessie smacked his shoulder as he bent her back just as Roarke stepped into the dining room.

Narrowing his eyes slightly, he shot his brother a warning look that Ryan met evenly.

"You always were late for breakfast, brat," Ryan didn't look away as he brought Jessica back to her feet to smile at her. "We'll take this up later, luv."

"Don't pick a fight this early," she warned, trying to give her friend an easy smile, but Roarke was still awkward and still glaring at his brother.

Kerry cleared his throat to break the tension as Deirdre brought Roarke a plate full of food. "Ry, I don't want blood spilled this early so cool it."

"Not my fault if two of my brothers are blind fools," Ryan sipped but winced as Maggie kicked him under the table.

The red head from Mayo knew he was teasing and guessed that Mac had enough sense to know it. But she wasn't sure how much their other brother would take and even she could see the attraction he had for the president of Hadley Industries.

“Miss Cavanaugh, I never got a chance to ask you why your newspaper was interested in my brother,” Kerry settled back in his chair to finally look at the petite redhead.

“Wondered how long it would take for this,” Mac muttered under his breath, giving his oldest brother a sour look but Maggie only laughed.

She was surprised it had taken this long since she knew how private these men were.

“My editor thought a story on Mac would be interesting since he’s so many things, not to mention he was one of the famous Fitzgerald brothers,” She smiled as Mac rolled his eyes again. “Though he really hates it when I say anything like that.”

“I hated it when your editor told you to ask me how I managed being a witch,” Mac corrected sourly. “Ry, now there’s someone you can play with.”

Seeing Ryan raise his cup cheerfully reminded Maggie of something. “Do you all believe in the rule of ‘and may it harm none’?”

“For the most part, we do,” Kerry replied after a moment’s thought, deciding to trust this woman. “It’s the basic rule we were taught when learning to use our powers that magic shouldn’t be used to harm others or for personal gain.”

“He’s looking at me, isn’t he?” Ryan snorted, noticing that Roarke was just picking at his food while Jessica sipped the juice Deirdre sat in front of her. “My luck runs hot or cold by nature. I don’t use my abilities to change it,” he eyed the reporter seriously. “As for the other, innocents are never harmed but I will defend my own against evil.”

A clattering as silverware dropped on china but Ian was quick to divert attention away from Roarke.

“How do we define evil?” he asked, being the one with probably the least experience.

“Human evil or magical evil, it’s all and the same,” Roarke spoke for the time since entering the dining room but his voice and accent were quiet.

Jessica looked at him hard for a second but gave up when he refused to look up at her. “Actually, evil’s defined on various levels,” she told Ian gently. “The one you face now is probably rated...”

“He’s an eight,” Mac and Ryan spoke at the same time then grinned.

That caused both of their younger brothers to look up but with various expressions of shock.

“There’s something worse than whatever this is?” Ian blinked at that, clearly surprised. “What?”

“Mostly our lives, this is just...” Roarke muttered but cut off, his emotions still raw even though he knew it wasn’t his younger brother’s fault.

Kerry just shifted a look down the table then stood with a look to Deirdre. “Could you bring some drinks into the living room when you get a chance?”

“Of course, though I could do it faster with Maggie’s help,” the older woman acknowledged.

Guessing this was a way to distract her, Maggie let it go since she figured this might not be a good time to be around.

“I’ll help ‘em,” Jessica started to move but a shake of Kerry’s head stopped her.

“Cam can help in the kitchen but you were in New Orleans so I need you for a moment,” he told her, also wanting to try to ease some of the tension between her and his brother.

Mac could feel the tension as well but he paused by Kerry. “He’s wired too tight,” he warned lowly.

Roarke wasn’t ready for a face-to-face about this yet and he didn’t want to bring back anything to his friend, so he didn’t like his brother including Jessica in this meeting.

However, what he really didn’t care for was the way Ryan was flirting with her. He knew how uneasy his friend could be at times and his older brother was a bit too close; which brought back other things.

“Darling, after all this drama is over, please say you’ll sail away with me to some distant land,” he was lightly running a hand down her shoulder in what appeared to be a flirtatious move but was actually gauging her injuries, both physical and emotional, for himself.

Of course, his tired and still wired brother didn’t see it like that. Ryan realized when he felt the slight zap go through the fingers of his hand. “Someone’s jealous,” he smiled, his usual

cockiness clear. "That little tingle really supposed to scare me, brat?"

"Quit teasing him, Ryan," Jessica urged, moving away from him to reach out for Roarke's hand, but something flashed and she jerked back. "Roarke, what's wrong?"

The sudden concern in her voice made Ryan turn just as his jaw exploded in pain as Roarke's closed fist hit home just as Ian walked into the room.

"Ahh, boy!" he whistled lowly, not having to use his extra senses to feel the negative energy in this room. "I don't think this is good."

The blow had surprised Ryan so he'd taken it fully but after he landed on the floor, bumping into the ivory piano, he shook his head to clear it then looked up. "Little boy, if I didn't know Kerry would yell for a bloody hour I'd remind you of why I could always beat you when we were lads," he gritted.

"I told you not to ever touch her," Roarke's tone was low and dangerous but strained, and his eyes weren't focused really as he took a step, but a hand grabbed his arm.

"Roarke, stop it," Jessica snapped, feeling his power and not understanding his reaction. "Ryan didn't mean...Roarke!"

Her friend's reactions weren't clear nor were his thoughts as he mistook her gentle hold as something else and he started to whirl and lash out and that was when Ryan moved.

"Get Kerry!" he snapped at Ian, moving between his brother and the girl before his blow could contact and they both hit the floor with Ryan doing as he had long ago in a fight with his brother and sitting on him, twisting an arm behind him. "Brat, you better knock this off and hope you didn't touch that girl."

Ian had only started out the door when Kerry and Mac came in, read the scene quickly and reacted.

"Ryan, get the hell off him," Mac ordered, but saw how pale Jessica was and Ian quickly told them what he saw.

Kerry walked over and knelt down to where Roarke was struggling. "That's enough, Roarke," he urged quietly.

Jerking under his brother, Roarke tried to free himself from the hands holding him. "Let go!" he yelled, twisting, but years of fighting had let Ryan know how to restrain his brother without hurting him. "You won't touch her! Do it to me but never..."

"Oh, no," Jessica whispered as Mac laid a hand on her shoulder, keeping her back. "They'll hurt him, Mac."

"I'm the one bleeding, lass," Ryan reminded her in a grousing tone, ducking an elbow and shoving his brother's head hard into the floor. "He doesn't have a mark. He doesn't yet at least."

Kerry reached out but hit a wall of fear, anger and shame so he resorted to means that are more basic. "Roarke Michael Quinn Fitzgerald!" he snapped in a tone perfected from breaking these two up as kids.

The sharp tone of his brother managed to slow some of Roarke's struggles, but not all of them, until finally he stopped fighting under Ryan's hold and stayed still.

"Let go," Kerry ordered when he was sure the worst was over and he laid a hand on a shaking shoulder. "He's almost back."

"Then I can hurt him?" Ryan asked as he carefully let go and backed off slightly but not far, wiping blood from his mouth. "Even as lads, if I bled then he bled."

Mac's hand tightened on Jessica's arm as Ian came in with a bag of ice and some water and towels. "You flirted too much, he flashed on something and you got it full force," he shrugged. "Before this is over we may all go through this with him, depending on what he sees. Retrograde amnesia means he's pushed a lot of the stuff that's happened to him back and they hit him in flashbacks and nightmares."

"Did he ever say if the Walshes or anyone threatened you or anything like that?" he asked, figuring that must have been what happened.

"He never talked much about it, either after it happened or now," the girl shook her head, chewing her lip as she watched Kerry continue to work on getting through to his brother. "I only know what I do from his nightmares or visions."

Ryan scowled as he took the icebag and placed it on his jaw. "So what the hell did I do?" he demanded sourly. "Jess talks to all of us including our baby-faced youngest brother, so why did I get picked to be first?"

As Mac began to gently rub his friend's shoulder to soothe her upset emotions, he considered that. "Ian's not a threat



because he's only eighteen and would be more like a little brother to Jessica," he reasoned. "You'd be more of a threat since you're only two years older and you flirt more."

"Lucky me then, I guess," Ryan muttered, shifting so he could sit down and watch the scene across from him.

Kerry was concentrating hard on his younger brother now, looking up. "Mac, come here."

"Go get some tea, luv," Mac urged Jessica, wanting the girl out of the room when he saw her mild fear. "He'll be fine, Jessica," he promised, going over to where Kerry was kneeling and already knowing what he wanted. "I can't take all this at once."

"I don't want you to," he replied, keeping a hand on Roarke's arm and feeling the trembling. "Just ease this enough that we can get him over it."

Ian crouched down so he could watch as Mac took a couple deep breaths before placing his hands gently on his younger brother. Keeping one hand on his hand and the other one on the small of his back, he was careful. "Hush, boyo," he spoke softly, his voice dropping to the soft, musical lilt it always did when he played medic.

Roarke trembled as his brother slipped in the language of their birth, speaking Irish as he spoke the spells to ease his pain and his fears, and clearing his mind of the tormenting memories.

Once he was sure that Mac had done as much as he could at this time, Kerry began talking to bring his brother back.

"C'mon back now, Roarke. Come back now," he urged, speaking Irish as they all did in certain times. "Roarke, listen to me. It's Kerry and you're safe in our house with me, Mac, Ry and Ian."

Gasping, Roarke was able to roll on his side but didn't open his eyes yet as his mind had a hard time reaching for his brother's soothing voice. "Don't hurt, please," he whispered, hand trying to grip at something but not touching anything.

"Something's blocking it," Mac felt the intrusion and swore. "Kerry."

His brother felt the same thing, reaching into his pocket to get something he'd removed from the family safe earlier. "Leave him in peace. No harm shall touch a son of this house." He

placed a silver Trinity medal in his brothers' hand and closing the fingers tight.

As soon as Kerry closed his brother's fingers around the medal, they all heard a loud noise from somewhere and everywhere, then Roarke's eyes snapped open to stare at Kerry.

*"Tog e goboge (Take it easy),"* Kerry urged, keeping his hand loose on his shoulder. "Stay still and let it level off."

Not moving right away, Roarke hated the blackouts when they came and he could tell this one had been bad just by the way his stomach was turning and his body hurt, though usually he didn't come away from these hurt physically.

"Ow," he groaned, lightly touching his head and frowned at the small bump. "I hit the ground hard or what?"

Mac sat back and snickered as Ian shook his head at Ryan who was opening his mouth to reply.

"No, actually you and Ryan hit the floor hard," Kerry replied standing and extending a hand. "Let me help you up."

Frowning, Roarke stared at the hand for a long moment then finally did reach out to accept it to allow him aid in getting up. "I'm fine," he started to say but nearly fell forward if Kerry hadn't caught him. "Fine, I'm fine. I'm just a little off balance."

This time he tensed when his brother didn't let go. "I'm alright. Let go, Kerry," he met his brother's eyes fully, "please."

"We need to talk," Kerry told him, watching his eyes to see the wariness return, "Now or later, you choose."

Sighing, Roarke closed his eyes and knowing Kerry's stubbornness knew he didn't have a choice. "Later," he muttered, looking at his brothers but frowning as he eyed Ryan. "What happened to you?"

Muttered, low curses could be heard as Ryan's eyes flashed in a way that Ian thought he'd lunge at their brother.

"Nothing, it's nothing," he finally muttered, tossing Ian the icebag. "So, we have a new plan, bro?"

Kerry nodded. "Before we talk this through there is one place all of us should go," he decided, figuring it was the only way to do the proper thing and to test some things. "Is this a good time?" Mac asked, figuring what he wanted.

"The five of us have to be united on this to beat Sebastian and by right the first thing the five of us should do is visit them,"

Kerry replied, feeling Roarke go rigid. "Roarke, do you want to come or...?"

Shaking his head, he backed away slowly. "I can't go to the cemetery yet, Kerry," he refused, nearly panicked at the thought. "There are too many issues to cope with before I can face them. I will but not yet."

"You still don't...Ow!" Ryan had started to sneer when Mac dug his fingers into his neck to silence him.

"Alright, you don't have to come," Kerry accepted that, not being too surprised but he did raise a hand to keep his brother's attention. "I would then ask you find Jessica and settle some things with her. She's scared for you, Roarke, and whatever happened this time made it worse."

Turning to stare at his brothers, he saw the way Ian was looking at the floor and Ryan's look. "What did I do?"

"Just talk to her," Kerry repeated as he moved to go to the back door with Mac and Ian following him.

Ryan hung back to consider something then finally spoke. "Roarke, wait." It was rare for him to use his brother's name so that got immediate attention. "I know you and I have issues but that's us and we'll handle that but..." he paused, hating to lose the arrogant attitude he'd always used but knowing this time he had to be serious. "She loves you, Roarke. Any blind fool could see that so I'm hoping you do 'cause that lass is willing to take a lot of risks for you."

"Loving me is a bad thing for anyone to do," Roarke replied lowly, going to turn away but tensed when his brother grabbed his arm. "Ryan..."

"That's bullshit, boyo," Ryan snapped, using his anger to keep the tone to his voice when every part of him wanted to soothe this scared boy.

He had always known that he and Roarke would fight the most but that was fine with Ryan so long as no one else hurt his brother.

"You talk to the girl, then talk with Kerry, because what you believe is wrong with you is dead wrong," he snapped, whirling on a heel to storm out but paused to look back. "Tell her, brat."

Maggie had been helping Deirdre in the kitchen when Kerry and the others entered and she immediately caught the strain.

"We'll take the drinks in the living room in awhile," Kerry spoke to the housekeeper as he reached into a closet for a red and black linen cloak.

Deirdre had been turning with a large roast in a pan when she saw this and would have dropped the pan if Ian hadn't been close to catch it. "I spoke with several locals and they'd like to pay their respects to the Lords of Fitzgaren."

"Fitzgaren has an actual Lord?" Maggie blinked at that. "I thought that went out years ago."

Mac grinned. "The title is symbolic but many of the townsfolk still hold by it and offer little respectful tributes."

"It also helps when the Lord of Fitzgaren has always been a powerful witch who can make rain when he gets ticked," Ryan added, coming into the kitchen.

Deirdre sat the pan in the oven and wiped her hands on an apron as she looked at her helper in the kitchen. "Kerry inherited the title after his parents, Lord Toryn and Lady Brenna, passed. Though all five share the actual role of Lords of Fitzgaren."

Maggie turned to stare at Mac. "You didn't tell me that," she hissed, annoyed by his grin. "You didn't ask me, luv," he returned, sighing. "Let's do this before I change my mind."

As the four left by the back door, Maggie looked at the housekeeper. "Where are they going?"

"To the Fitzgerald family cemetery to pay their respects, but without young Roarke, I don't think it'll do what Kerry wants it to." This left both women to wonder just where Roarke Fitzgerald was if not with his brothers.

## CHAPTER SIX

“Nick, tell me there’s something you can do to speed this along so my life gets back to normal,” Cameron Young was sitting on his bike on the side of the manor talking to what was clearly an astral form of a light haired young man.

Nick O’Malley was one of Hadley Industries’ resident mystics and right then he was calming down an upset mercenary. “You’re dealing with things written centuries ago, Cam. Sean and I can’t speed that up.”

“Thank you very much,” Cam muttered, scowling as he looked up. “I really should shoot you.”

Chuckling as he got closer, Roarke spread his arms. “I asked you to do that a long time ago, mate,” he reminded his friend/part-time leader.

“Shut up,” Cam growled, motioning Nick to go away so he could focus on Roarke. “So, you want to tell me what the hell happened a little while ago?”

“I had a blackout, I’m guessing, ‘cause I don’t remember anything,” Roarke sighed, letting his fingers run through his long hair before reaching into his pocket for a cigarette; a sure sign that told Cam that his friend was too wired. “What she say?”

Cam knew that was an obvious set up so he stepped back from it. “She’s in the stables with the horses in case you’re interested,” he announced, pulling his jacket collar up to ward off the chill. “I’ll be inside and finding my team.”

Roarke scowled at his back, took two more puffs before tossing it away and heading for the stable.

He could recall his father building this new stable when he’d been a boy and how he and his brothers had loved playing in it or watching the horses. Stepping in, the smell took him back and he just stood there for several minutes taking it in before the soft sound caught his attention.

Listening, he recognized the old Irish lullaby in his native language as one his mother had sung to them as babies. Following the sound, Roarke found Jessica singing softly as she gently brushed the nose of a beautiful black stallion with a full flowing white mane.

He stood back to watch his friend and thought on his brother's words. Even as children, Jessica had been his best friend. The one he could tell anything to and not be afraid. Lord knows he knew she had saved his life, even at times when he wanted die, and together they had been through bad times and he feared the times to come would be worse.

Watching her with the horse, Roarke began to look carefully so she would not sense him yet. He could read her physical weakness, how tired she still was but he also caught how uneven she was emotionally. Being tired himself and weak, he couldn't see the physical injuries without being closer.

Jessica sang softly to the horse as she brushed its silky coat, needing anything to keep her mind off recent events. She knew she needed to keep it together for Roarke's sake so she couldn't break down in front of him or appear afraid even though she often was scared with his blackouts and especially with how he'd been lately.

"You're a pretty boy, aren't you?" she spoke to the horse as she went to put the brush aside to scratch its ears, but winced as her ribs and the slight burns the hospital attack caused pulled unexpectedly and she nearly faltered until strong hands encircled her waist.

"Just like most Irish males, all that attention will spoil him for life," Roarke spoke in her ear as he caught her from falling, not letting on when he felt her tense as he did so often.

Startled at her friend's voice, Jessica turned on instinct and found herself encircled by his arms. "Roarke, how long have you been out here?" she asked, thoughts scattered at his sudden appearance and fighting to shield as much as she could as fast as she could.

His smoky gray-blue eyes were calm as they looked down since he was several inches taller than his friend was, and saw what she couldn't hide. "When was the last time I told you that you sing wonderfully, *a gra*?" he countered her question, feeling her shake as he eased her toward a hay bale to sit on.

"Did Mac or Peter say you could be out here?" Jessica ignored his question, frowning as he sat her down but didn't step away as he normally did.

“Kerry said we needed to talk,” Roarke replied, lightly running a finger down her cheek and instinctively moved her hair aside and saw the marks on her neck. “Want to pick the topic or should I?”

Jessica shook her head, figuring why Kerry would need them to talk, and more confident that she could get him on a topic that was safe. “No, it’s fine. All we need to do is...” she had started to push up when his hands moved to ease her back. “What?”

“Tell me how you got these?” he touched her throat and saw her eyes go wary. “New Orleans, I can guess, so skip the bloody easy remark and tell me how and who. Did I do it?”

“No!” she seemed shocked at the idea but avoided his eyes, which could be too intense at times. “Roarke, I expect to get hurt when I deal with evil power. It’s nothing.”

Doubting that, he let it go for then, moving to sit next to her and knew she was struggling to hide things. “What did I do at the hospital?” he asked, cutting her off when she went to shrug. “Ryan says I hurt you and Kerry won’t say which means I did something, so what?”

Knowing her friend didn’t need this right then, Jessica tried to get him off the subject. “Roarke, it’s fine. I’m fine. Let’s go inside and...Roarke?”

This time he heard the mild fear when he held her arm still and hated that he could cause her that fear when he had sworn he would never hurt anyone he loved...he swallowed suddenly at the thought and finally sighed. “I hate when he’s right,” he muttered, letting go of her so he could scrub both hands over his face.

“You hate when who’s right?” Jessica asked, concerned he would slip under again.

“Ryan,” Roarke answered sourly. “I hate when Ryan’s right about anything because he never lets me live it down.”

Jessica knew this and hesitantly touched his arm. “I figured that out when you punched him earlier.”

“Is that how his face got to be bleeding?” he lifted a brow at that and wondered what had caused it then figured he knew. “He was flirting with you, wasn’t he?”

“Ryan was being Ryan and didn’t mean anything,” she swiftly sought to explain, needing him off this subject.

Roarke felt her fear building, which caused him to turn to look and saw her shields had dropped a good deal, and he could see the paleness, the weakness and... he could sense the injuries.

“I haven’t been the best friend to you lately, Jess,” he spoke slowly, watching her closely but he stepped away, needing the space.

“You’ve been through too much, luv,” the girl smiled, wanting to reassure him but not knowing how. “It’ll all be fine.”

Not knowing who she was reassuring more, he smiled for the first time in days. “Promise me if I ever hurt you in any way you’ll let Ryan burn me.”

Seeing her eyes shoot to his told Roarke what he wanted to know, but as he started to turn away her hand shot to his arm without thinking.

“Roarke, I know you’d never hurt me intentionally,” she quickly spoke but as he stopped, she wondered silently.

Looking over his shoulder, he could read the fear and concern and made a choice. “From New Orleans to today, show me what’s happened.”

Knowing that was a bad plan, Jessica tried to refuse but his hands were on her shoulders gently, his eyes plaintive.

“Show me, *a gra* (my love),” he murmured, feeling her hesitance, but his power was slightly stronger as he looked past her shields. He then saw the attack in New Orleans with the shadow creature, the airport attack, to his possession at the hospital in Killarney where the demon who took over his form attacked the girl and his brothers to everything else.

Only Roarke’s speed kept his friend from collapsing to the ground as the images died away and she went limp in his arms.

“No, stay with me, luv,” he spoke firmly as he eased her back on the bale of hay and quickly took his jacket off so he could ease her head back on it. “Jessie?”

Briefly considering calling for Mac, Roarke sighed and took a leap that he prayed didn’t doom them both.

Knowing it was just the stress of reliving everything and using the energy that she didn’t have yet that caused her to collapse, he knew how to help that; at least he hoped he did.



Gently rubbing her cold hands between his, Roarke waited a minute before pressing his lips to her forehead and closing his eyes. “Rest, *muirnin* (sweetheart),” he murmured softly, easing his friend into his arms fully and waiting again until he could hear her soft heartbeat in his mind. “Take what you need from me,” he whispered. “Take my strength, my warmth.”

The horses in their stalls stirred to Roarke’s gentle voice as he closed his eyes and sang softly the songs his parents had taught him.

He was unaware of the soft glowing light in the barn as he held his friend against him, knowing that both Mac and Kerry would yell about this since he wasn’t at full or even partial strength yet to do this.

A light touch on his face caused him to look down into tired blue eyes as Jessica rubbed her eyes before settling on him. “None of it was your fault,” she told him, shivering suddenly.

“You can’t always be my savior, Jess,” Roarke was careful when he said this so she wouldn’t misunderstand. “There comes a time when I have to protect us both.”

“I’ve always been there for you, Roarke,” she argued, starting to draw tighter to herself. “I haven’t been too good at protecting you this time but I will from now on if...”

Frowning, it took a second for him to realize what she was saying. “No, *a gra*. That’s not what I meant,” he broke in, gently laying a finger on her lips.

“Jess, for as long as we’ve known each other most of the time you’ve been the one riding to my rescue,” Roarke tried to explain but knew he was messing up. “I have to fight this battle alone but...” Gently lifting her face up to him, he went on softly. “You will always be there with me and for me as I will be for you.”

Pausing to take a shaky breath, he let his fingers touch her face in the way he always had, feeling the silkiness of that skin. “You’ve been more of a friend than I deserved.”

“Best friends, luv,” she replied softly, knowing he didn’t like to be touched or get too close at times so she went to move and was surprised when his arms tightened just slightly. “Roarke?”

"I swore a bloody long time ago that I wouldn't ever doom anyone else 'cause of what happened to me as a lad to everything else, I believed what they said," his voice was soft but he held her eyes and gently brought one hand up to kiss it. "I was afraid to doom anyone by letting them love me or loving anyone."

Jessica's eyes narrowed as they did when he talked like that, still mad about his childhood, but this time she tried to stay calm. "Your brothers love you, Roarke. Even Ryan, though he is a huge pain in the ass at times. It's safe for you to love them."

"Yeah, gotta agree about Ry though we won't tell him," Roarke chuckled, and then his eyes turned serious. "I do love my brothers, Jessica but there's something else," he said a quick Irish prayer to him self then went on. "I love you, Jess."

The girl stared at him for a long time, not sure if she had heard that right. "Roarke, you don't have to say anything you don't mean or..."

The words that she was fighting to get out past a hammering heart were cut off with a gentle kiss.

This wasn't the first time he'd kissed her, as they'd been friends for years, but this kiss he felt the change in it, the deepness, and the desire that flamed as he deepened it only when he felt her not resist as he feared she might.

"*Ta me chomh mor sin I ngra leat* (I love you so much)," he whispered against her lips upon breaking the kiss. "Been in love since we were probably sixteen, luv, but I was scared if I told you then something bad would happen," he coughed in the silence. "You could say something, Jess."

"I've loved you since you were eight, you dumb bloody moron," Jessica finally replied, meeting his eyes with a shy smile. "Why do you think Ryan enjoys flirting with me? Because he knows it would annoy you to no end."

He stared at her then let his fingers touch her face. "I'm scared, luv. If I lose you or them..."

"You aren't alone this time, Roarke," Jessica replied softly, easing closer as the fall chill closed in. "Open up to your brothers and it'll be alright."

Knowing what she meant by this, he sighed. "I'll try." Seeing her shiver again, he reached for his jacket to wrap around her. "Let me take you back to the house, luv. You're too cold."

Jessica didn't want to go in yet as she knew her friend still had issues to resolve, but was still too tired to fight so she nodded, unaware when he lifted her in his arms to carry her back.

"Can I say I love you?" she asked sleepily, resting her head on his shoulder.

Feeling some of the tension in his chest leave him, Roarke lightly kissed her on the forehead. "Yes, Jess. You can say that you love me and I do love you," he murmured, stepping onto the path that would go back to the house, and was talking softly so his friend would fall to sleep fully when he caught the first sense of evil nearby.

Slowing his steps, he looked around slowly, but knowing this land had always been safe from evil began to think he was just imagining things until he heard the first growl.

"Roarke? Something's wrong," Jessica yawned, blinking as something buzzed in her head.

Easing her to the ground but behind him, Roarke gently nudged the British girl. "Go to the house," he ordered quietly, looking with his powers even as the massive black coated thing stepped onto the path between them and the house.

It looked like a huge dog but its body was three times the size with black matted hair, glowing red eyes and snarling teeth that was growling dangerously.

"No," Roarke breathed, eyes narrowing as he saw the creature and feeling his heart nearly stop as he recalled the last time he had seen something like this.

He had been eleven years old on Skelling Michael Island after spending a near perfect day with his parents, they had been waiting on Kerry to come with the boat when the creature attacked.

One of the few things he could remember about that event was his father telling his mother and him to run and though he knew it tore at her to do so, Brenna Fitzgerald had run with her son but only so far as to get him to the steps leading to the beach.

"Run to the beach and stay safe, my little boy," she told him urgently, lightly ruffling his hair. "Your Da and I love you, Roarke, but this is what must happen. Tell Kerry to protect you and your brothers and never doubt that you will always be safe."

With that, she had gone back to help his father and though he had followed, to this day Roarke still blocked what he had seen.

Seeing this beast today was bringing it back but feeling Jessica's fingers on his arm snapped him back to the present.

"Run," he told her, knowing she could go through the stable and take the long way to the house. "Go find my brothers or the Mavericks."

"I can't leave you to fight this thing alone," Jessica argued, feeling his fear but also feeling his determination. "Roarke, no. I can't..."

Seeing the beast hunch its back, Roarke grabbed Jessica's arm and pushed her back toward the stable. "Go, Jessica!" he snapped, his fear making his voice hard.

Hesitating a second, she finally nodded and began backing away when another growl had her whirling just in time to scream.

Spinning at his friend's voice, Roarke saw the second beast jump from the shadows at the girl and it was his panic and fear for her safety that had him doing something he hadn't done in more years than he wanted to remember.

Lashing out with a wave of wind to deflect the beast jumping for Jessica, he diverted a portion of his power to search for his brothers and hoped after years apart, one of them picked his call for help up even as the first demon was jumping on his back.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

The Fitzgerald Family cemetery was set away from the main house and fields, but was connected with an ancient cobblestone path and lined with rosebushes.

The black gate had an oval trellis that, depending on the season, always had some type of climbing flower growing on it.

Passing the gate there was another feel that you encountered as you stepped on ground that had been a family burial ground since the first Fitzgerald were laid to rest.

There had always seemed to be a strange peace to this part of the manor grounds, and as the four brothers went down a path maintained by the manor gardeners, there was silence until they got to a large double highly polished black marble stone.

Surrounded by the prize winning white roses, the stone read in engraved letters 'Beloved Husband, Adored Wife and Loving Parents; Toryn Fitzgerald and Brenna Kerrigan Fitzgerald.'

Kerry stared at the stone of his parents and felt the wind blow warm over him as he picked a single white rose to lie in front of his mother's name.

This would be the first time, he knew, that any of the others had been back to this site in fifteen years, so he remained silent.

It was Ian who spoke first, in a low hushed tone. "I can't remember them that much."

"You were three when they died, lad," Mac replied, letting a hand rest on the youngest boy's shoulder when he both heard and felt the pain in his voice. "That's to be expected."

Bending down to pick a rose and then toy with it absently, Ryan tried to keep his untouched attitude but it was hard.

"Mum was beautiful and looked like you," he finally spoke, looking over his shoulder. "She could sing like an angel or yell like the devil if her temper was up. You have her face and hands and you, Mac and Kerry, all got your blond hair from her."

"They loved each other very much but they weren't perfect," Kerry placed a hand on the stone and was surprised to feel the vibration. "No couple ever is. They had fights, and

raising five sons who were in the spotlight like we were wasn't easy, but they made it seem like it and never complained."

Mac looked up as something pulled him but he brought his attention back to Kerry. "The fights got worse toward the end though."

"Mum knew how she was looked at from our grandmother and Kathleen and Da was fighting a lot in those months," Kerry agreed, wishing he had seen it more then. "I think that Mum knew the threat Da's Mum was to her children, which was why they were discussing her taking Roarke and Ian up to Clare that summer to see her folk."

"But it never happened," Ryan frowned, wincing as pain shot through his head for no reason. "They died two weeks later."

Ian looked between them as he felt his claddagh medal getting warmer under his shirt. "What did happen to them, Kerry?" he asked.

Knowing this was the heart of it, Kerry accepted his brothers needed to know the truth of that time. "We'll go back to the house and discuss..." he drew off as something from the corner of his eye made him look toward the small gazebo he'd had built in honor of his mother.

Staring hard as he thought he heard the swing in the gazebo squeak as it blew, he blinked at the form he saw.

Always a petite, frail-looking woman with slender hands and arms, Brenna Fitzgerald had a sweet side. However, she could handle her unruly sons easily as well, and had been perfect in Kerry's eyes.

Now he watched as his mother sat on the swing, dressed in a soft lilac dress that she had adored with her long blond hair hanging loose down her back, she smiled at her eldest son.

"You did your best to protect them, my darling boy," her words were in his head, as he looked deep to be sure if this was real or another trick. "Don't doubt that your father and I know how you tried but now is the time to bring back what she helped to tear apart."

Brenna lifted a hand as he had seen her do so often to brush a cheek or stroke a flower but now it was like a stirring of the air. "Kerry, you were always the strong one. The one Toryn and I

never worried about, and I know you will carry on and defeat this evil when it's your time.

"Mac, you were always my little mediator who tried to help maintain the peace as much as you caused your own fights," her eyes shifted to her second born with a smile. "Your place has never been questioned but you must learn to accept help and know that others will help carry this burden if only you let her.

"Ryan, now you my lad were a mother's stroke waiting to happen," her soft laugh was musical but it was only now that her sons were starting to focus on what their brother was seeing. "You have your Da's temper as well as his looks, but both of our stubborn streaks. Your temper will serve you well with the dangers ahead, but you need to let go of your pain and start to forgive. Forgive yourself and your brother.

"Ian. My sweet little boy, you were our last, and I feared for you the least as you have so much potential and strength of will. All of that will be needed to help your brothers through this."

Brenna's eyes went back to Kerry and he read the sadness. "I can't reach your brother since Roarke still carries so much pain, guilt and shame inside him for what happened, Kerry. He needs to let it go and heal. The lass can help so much but he needs you and brothers."

"I know, Mum," he sighed, frowning when he saw her eyes flash and he felt the pain in his head as he had once before.

"No, Roarke needs you now," Brenna's tone was firm as she began to fade. "Focus, my sons. Focus past the walls she put up to block you from one another."

As the vision seemed to fade, Ryan blinked a few times. "That real?" he asked in a strained tone, refusing to show how much that had hurt since he hadn't actually pictured his mother in some time.

"I heard her in my head," Ian whispered, wincing as he felt the pain build and heard something.

"I think we all did," Mac sighed then blinked as he heard something else. "Kerry?"

Kerry had heard the voice and felt the building terror. "It's Roarke," he turned quickly. "Something's wrong. He's afraid."

“There are some really big dogs near the stables,” Ian could see that by just focusing slightly, then pulled back as the power jumped at him. “He and Jessica are in trouble. What are they?”

Looking for himself as he was now picking up the frantic call more easily, Kerry felt his blood running cold. “They’re demon dogs of the Abyss. They’re Sebastian’s pets. They’re what attacked him on the island.”

“Shit!” Ryan hissed, stepping away from them. “I thought this place was protected.”

“It’s always been,” Kerry was quiet as he thought how this happened. “He’s not strong enough to face this alone, much less against two of them.”

Ryan cursed soundly, whirling as he jerked off his jacket to allow him access to better movement. “Get to the stables!” he snapped, making an instant choice. “I’ll meet you there.”

“How do you...” Mac started to ask when his brother waved a hand and cast a spell only he and Kerry could do easily. “I hate when he teleports,” he muttered, breaking into a run.



## CHAPTER EIGHT

Seeing the jumping beast from the corner of his eye, Roarke Fitzgerald waited until the last possible second to twist out of the way, but still felt the hot snarl pass him.

“Jessica!” he had used the biggest portion of his remaining power to deflect the second beast who had been about to attack his friend.

The wind had deflected it but she had still fallen under a brief contact and had yet to move.

Chancing a quick look, he could tell she was breathing but bleeding from where her head had struck the path.

“Shit!” Roarke swore to himself, figuring he could handle one of these things if he kept his head and didn’t panic but knew he didn’t have the power to handle two and protect himself along with Jessica.

Making the only choice that he could, Roarke quickly diverted his most strength to shield his friend from any attacks since he knew that even one of the things could tear her apart within seconds.

“It’s me you want, you bloody demons!” he snapped, speaking directly to the large beasts. “You wanted me fifteen years ago. Well here I am, so take me!”

Throwing a hand out, blue energy shot from his fingers to strike both creatures but at his current levels, it was more of a taunt to get them to face him than to actually hurt them.

The first beast, the large of the two, seemed to snarl as it began to circle but the smaller one was still eyeing Jessica Hadley’s prone form.

“Leave her be, damn it.” Roarke shifted to watch the first beast but saw the other was preparing to launch itself at the girl. “No!” he started to focus all his strength when the growls close by made him look, and for an instant, he was eleven years old again.

Knowing its companion creature had the boy's attention, the largest one had circled around until it found the perfect spot, then took its shot.

Jumping with a lunge and snarl, its massive teeth snapping, it jumped at Roarke, who only had a split second to act.

Whirling to barely avoid getting those jaws in the neck, Roarke still felt the sharp burning pain as teeth tore into his shoulder and back. Both he and the creature rolled to the ground with him bearing the full weight as his arms struggled to keep the beast from ripping his throat out.

He could feel the claws digging into his arms and chest as he fought to shove it off him even as his mind, assaulted with images of his past of his parents dying, and then seeing the second beast nearing closer to his friend.

Sudden burning pain was too intense to prevent the scream as long claws dug deep into soft flesh as his shield around the girl faltered with his own dwindling strength.

"Leave...her...be," he gritted, feeling his arms started to lose strength as those snapping jaws were close to his face, but he didn't fear his own death, but that of failing to protect his friend.

Feeling the beast finally escape his grasp and knowing this was it, Roarke's last thought was of Jessica and his brothers when suddenly the beast jerked and screamed as if in agony and then the weight was off the young Irishman.

Gasping as air was finally able to get back into his straining lungs, Roarke barely saw the bright blue energy that struck the beast as it went to lunge at him again.

"Get the hell away from him, bastard," Ryan's voice had no accent, just anger and power.

Teleporting was something he only did on rare occasions since it could leave him too weak, but knowing the risk to his brother was greater than the one to him, he used the spell in order to get to the scene more quickly.

Arriving, he had taken in the scene quickly and judged which threat was greater.

Jessica was unconscious and bleeding slightly and being stalked by a smaller creature, but he could tell that his brothers would be there in seconds to deal with that.

Ryan's eyes went to pure black as his anger took over upon seeing the large beast on top of his younger brother and feeling what he did.

Reacting on that anger, he grabbed the beast both with a wave of energy and with his hands and pulled it back and away. Lashing out with blue energy, it started to lunge again.

"I said, get the hell away from my brother." He looked at the beast and felt the evil coming from it. "You couldn't have him then and you won't have him now."

The beast seemed to be looking at Ryan curiously, then it raised its head and with a howl, launched itself right at him.

"Stupid," Ryan sneered, letting his powers flow and meet the beast fully and as it rolled back in screeching yelps, it slowly began to dissolve into a thick black slime on the spot where it landed. "Yeah, the gardener won't bloody well care for that."

Another growl had him turning to deal with the remaining creature, but a sharp bolt of red flame struck it as it was going to attack the helpless girl.

"It's about damn time," Ryan muttered then whirled to check on his brother. "Damn it."

A quick look didn't make Ryan very happy as he gently laid a hand on Roarke's pale face.

He didn't study well but had listened to his father's stories of the ancient creatures and demons, so he knew for good and well what a serious wound from one of those creatures could do.

"Damn it, brat, open your eyes!" he snapped, not liking the shallow breathing or paleness of his brother and seriously not liking when he moved him a little and saw the torn shirt and skin on his back and shoulder where both claws and teeth had struck. "Roarke? Look at me."

Seeing the blood and marks, Ryan swore bitterly and was about to see where Mac was when his brother's body suddenly convulsed a few times before struggling to sit up.

"Whoa there, bucko, you ain't going anywhere yet." Ryan easily restrained his brother but sensed his fear and agony. "Brat, lie still until Mac or Kerry gets over here," he urged.

Roarke's mind and body were fighting the agony he was in from the wounds he'd gotten, but his biggest concern wasn't

himself. “No.” he struggled to move but found that even that tiny effort made it worse. “Jessica... Ry, she...”

Not wanting to move him anymore than was needed, Ryan kept his touch light as he moved enough that Roarke could see. “Ian and Mac are handling Fido, brat,” he replied easily, needing to keep his tone even because he didn’t want his brother to see how worried he was getting. “Mac, quit playing with the puppy and c’mere.”

“Puppy my ass,” Mac muttered under his breath, cursing soundly that he’d gotten out of actively practicing his more strenuous powers.

Upon arriving, Mac’s experience kept him from hesitating, but it was easy to see which one needed their attention.

Shooting red flame, Mac’s attack had just diverted the thing’s attention from Jessica so Ian could get into a better place to defend the girl while his older brother handled the now snarling beast.

“Where’d Kerry go?” he asked after kneeling next to Jessica and checking for wounds, seeing her head bleeding from striking cobblestone, and the one bite on her arm that was bleeding black.

“He said to get something,” Mac tossed back, leaning away as the creature lunged for him. “Ryan, keep him from going into shock!” he yelled over, feeling his brother’s wounds from there.

Ryan rolled his eyes. “Too late for that I’m afraid, brother,” he muttered, sitting next to his trembling brother who was still trying to get to his friend. “Ian’s with her, brat. Stay still,” he urged, frowning as Roarke went still.

“Ah, bloody hell,” Mac hissed, feeling Roarke’s pain to Ryan’s growing unease.

This distraction had allowed the creature to shift quickly and snap at his leg but before it connected, light reflected off metal as a sword stabbed through the creature’s head.

“Be gone, foul demon of the netherworld.” Kerry twisted the sword that had been his father’s into the beast’s head as it let out a long howl before dissolving into another pile of black slime.

Mac blinked at the sword, which he had never seen used, then hurried to where Ryan was sitting, his fingers unknowingly going through their younger brother’s hair in a calming motion.

"It got him on the back and shoulder and looks like his arms have been clawed pretty badly." Ryan didn't look up as Mac knelt down. "How's Jess?"

"Minor bite, but anything with these things is bad," Mac frowned deeply as he first looked at the scratches on Roarke's arms.

These he wasn't too concerned with; it was when he gently rolled the boy toward him that his concern tripled. The gashes or bites on his shoulders and back were deep and nasty looking.

"Roarke, are you with us?" Mac spoke gently, lightly touching his brother and feeling the fever.

"Will he be alright?" Ryan asked, honestly surprised that it mattered to him this much. "Mac?"

His brother was silent for a long time. "I don't know," he admitted slowly, looking up as Kerry came closer. "We need to get him back to the house, and hope I can counter this."

Kerry nodded, looking to see that Ian had picked Jessica up already. "How fast can you run?" he asked, recalling something he'd seen in a letter from Ian's foster family.

"According to the coach, I was the fastest sprinter in high school," the boy replied, catching on as he eased Jessica off into Kerry's arms. "Who do I tell what?"

"Find Deirdre, tell her to prepare Roarke's room with the fireplace, plenty of water and clean towels and our father's satchel," he explained, thinking. "Tell Cam to find Peter 'cause Jessica's hurt, but either he or their mystic should be able to help her."

Nodding, Ian took off quickly for the house to do as his eldest brother instructed.

"Can we move him?" Kerry asked, not liking the look of the wounds or the lingering black slime on his lawn.

"We don't have a choice," Mac returned, standing to reach down for his brother and frowned as an arm blocked his hand. "Ryan."

Ryan feared moving his brother would cause him more pain but knew Mac was right. "I have him," he spoke evenly, not seeming to have any trouble lifting his younger brother. "Let's go."

Kerry hesitated before following as he looked at the blackened lawn, waving a hand and dispelling the leftover darkness; fearing the reasons his land could have been breached and hoping he could make it right again.

“Calm down, boyo. Take a breath,” Maggie was trying to slow Ian down as he rapidly sought to explain what had happened. “Sit down and... bloody hell!”

The petite redhead whirled as the back door slammed open, bombarded with both emotion and sounds as Cameron Young quickly took his employer from Kerry.

“Ryan, don’t snap at anyone,” Mac was rolling his eyes as he followed his brother. It was good that he was close because both brothers nearly went down when Roarke suddenly began convulsing again.

Grabbing quickly before Ryan lost his grip, Mac knew this was going south fast. “No time for his room. Lay him on the floor in the office,” he ordered, seeing Maggie’s concern. “He’s bad.”

“What do ye need?” she asked, knowing that Deirdre was preparing in the wrong room.

“Get the water and towels from Deirdre and have her tell Ian where she put the satchel our father used,” Mac replied, frowning as Kerry entered. “Those things should not have been able to cross the border.”

Kerry understood that but before he could say what he suspected, they were all interrupted a low vibration.

“Was that an earthquake?” Maggie blinked feeling Mac’s hand on her arm.

“No, that’s Roarke’s powers,” Kerry murmured even as Ryan shouted for them.

Mac had picked the office for this since it had the most floor space, and he was hoping it still had some energy left from his father.

Right then as Maggie and Ian went to get the various things required, and Mac and Kerry entered the room, it wasn’t clear if they weren’t already too late.

“I swear, if he makes me bleed one more time this week alone, I’m hurting the brat,” Ryan was scowling as he fought to

keep his injured brother from doing himself more damage as his body convulsed.

“Get his damn shirt off,” Mac ordered, having no time to set up, as he would have liked. “Whatever infection these wounds have caused is killing him, just like Sebastian wanted.”

Kerry was moving to open the windows that surrounded the room to give them fresh air. “I’m not sure Sebastian sent them this time,” he sighed, turning when he heard the awful sound of his brother trying to breathe and be sick at the same time.

“I’ll ask when I can afford to split my attention,” Mac scowled even as he was literally moving Ryan aside. “I can’t cope with him and your temper. So check it or leave.”

This order came as Ryan began swearing in their native language after removing their brother’s torn, bloody t-shirt and for the first time saw fully the massive amount of scars and other injuries he had gathered since childhood on his back, chest and arms.

Mac’s hands shook despite his best efforts to keep them still as Maggie came in with towels and a bowl of water while Ian had a worn leather satchel.

“Kerry, talk to him and see what’s in the bag,” he instructed, feeling the depths of the pain his brother was feeling. “Ry, getta grip and light the fireplace because we need heat. Ian, I need you to help Ryan hold him still because this will hurt.”

Maggie laid the towels down but didn’t move away from Mac as she knelt beside him, a feeling in her heart telling her to stay.

“Will this hurt you?” she asked, seeing him frown but understanding that he’d do this anyway even if it did hurt him.

As the pain increased, Roarke’s powers were trying to protect him and the threats his fevered mind perceived, but he was too weak to do anything but cause the low vibrations that were often an aftereffect of his abilities.

“Sshh, quiet” Maggie shushed gently, knowing she should leave, but the voice in her thoughts was still speaking.

Kerry knelt by Roarke’s head, careful to keep his hand on the top of his head while he spoke quietly to him.

“Just remind me to hurt someone when this is over,” Ryan complained, doing one thing before doing what Mac told him to,

and that was to light candles around the room in a certain pattern. "Alright, brat, listen up. I got more to do than deal with you, so let's heal you up and get things moving."

Maggie wondered if he was really so hard core that this wasn't bothering him, but then she watched him kneel down to hold onto their brother and saw his fingers brush his face gently.

"Hold onto him and watch his powers," Mac warned, hoping he could do this.

Taking a deep breath to cleanse his thoughts and center himself, Mac opened the channel of his powers, but this time centered them on healing his little brother.

Kerry knew the danger this posed to all of them but focused his powers on soothing his brother's pain so he'd be calm through the worst of this. "Rest, Roarke," he spoke mentally but felt the pain and fear grow.

Laying on his stomach on the floor so Mac had full access to the worst of the wounds, Roarke twisted in pain and fear but strong hands held him still as Mac's gentle hands touched the wounds and things sparkled.

Mac Fitzgerald felt the nauseous feeling of just touching these wounds but fought to push that down. "With the power I was granted, I ask those who have gone before to guide me to heal what were stricken," he spoke lowly in his Irish; his eyes going dark to full smoke as his powers built and a soft glow began forming under his hands.

Roarke groaned in the pain as the healing spell slowly worked on the now festering wounds. "No... don't hurt..." his voice strained as he moaned.

"Yuck," Ian muttered after looking to see his brother's wounds but tightened his grip to keep his hold. "It's almost over, Roarke," he promised, using the tone he'd heard Sybil use when soothing him as a child.

Ryan wasn't so sure of that when he saw how Mac was struggling to contain the now boiling injuries, and their brother was getting paler.

Increasing his hold slightly since he didn't want to hurt his brother more, Ryan placed his other hand over Mac's, meeting his eyes silently.



“He needs you all,” Maggie was quiet as she gripped Mac’s arm, finally understanding. “Your strength, the strength of the Five, has always been in your unity.”

“That was broken when we were broke up,” Ian saw her point, shifting his position so he could free one hand and lay it on his brother’s, feeling the warmth.

Kerry watched this, pleased that his brothers were realizing this as he reached into his father’s worn leather satchel.

He had seen his father use various herbs and other things in this bag to help others when sick or when he needed to cast a spell. Right then he was hoping it would have something to use to help heal his brother.

Reaching in, he felt for a second, then his fingers touched a small round tin, which he brought out. The salve can looked old but something told him it was vital as he opened it, took some on his fingers and rubbed it on a large oozing bite on Roarke’s shoulder.

The black haired Irishman’s body bucked violently as the salve seemed to hiss on his wound, but once they got him calmed again, the wound wasn’t oozing again. In fact, it seemed to be closing.

“Hold him,” Mac snapped voice tight as he strained to heal. “Kerry, whatever that is, use it on the rest of them then we can finish healing.”

Maggie held a hand out for the tin, knowing it would take all four of them to control their brother and do the final healing.

Ignoring the awful smell, she began laying the salve on the bite marks and claw marks on his shoulders, back and arms where she could reach, watching as the boiling wounds began to heal with hissing pain.

“C’mon, brat, it’s fine.” Ryan ignored the pain he felt and struggled to keep his brother still.

Kerry caught Mac’s eyes and understood as he placed a hand over Ian’s. “We are of the Five, born into the power from the power of generations long gone,” he recited the words easily.

“We seek to protect one of our own as he was protected years gone by, by those who sought to protect us.” Mac’s eyes flashed as his hands spread the warm glow over his brother’s back, allowing it to spread over him.

“As is our right from birth and blood, we use the gifts given to us to heal and protect this boy from injuries suffered from evil born of darkness.” Ryan felt the breeze coming in the window pick up and the power connecting them increase.

This was new for Ian but as he paused to think of what he was supposed to say, the words seemed to come to him. “Heal our brother so the Five can be formed as we protect what is ours now and what will be,” he quoted, eyes changing as the power grew.

Maggie had seen magic in use since she’d been a child but nothing prepared her for this sight as she kept silent, watching as the candlelight around the room grew into a wall of blue flame.

“Blessed be.” With the closing quote to end the spell, the blue flames busted into pure white light, Roarke’s final cry of anguish stopped and he went limp from exhaustion and exertion.

Mac felt Maggie’s gentle hands on him when he let himself fall backwards as the winds and light dimmed. “It’s like I said once before, Doc. You do show a girl a good time,” she whispered in his ear, resting her head on his shoulder.

Kerry was gentle as he ran a hand over his brother’s back, pleased to see there were only slight marks from these wounds, but not liking that none of the other scars had faded even a little.

“Some of those should have been taken away,” Ryan muttered, eyes slitting. “Why weren’t they?”

“Possible they can’t be until he deals with the guilt and shame and anger he has,” Kerry replied, easing Roarke onto his back on the floor to see his face had relaxed some and the claw marks on his arms had gone.

Ian had gone to get a pillow and blanket from the leather sofa in the room, but Kerry shook his head to wait as he and Ryan got their brother onto the sofa.

“Roarke, wake up,” Kerry spoke quietly, sitting next to the younger man on the sofa and letting Maggie and his brothers deal with getting Mac onto his feet.

“I think Young’s mystic is still here,” Ryan smirked at his brother but reached for a small shot glass to pour whiskey into. “Better have him look at you.”

Mac took the liquor with a single hiss then let his eyes cross as it burned all the way down. “The day I need a bloody

O'Malley brother to look at me is the day I retire from practicing," he shot back, looking up as Maggie sat on the arm of the chair. "Thanks."

"I didn't do anything," she seemed surprised by the honest depth she saw in his eyes.

"You did more than you think," Mac replied quietly, looking as Ian nodded to the sofa.

Waking up after being hurt or getting knocked out was not one of Roarke Fitzgerald's favorite things ever. This time was worse since the last thing he could recall was pain and terror, but mixed in with those memories were other things.

"Mum...don't go," he murmured sleepily, trying to reach out to grab his mother's dress as she left him that last day. "Mummy, I'm sorry..."

His brothers exchanged looks as they realized what was happening. "Ah, hell," Ryan muttered, starting to move when a single burning look from Kerry stopped him.

"It's not your fault, Roarke," Kerry assured him quietly, lightly touching his shoulder. "You couldn't have stopped what happened that day. Mac, Ry and I should have been with you."

Twisting violently, Roarke's eyes suddenly snapped open to stare into Kerry's. Gasping to breathe, he recalled the attack at the stables, the pain and...

"Where's Jessica?" he finally got out, recalling her scream and remembering seeing her on the path.

As Ryan rolled his eyes at the first question, Ian sat a glass of water on the table in front of him. "She's upstairs with Deirdre and Cam's medic."

"You'll see her soon, lad," Mac spoke without looking since he was trying to get the room to stop spinning.

Looking around the office, Roarke fought to place things in order then realized the wounds from the beast were gone, and then slowly realized his shirt was off.

"Roarke, listen," Kerry's tone was soft but even as he felt his brother go rigid. "It's alright. You're safe."

Jerking a sudden look at his oldest brother, Roarke saw what he hadn't before. Kerry wasn't asking how he got the scars because he already knew.

"I...I need to see..." he tried to stand but fell back on the couch and recoiled when Kerry went to steady him, as his memories and emotions were still high. "Don't touch me."

"Roarke, stop and listen to Kerry," Mac really didn't feel like this right then but halted as Kerry held up a hand.

"Ian, help Maggie get Mac up to his room or into the kitchen so he can get some rest," he made the tone sound like a request but none of them doubted the firm command, especially as he shot a hard look at Ryan. "Go check and see if Cam and Peter need help."

Expecting some resistance, Kerry was slightly surprised when he didn't get any. Waiting until the door closed, he finally stood to give his brother space.

"You shouldn't have been able to be attacked here so in part this was my fault," he began slowly, closing the windows now and seeing his brother's reflection.

"It's me who should be dead. Nothing anyone can do to stop it if it's meant to happen," Roarke shrugged, his tone going quiet. "I knew if I told Jess how I felt it would doom her and it did."

Kerry turned. "Neither of you are doomed. We'll deal with everything one step, one day, at a time," he vowed, watching from where he was standing as his brother eased to the edge of the couch. "We need to lay it all out from the day they died to finally to how all this started again."

Roarke knew that but also knew his memories of that day could be spotty at best, but right then he wanted out of this room. It was closing in on him the longer it went.

"Deirdre always said to leave the windows open in the fall; that it airs out the house." Kerry saw the way his brother was twisting his hands, could feel the almost his panic as he opened the windows again. "You never used to be bothered like that."

A short snort was his reply. "Things change," Roarke fought to keep the reason of his claustrophobia down but figured Kerry already had a suspicion. "What did Jess tell you, Kerry?" he asked finally, sounding tired.

"Actually, she didn't tell me anything except a few basic things," his brother replied, going to the desk to eye the bundle of letters. "I'm afraid that while trying to calm you down the first night here, I saw some things that didn't take a genius to figure out."

Silence filled the room except for a hesitant 'Oh' as Roarke shifted uneasily as if putting distance between himself and his brother. "Yeah, well time heals all wounds and all that rot."

The light tone warned Kerry that it wouldn't take much to the walls to break. "Does it?" he asked carefully, silently nearing Roarke and laying a hand on his back.

"Don't, Roarke," Kerry caught his arm when he whirled and held it when he would have jerked away. "You know you're safe here."

"I haven't been safe anywhere except with Jessica since I was eleven bloody years old," his brother gritted, sighing at the level look he was getting. "I cope with it, Kerry. Let it alone."

Knowing it wasn't that simple, Kerry did release the younger man's arm and then simply waited since, as he recalled, Roarke needed to be the one to open up.

Wanting to go up, dress and then check on Jessica, Roarke had touched the knob to the office door when something made him pause and he mentally fought with himself until finally...

"Did you know?" he asked without looking.

"What?" Kerry sat on the desk edge and waited.

Roarke didn't want this. He didn't want to face this part of his past but suddenly needed to know this. He needed to understand.

"Did you know about it, Kerry?" he asked again, finally turning to his brother. "Did you know about what was going?"

"Roarke, I don't expect you to believe me, but until the other night, I had no idea what you had gone through," he replied honestly, staying where he was since Kerry knew now wasn't the time to approach. "I didn't know until I touched you and until Deirdre finally gave me these."

He held out the bundle of letters, seeing his brother's eyes narrow as he saw them. "If I had have known or even suspected what they were doing, what she had told them to do, I would have been in Mayo, you would have come home with me and those sadists would have hurt."

The firm tones of his brother made Roarke look at him fully, feeling the emotion from him. The pain and anger that Kerry felt inside for what he believed he had allowed to happen to his younger brother.

"She said you were better off and that's why you ignored my letters," he stated softly, eyes on the letters, and didn't see his brother's eyes spark. "I always wondered."

"You thought I didn't care or that I blamed you for Mum and Da's death," Kerry guessed, being careful as he put the letters back on the desk so he could stand up. "I didn't know, Roarke."

Roarke shifted uneasily, finally going to look out the window; needing to focus on something else but he still felt the unspoken between them.

"I think I knew when she took me from here the last day that I probably would only return here in a box, if that," he began slowly, looking at his hands. "The first week with the Walshes wasn't too bad. I missed home; I missed you and the others. Hell, I even missed Ry but I had nightmares and I kept crying for you, for Mum and finally I was put out in the barn to sleep so I wouldn't disturb the house."

Swallowing the sour taste in his mouth, he wasn't aware when Kerry stepped up behind him. "The chores started the second week I was there. At first they were typical, but the longer it went the more chores I got, the harder they got while their kids stopped doing theirs. If a certain chore wasn't done at a certain time, you didn't eat," he laughed dryly as he remembered. "Plenty of days and nights I only ate what I found in that barn."

"I believed what they said about me being slow, being stupid and everything else when the punishments started." Roarke closed his eyes and nearly moved when he felt the hand on his shoulder but stayed still, needing this contact to get through what was to come. "The first beating came about 6

weeks after I arrived. I honestly don't recall what it was for since it never mattered. They'd beat me for anything. I could breathe wrong and get beat. I started writing to you after the second one, asking to come home but I never heard anything.

"One day Gran showed up after they'd beat me up pretty bad and I thought she'd see and take me home, but she only nodded to Ida and told me that you had a new life and I was left to deal with what I'd caused," he paused a second, unaware that he'd begun to shake.

Kerry didn't move his hand when he felt the shoulder under it shaking. "You don't need to do this, Roarke."

"No matter what the Walshes or Gran said I kept writing, kept hoping you'd remember me and come for me but you never did," Roarke fought to keep his voice even but couldn't quite do it. "They limited my phone access and I was forbidden from ever calling you or Mac. I tried once and that was the first time they chained me in the barn and beat me. The first time I was..." he crossed his arms and felt his brother's hand squeeze. "I was twelve or so then when they started..."

"Roarke, stop," Kerry felt his emotions go edgier. "You don't need to put yourself through this."

Turning slightly to meet his older brother's eyes, Roarke blinked and shook his head. "I knew I'd die and after they started selling me to neighbors or friends or them or their kids would rape me, beat me, I wanted to die but I held onto the smallest hope that you'd read a letter I sent or just come to see me.

"The day that Cam and Jess came, I'd been chained in the barn loft for a couple days. I was pretty out of it and only barely remember hearing Jessica talking to me as Cam yelled," he shook his head. "When I came out of the shock, I was in London with them and knew I couldn't tell you or the others 'cause they said if I ever did, that what happened to Mum and Da would happen to you guys, so I made the choice of walking away to save you."

Kerry was careful to keep his anger hidden right then, knowing it would scare the boy in front of him more than he already was. "Let me take some of it, Roarke."

Understanding what he was saying, Roarke shook his head; fear and shame still too huge in his heart, but he didn't pull away when his brother gently clasped his face.

While Mac was the full empath, Kerry had always been able to feel as well as take emotional and physical pain if he needed to. Knowing what this usually did to him, he decided this was important enough to take the risks.

"Don't think on the pain, little brother," he urged, really surprised when his brother stayed still. "Nothing that happened was ever your fault. Not Mum and Da's deaths or what happened to you. If anything, all of this is my fault."

Surprised at this, Roarke's eyes snapped to his brothers and saw how the gray-blue had changed. "No, you couldn't have..."

"I should have fought Kathleen more and kept all four of you here in Fitzgaren." Kerry saw the full scope of his brother's fears, his life, and began soothing those raw emotions with both powers and soft soothing words spoken in Irish.

Roarke struggled slightly but events and injuries made him tired so he didn't resist as his brother looked and soothed. He was still numb from everything so he really wasn't aware when the shields he had built crashed and only the sudden strong arms around him kept him standing.

Tensing briefly since he didn't like being touched by anyone but Jessica, Roarke suddenly reached out and held on.

"It's o-kay, boyo," Kerry murmured, tightening his arms when he felt his younger brother was holding on and not fighting the hold. "You're home now and no one will ever hurt you or us again."

Silence filled the office for a long time until finally Kerry felt most of the tension ease from Roarke's body. "Alright?" he asked, easing him back slightly but not releasing him.

"Don't know yet," Roarke admitted but did feel better than he had in a long time. "Probably be better after I've seen Jessica."

Nodding, Kerry let go and lightly tousled his long black hair as he had done when they'd been kids. "Go see her then. I'll be up soon."

"Kerry?" Roarke stopped to look back and for the first time since returning home, he met his brother's eyes fully. "Thanks."



“It’s what older brothers are for, lad,” Kerry returned, waiting until the door closed fully to sink down into his father’s chair and place his head in his hands.

Expecting the aftereffects of what he did, what Kerry hadn’t been expecting was his own emotions as he had picked up on things that his brother hadn’t considered or thought about.

Running a hand over an obsidian ball sitting on his desk, he closed his eyes and forced his emotions down in order to concentrate on the image in his mind as he thought of all that had been happening and finally to the person he was thinking of. ‘We need you.’

“Kerry?” Deirdre spoke from the door, appearing concerned. “I passed Roarke who said he was checking on the lass. Ryan’s still up there while Miss Cavanaugh’s gotten Mac to take a bit of a lie down, and Ian’s ruining his dinner,” she reported, frowning as she looked at him. “Are ye alright, lad?”

“No, I’m not.” Her young Lord replied after a long silence, finally shoving to his feet and moving around the desk. “Tell Ryan I said to watch over Roarke and ask Cam if his people could double-check security. I’ll handle seeing to the magical shields when I return.”

Deirdre’s eyes looked surprised. “Return?” she repeated, surprised. “Return, from where?”

Kerry just reached his usual leather jacket and did the spell in his mind. “From County Mayo. I need to handle something,” he returned evenly, anger tinting his words as he cast the teleportation spell and he shimmered out.

“Oh, this isn’t good.” The housekeeper whispered.

Roarke Fitzgerald had stopped by his room to grab a clean t-shirt before going next door.

Even before he entered, he sensed the tension but couldn’t tell who it was coming from as Peter Daniels paced the room while muttering in German, and Cameron Young was between Nick O’Malley and Ryan Fitzgerald.

“My employer isn’t supposed to be lunch for some hellhound,” Nick was complaining, motioning to the bed. “Any deeper and I would have had to call my brother in to deal with that bite, and none of us want Sean here.”

Ryan was pleased that he was keeping his temper controlled when he saw his younger brother in the doorway.

Just a brief look told him that something had happened because he didn't feel the same angst or unease in Roarke.

"Hey there, brat. O'Malley's griping as usual." He turned from Nick with a smirk as Roarke came in fully.

"Hey," Roarke nodded, still a little wary around Ryan, but right then he wanted to concentrate on his friend.

Jessica Hadley still looked pale to him as she lay under a quilt he recognized as one of his mother's handmade ones.

Sitting down on the bed, he gently eased the quilt down so he could look for himself. Her injured arm was lying across her chest with a white bandage wrapped around the wound.

"How bad?" speaking because he knew his brother was close, Roarke's eyes remained on the girl's face as if looking to see any distress, but she seemed to be resting easily and he knew that had been Ryan's doing.

"The bite was minor and because you had cast a protection spell, not too much of its poison went into the bite." Ryan leaned on the bedpost easily while the merc leader got his mystic out of the room. "Her arm will be sore and it may take another go at healing it to take the pain away, but that'll be fine."

Seeing the bandage on her head reminded him of the blood he'd seen, and Roarke gently brushed his fingers over it and then down her face. "Her head was bleeding."

"She fell and hit it on cobblestone and since you were always fond of falling on those and taking layers off your knees, you should know what that feels like," Ryan replied, wondering if his brother knew that his hand was shimmering as it lightly touched or stroked.

"Mild concussion is what Daniels said before lapsing into German or something," he went on then stayed silent.

Roarke looked for himself, taking her hand in his and holding on as he finally let himself relax. "I was afraid that if I ever told her that I loved her, shut up, that something would happen and my failures or whatever would get her hurt."

"That attack would have happened even if you hadn't told her, brat," Ryan spoke firmly, not resorting to his usual

arrogance since he could feel the boy's honest fear. "So you did tell her?"

"Shut up, Ry," Roarke muttered but did smile a little, as things seemed to balance between them as it had years ago. "I've loved her for so long that if anything hurts her because of me or this..."

This time Ryan reached out to grip his brother's shoulder hard enough that he looked up at him, expecting to see censure or the typical sneer, but all Roarke saw were his brother's eyes locked on his.

"Nothing is going to happen to Jessica because you aren't going to let it happen, and because we're going to kick Sebastian's butt back to where it came from," Ryan declared firmly, then smiled his normal cocky smile. "Now, I'm going to go flirt with the little red-headed witch until Mac kicks me out, then I'll be back with some juice for you two."

"I'm a little old for juice, Ryan," Roarke decided then winced at the light tap to his head.

"I'm still your older brother, brat," Ryan shot back as he went out the door to head downstairs, seeing Deirdre coming up he could tell something was wrong. "What now?"

The older woman was worrying her lip. "Kerry's gone off to Mayo, lad."

Ryan blinked at that, actually surprised by this move and not certain what to do since his older brothers had always been the calm ones or the ones who had the answers.

Now Kerry's rare temper had taken him off to see the people responsible for hurting their brother while Mac was probably out to the world for the next few hours.

"This is bloody wonderful," he scowled and being a natural betting man, he could have placed wagers on how that would turn out.

## CHAPTER NINE

It was mid-afternoon at the farm in County Mayo that Kerry Fitzgerald arrived at. Looking around at the run-down equipment and small fields, but it was the rickety barn that drew his attention first as he neared it.

It didn't take a lot of energy to pick up the leftover images that places and things can hold over the years, and this place held a lot more horrors than his brother had remembered clearly.

By just touching the rotting wood, he could pick up on the past. See the events that stained the wood inside as he entered.

Closing his eyes, Kerry let the images, voices come, and he could see clearly his little brother, still grieving and alone, locked in here to sleep. Rusty chains further in showed him this was the spot the Walshes would chain Roarke to beat him or...

"Bloody hell, Roarke. What haven't you shared with even Jess?" he whispered, waving a hand violently to push the images of the more sadistic attacks away when he saw the small utility closet close by, and knew now why his brother couldn't be closed in as he saw images of the small boy being beat, starved and locked behind this door. Kneeling down, his fingertips lightly touched wood that seemed scoured by what he knew were ridges from his brother's fingers.

By the time Kerry had examined the whole barn, his already seething temper was ready to boil over as he exited it, forcing himself not to cast a fire spell to burn it to ashes.

"Are ye lost?" a reedy harsh voice asked from behind him.

Even though it had been many years, several even before his parents' deaths that Kerry had been to the Walsh farm with his Grandmother, he knew he would recall the voice of Ida Walsh.

A tall, skinny woman even in her youth, hard work on this farm hadn't been easy on her aging as he saw gray hair in a tight bun, worn clothes, but it was a hoe in her hand that drew him.

"No, Ida. I'm not lost," he spoke quietly, surprised that his voice was this even and quiet with the way his temper was pounding.

Staring hard at this tall, well-dressed man with a proper accent, Ida Walsh blinked at his use of her name. "You know me, boyo?"

"We met once when my Grandmother visited you," Kerry replied, still seeing his brother's life here, still hearing the screams from inside the barn. "You should recall her pretty well since she gave you and your family a perfect slave for two years," then his voice hardened. "You should recall him well enough, my brother Roarke."

This made the old woman stop short. "Yes, I recall that one," she sneered, turning to walk back to the house. "Nothing but trouble from day one he was and then he threw my family's hospitality back at us by running away."

"Running away or escaping?" Kerry challenged as he followed her, seeing a large, barrel-chested man coming from the house.

"What's that supposed to mean?" Ida demanded in a higher voice, whirling but was surprised when he was holding the hoe before she could raise it. "That little bastard was a liar and a thief. He deserved whatever Felan and I had to do to punish him and don't you tell me different."

Seeing his mother arguing with this upper class stranger brought Shay Walsh down the house steps. "What's the problem, Mum?" he asked, swaggering as he sought to intimidate this new arrival.

"My brother was eleven years old and small for his age. Sure as hell smaller than your children were," Kerry stared hard at the woman then shifted his gaze to the man when his eyes caught sight of the polished obsidian stone with a hole in it that he wore around his neck. "Don't tell me he deserved what you sick sons of bitches did to him."

"You don't talk to my mother like that!" Shay snarled, drawing back a huge fist when Kerry's eyes flashed and lightning flashed into the ground. "Saints preserve us!" he breathed.

Kerry sneered, temper sparking. "The Saints wouldn't have you," he snapped, reaching down and jerking the stone from around his neck. "My father gave Roarke this lucky stone for his sixth birthday. When did you take it from him?"

"You're wrong!" Ida snapped, nerves showing now.

Kathleen had assured her that no one would care what happened to the boy. It had been years since she had even considered anyone coming about their mistreatment of him, much less one of his brothers.

The stone seemed to glow in Kerry's hand, which silenced her. "Roarke would fight to keep this since it was from our father, so I want to know when you took it from him," he looked at both coolly. "One of the times you beat him raw after chaining him in that barn, or when you were assaulting him?"

This made mother and son look at one another but before either could speak, Kerry's eyes flashed. "I should make you both feel what he has felt. I wish you, your children and whoever else you may have sold him to could know the pain he has known and I could do that," his voice was cold and flat.

"Boy, your Gran told me and my sainted Felan how to handle your brother," Ida spoke quickly, sensing the danger and knowing this one's power. "Kathleen was my longest friend but I feared her if we didn't..."

Lightning flashed again, striking the ground near the woman. "He was a child!" Kerry snapped, motioning to the barn. "No animal, much less a child, should have been treated like you treated him."

"Been years since it happened, let it go," Shay sneered but didn't move from the ground. "Besides, why would a bloke of your importance care so much about a bloke whose probably only use these days is what me folks used him for...Hey!"

Kerry's eyes went from smoke to black in a second as Shay found himself yanked from the ground and slammed down a few feet away. "You're still alive only because I want you to know suffering of some kind, and I won't sink to that level," he snapped, glaring at the man.

"I got what I came for in his stone. However, I promise you, Ida Walsh, that for what you did to my brother you will always be marked and I assure you that the grandmother you should fear

isn't Kathleen Fitzgerald but Fiona Kerrigan. She will learn of this and if you or yours ever touch what is mine again then I may forget my vow."

With this Kerry walked away, knowing if he didn't leave then his temper would cause him to do something he'd regret.

"Your Gran will hear of this, laddie!" Ida screamed at his back. "You can't come to my home like this! Kathy will..."

Shifting slightly to look back at her, Kerry simply smiled. "You tell her what you like because I have plenty more to say to her myself," he replied before disappearing and reappearing in the office.

"Tell me you turned someone to ash," Ryan's voice spoke from the side.

Looking to see both Ryan and Ian waiting for him, Kerry shook his head before sitting on the sofa with a sigh. "It's too easy to match violence with violence, Ry."

Ian handed him a glass of Scotch since he could see how weak his brother seemed, but also saw his temper and pain. "Why would you go there?" he asked.

"I wanted to see them. I wanted to see the place," Kerry sighed, hissing at the liquor then dangling the obsidian stone from his hand. "I also went to get this."

Ryan recognized the black stone as the one their father had given Roarke. Taking it, he didn't care for the feelings. "It needs cleansed before he gets it back."

"I can do that," Ian offered, figuring it was time he did something to help.

As the boy left, Ryan sat on the sofa arm. "So, is he coping?"

Knowing what he meant, Kerry could sigh. "I hope, because we have things to handle."

After Ryan had left the room, Roarke had remained sitting next to his friend; his gray-blue eyes settled on her face. "I love you, Jessica," he whispered, lightly brushing hair from her face.

Thinking about going to check on Ian, since he hadn't had a proper chance to see his younger brother yet, Roarke was just moving when the first glimmer from across the room caught his eye.

Blinking, he frowned as what he saw slowly became clear and his blood ran cold. "Oh, God," he breathed, "not again."

"Using your memories and fears against you was a cruel thing even for Sebastian," Brenna Fitzgerald spoke as she looked at her son with the same loving smile she'd given the others. "I've been trying to reach you for the longest time, Roarke."

Staring at his mother's image, Roarke blinked but he moved away from the bed so nothing would endanger his friend if this was a trick. "Last time I saw an image of my Mum it didn't turn out well for me, so you'll forgive if I'm a little wary."

Smiling in amusement, Brenna sat in the chair across from him. "You look like your Da but got my wit I see. Toryn always said I'd teach one of you to have my sarcasm."

"Mum?" Roarke moved a little closer, his powers not picking up anything wrong, and his mind remaining clear unlike the night in New Orleans.

"Hello, my sweet darling," Brenna smiled, letting her head move so she was looking fully at him. "I never guessed all my wee ones would grow into such handsome young men, even if you and Ryan do need your hair cut."

Nearly snickering at that, Roarke stopped a little bit away from her then slowly dropped down by the chair. "I'm so sorry, Mum," he whispered, emotions he'd buried coming out. "I never meant for you and Da to die and if I could have given my..."

"Stop, Roarke," Brenna soothed, her hand rising as it would to brush his hair and even though he knew it didn't touch him, he felt the brush. "Toryn and I knew what we were doing that day and though I fear you'll learn things soon that may hurt, I never want you to doubt how much Toryn and I love you and your brothers."

Looking down with sad eyes, she watched him for a moment. "You need to let go of the guilt, my boy. Only you and your brothers can stop Sebastian this time and stop the rest but you need to let others in to help. You need to love again and learn to trust again."

Looking up at his mother, Roarke thought he knew what she meant as he looked back to the bed. "I will, Mum," he promised, thinking of something. "Are you and Da ashamed of me?"



Fire lit in her soft eyes and this time he did feel the touch of her hand against his skin. "Roarke Michael Quinn Fitzgerald, your Da and I will love you always. What happened when you were a lad wasn't your fault and eventually all evil gets what it deserves, so let go of the shame and fear and live, my sweet boy," she smiled as a slim hand rose to wave and slowly candles lit in the room to cast a soft glow, as did the fireplace. "Now, go to her," she urged softly, laying a kiss to the top of his head. "We love you, Roarke."

"I luv you, Mum," he whispered, surprised by the burning in his eyes as he blinked, but then his attention was drawn by the soft sound from the bed.

When Roarke went back to sit on the bedside he watched as Jessica's eyelashes blinked a few times before slowly opening to meet his eyes.

"Welcome back, *a gra*," he murmured, letting his hand rest on her face since he knew she'd be disoriented when just waking up. "Just rest now."

It was his soothing voice and touch that assured the young British woman that she was safe since the last thing she remembered was a large black creature.

Slowly Jessica was able to bring her eyes to clear on Roarke's concerned face, noticing right off how tired he looked, but wasn't picking up the same unease as she had been.

"Big ugly doggies gone?" she asked, trying to sit up but only his arm supporting her allowed her to partially sit up, leaning against pillows as she saw her arm.

Laying a hand over the bandage, Roarke found it easy to ease any minor pain his friend had left over. "Aye, they are," he wasn't aware that his accent was coming back more as it did when it was just the two of them. "Kerry and the others dealt with 'em."

Roarke didn't want her knowing about the injuries he had suffered so he tried to get her off the subject. "I'm sorry you were hurt, luv."

"I'm fine," she yawned, still feeling tired but wanting to stay awake. "Are you okay?"

Considering that for a long moment, Roarke finally smiled and nodded. "Yeah, *a stor*, I'm better than I have been in a long

while,” he admitted, holding her hand loosely in his as he gently leaned over to kiss her cheek.

“Roarke, can I ask you something?” she asked quietly, looking down at their meshed fingers.

Feeling her nervousness, he nodded but kept her hand in his. “What, luv?” he asked, suspecting what it was.

“Did I dream it?” she avoided his eyes at this question, afraid that her previous injuries had caused the hallucination before the attack.

Knowing what that meant, Roarke smiled and gently cupped her chin so their eyes met. “Did you dream the attack or did you dream when I told you that I loved you?” seeing her eyes start and feeling her pulse jump in his hand. “You didn’t dream the beasts I’m afraid, but more importantly you didn’t dream the other either.”

Being careful of her arm and head, he leaned in closer and this time his gentle kiss met her lips, deepening it carefully only when he felt it was safe to take her fully in his arms.

The candles in the room flickered with sparks as more sparks shimmered from the couple in the room as desire flamed, but Roarke knew to use caution since, while he had his own issues, his friend was even more uneasy at times with physical contact.

“I love you, Jessica,” he whispered against her mouth, shifting so he was sitting beside her on the bed and bringing her against his chest. “I may not show it as much as I should at times but I never want you to doubt that, luv.”

Jessica stayed quiet as she let her head lay on his chest. “I love you too, Roarke,” she murmured, feeling her eyes close. “Stay, please.”

“I’ll be with you, *a gra*,” he promised, listening to her breathing even off as she fell back to sleep. “You’ll be safe.”

A soft knock made him move a hand slightly on instinct to protect but stopped at the mental sound from the other side. “Come in.”

“Is she back to sleep?” Kerry asked upon entering, not saying how he knew their friend had been awake, and his brother didn’t ask. It was one thing Kerry would know.

“Yeah, she’s relaxed.” Roarke looked down with a small grin as he let his fingers slide through her hair. “Once she gets some sleep, she’ll be fine.”

Kerry brought a chair closer to the bed so he could watch his brother, seeing how tired his face was. “I know you’re tired, Roarke but if we want to get this sorted out, it’s time to finally settle some things.”

“I don’t remember everything from that day, Kerry,” his brother was quiet and clearly hesitant.

“We’ll deal with that,” Kerry assured him, pausing as he took something from his pocket. “This belongs to you.”

Looking up in sudden surprise, Roarke’s eyes landed on the black obsidian stone that had been cleansed and also cleaned until it shined, and even the chain it was on had been replaced.

Startled, he stared at it then up at his brother; the questions whirling unasked in his eyes and mind.

“It doesn’t matter,” Kerry replied, seeing those questions as he placed the lucky stone on the nightstand and stopped at the door. “When you think she’ll sleep alright, come to the living room, please?”

After his brother left the bedroom, Roarke looked at the stone for the longest time before reaching for it.

He recalled his father giving him the stone for his sixth birthday, and that had been so special since Toryn had always been careful not to show more attention to one son than another yet on that day he did.

There was a brief stab of pain as he remembered this and as he recalled the day this stone was taken from him.

Hesitant to touch it because of what it could bring back, Roarke finally lifted the smooth stone into his hand but only felt his father in it and also felt the immense power of his baby brother who had cleansed it.

Placing the chain back around his neck, he felt it warm against his skin as he actually felt his father close. “I won’t let you down again, Da,” he whispered, easing Jessica down on the pillows and reached for the quilt before laying a soft kiss over her cheek. “Sleep now, my love. I’ll be back soon.”

“Don’t you sleep more than an hour?” Maggie Cavanaugh was demanding after she went to check on Patrick ‘Mac’ Fitzgerald.

Mac was just finishing dressing when the little red headed whirlwind entered his room. “Don’t you knock?” he countered, trying to sense out to see what was going on, but all he was picking up was Maggie’s irritation.

“I spent the past few hours wondering if you were comatose and learning that your innocent baby brother has a wicked weak spot for junk food of any kind. Ryan’s been the even minded one because your big brother took himself off somewhere and all I could get out of Ian was that at least he didn’t fry the woman,” she rambled while pacing his room. Taking the time to figure that out, Mac finally picked out the important parts as he put his watch back on and ran a careless hand through his short hair.

“Each of us has different ways to recharge after using our powers for extended periods or at certain levels,” he told her, leaning on his dresser to watch the woman. “Kerry usually broods or meditates, Ryan always, even as a lad, played cards or something, Roarke will sleep or withdraw into himself and I sleep. Ian clearly goes for food.”

“Don’t you guys have anything in common?” Maggie asked, still pacing when suddenly a hand snagged her arm and she found herself off balance and then in Mac’s arms. “Well hello to you too, Doc.”

Figuring he could blame still being tired and weak on this move, Mac laughed that nothing seemed to faze this woman, as she seemed to fit in his arms perfectly. “Y’ know, any smart woman would have run screaming from this mess, Mary Margaret.”

Usually having anyone call her by her given name made her mad but when Mac used it, she really didn’t seem to mind. Nor did she mind when he held her.

“Let’s just say I’m not one to leave an assignment unfinished, and you still owe me an interview,” she countered, loosely wrapping her arms around his neck and looking up at him with sparkling green eyes. “Ian’s about to knock, you know.”

"I know," Mac muttered but instead of letting go he moved quickly to kiss her, but was surprised when Maggie met his kiss fully and deeply before the knock was heard.

Maggie broke this kiss, muttering about little brothers and frogs. "Come in, Ian."

"How'd you know it was...?" Ian started to ask but something about the mood in the room made him stop and look. "Ah, yeah, Kerry wants you in the living room, Mac," he explained, backing out of the room. "I need to go pay Ryan twenty-five pounds since he bet me Miss Cavanaugh would be in here."

"Get yourself out of here, boyo!" Maggie snapped, swearing she was going to hurt that black haired devil the minute she got the chance. "I hate your brother."

Smiling down at her, Mac was surprised at what he was feeling as he gently pushed a stray strand of unruly red hair behind her ear. "I've had those feelings since our Mum had him," he admitted, opening the door for her. "Let's go down."

"I'm sure this is just for you and your brothers," Maggie told him, not reacting when he reached for her hand.

"I don't know why, but I think you should be there too," he shrugged, not sure he wanted to open himself up this way. "You have some connection to this, Maggie and you need to hear it all."

Remembering the woman in her dreams as of late, Maggie slowly nodded. "Alright, we'll see what happens."

## CHAPTER TEN

Deirdre O'Connor sat a tray with various drinks and snacks on the coffee table before going to start dinner, knowing what was said in that room, a simple housekeeper didn't have a need to know.

"See, didn't I tell you that perky little reporter would be up with big brother Mac?" Ryan was nudging Ian's arm as the boy was counting out the wager. "You need to pay more attention to me, lad."

As Ian was muttering under his breath, Roarke turned on the couch to watch. "House rule used to say something about not conning younger brothers, Ry, and since it's pretty clear the sparks between Mac and the reporter, you suckered Ian so he doesn't have to pay up."

"You're still a tattletale," Ryan stuck his tongue out at his younger brother but was glad to see him more at peace with himself and them.

"Never bet with Ryan, Ian," Roarke told his younger brother, smirking at the older man. "He cheats."

Kerry watched this scene from the reflection in the French doors of the living room; relaxing at the sounds of his brothers bickering as they had when things had been normal.

"Ry, you better duck because Maggie wants blood," Mac announced as he entered the room a brief step ahead of the redhead.

Maggie stepped in and pinned the black haired security consultant with a blistering look. "You just wait until this mess is over, Ryan Fitzgerald, and then I'll show you what a girl raised with nine brothers can do." She jabbed a finger into his chest.

"This should be fun," Roarke grinned at the dark look Ryan was giving him. "Hey, at least she can't order Cam to shoot you."

"That is true, brat," Ryan agreed, eyes looking toward Kerry as he stepped away from the doors. "I know, I know. Quit picking on females that can fry me with a spell."

Ryan had slumped down on the sofa next to his still smirking younger brother while Ian went to look at some photos

on the mantelpiece, and Mac snickered as Maggie sat down in a chair in the corner.

"You know not to torment your brothers, Ryan," Kerry spoke as he stopped behind the sofa but let his hand rest on Roarke's neck to squeeze lightly.

"You know how Ry is," Roarke grinned, turning to look and frowning.

"Listen to her and let go of the guilt," Kerry spoke but the tone was deeper as was the amount of energy in the eyes. "There is no need for it, my son."

Ryan saw his younger brother go pale and heard the change in Kerry's voice but it wasn't until he looked up that he suddenly swore. "Mac!" he snapped, rolling over the back of the couch to push his brother away from Roarke and up against the wall, keeping an arm across his chest to hold.

Checking on Roarke, Mac went around the couch to look and saw what had caused Ryan's reaction. "Let him go," he spoke quietly but firmly.

Smoky blue-gray eyes but with a much deeper intensity stared back at them with a smile that wasn't their brother's. "It's time to face the past, for all of you but especially for Roarke who blames himself. Face it, face him and deal with her but one battle will not defeat this evil," he replied, "for the Five to form the Circle it will take all Five to face their fears and battle the evils that you will face."

"What's going on?" Ian couldn't figure this out but did know that Roarke was still pale and staring.

Ryan's arm went harder against Kerry's chest. "We'll figure it out, now let him go," he ordered, lowering his tone. "Da, leave Kerry alone because it's just going to upset Roarke more."

"I know," the tone was sad but finally as he looked around the room, his eyes settled on Mac with a silent message. "Blessed Be, my boys."

With that, Ryan and Mac had to be fast, as Kerry seemed to go limp quickly. "We need to cast another protection spell on this house," Ryan muttered as they got their brother to a chair while Maggie poured a glass of Scotch.

"Doubt if it would work on our own parents, lad," Mac sighed, turning to check on Roarke. "It's fine, he just wanted to reassure you."

"I know but..." Roarke was fighting not to shake but had unknowingly reached to touch the stone he wore again, and some of the emotion evened off. "It's still so raw, Mac."

Kerry shook his head as it finally cleared, frowning when he noticed Ryan so close. "What happened?"

"Da paid a visit," Ryan returned, rolling his eyes. "Can we get some things sorted out so Roarke can sleep tonight and...?"

"Ryan!" Mac snapped, catching the thought and hoping Maggie hadn't as his brother smirked.

"I'll hurt him later," she promised, looking at the brothers. "Like I told Mac, this is probably something you should do together. I can go help Deirdre or..."

Kerry looked up at her as if considering, then shook his head. "You were involved in this the moment you saw the visions at Mac's home and clearly your Grandmother sought to prepare you somewhat by giving you her Book of Shadows, so you should hear this."

He paused as he looked at his brothers. "Jessica already knows most of this, I'm sure, since the O'Malley brothers like to keep tabs on magical or demonic events, so there's no need to wake her."

"Guess there's no way to keep her out of this, huh?" Roarke sighed, not wanting his friend involved anymore than she had been.

"I wish there was, lad, but Jessica's abilities and her closeness to us already has attracted it to her." Kerry felt his brother's concern. "Now that we know the danger and know to expect anything, it'll be easier to protect those close to us."

"Easier said than done until we recast the protection spell the grounds have had for centuries. That needs handled soon." Mac muttered under his breath, settling on the footstool closest to the sofa while waiting for the oldest of them to begin.

Kerry wasn't sure where to begin then, finally decided it best to just start from the beginning. Taking a deep breath, he waved a hand toward the fire and it roared to a soft flame.



“Sebastian Donegal, according to the legends passed down in our family, was a very powerful Irish landowner back when Ireland was still very young. He kept his massive hold on what he owned by being very strict, frugal and powerful since he was also a very cruel and powerful witch,” Kerry spoke quietly and slowly, recalling the stories he’d been told as a lad. “He had few who could compare to him except for Angus Fitzgerald. He founded this town and built this town. He and Sebastian’s rivalry began then and Sebastian has kept his rivalry with our family to this day.”

Ian considered this so far. “So he’s an Immortal witch?” he blinked, not caring for that. “Great.”

“He’s not immortal. He uses spells and sacrifices to keep his life going,” Kerry corrected, going on. “Once a generation he has issues with the Lord of Fitzgaren. The last was our father. Sebastian and Da sparred a lot but it wasn’t anything too serious until it became clear that Da’s sons would be the chosen ones to finally defeat him. That was when the fun and games ended.

“We’d been touring and performing for years. Ian had only joined us on stage about a year earlier when he was two,” Kerry saw Roarke begin shifting restlessly and was pleased when Ian sat down next to him. “That fall we were back here because we always stopped touring before the Fall Equinox, ‘cause Mum always felt it was the most important Solstice.”

This was what Kerry knew would be the hardest on his brother. “I was nineteen, Mac was sixteen, Ry would have been thirteen, Roarke was eleven and Ian was three. Mum and Da were a bit stressed with some things but I didn’t realize until later how bad it was. I know that they were fighting a lot about his mother and that Mum was talking about taking Ian and Roarke up to see her family,” he paused to meet Roarke’s eyes.

“Roarke had wanted to go to Skelling Michael to see the island and the sights for months. Ryan had been on him about wasting time exploring a rock but he constantly asked to go.” Kerry felt the tension as he moved closer to the sofa.

“There was just so much tension in this house that I thought maybe a day out together would make us normal,” Roarke murmured, not looking at his brothers. “I knew you guys didn’t want to go and Ian was too sick, but when Da decided to go

along I was thrilled, because I didn't always get both their attention very often. We took the tour boat out and it was the best day I'd had with them and the last 'cause they died all because of my stupid idea."

Maggie couldn't help but feel sorry for the little boy who had endured so much and was still feeling it. Her eyes narrowed when she saw Ryan move, knowing full good and well how sharp his tongue could be and how he enjoyed tormenting his brother.

'Let Kerry handle it, luv,' Mac's voice spoke in her mind even though he hadn't moved.

Kerry had been watching his younger brothers and had positioned himself in case he felt he needed to step in as Ryan sat on the sofa arm and punched his brother in the arm, but not as hard as he normally would.

"They died because of some evil bastard, not because of you, brat," Ryan's usual cockiness was plain in his tone but when his hand lay on Roarke's shoulder, it wasn't rough. "They knew what was happening and did what needed to be done. Stop hating yourself."

Roarke paused to look at his brother as if considering. "You hated me for it."

The simple comment made Ryan close his eyes and his fingers flex but instead of shooting off a sharp comment, he slowly took a deep breath before opening his eyes to meet his brothers. "I never hated you, Roarke," he sighed, knowing that Kerry was waiting to see how he handled this. "After it happened we were all hurting so damn bad and you just shut down so I couldn't even pick a fight with you like I would. What I said the day we were all last here was just rage and grief. Not at you but at Mum & Da for failing to be perfect like I wanted, at Mac and Kerry for not being there but mostly at myself for being too selfish and not going that day. You were just the easy one to lash out at but I didn't hate you then and I don't hate you now," he finished firmly, letting the words go out as casually as he could but also shared a long silent connection between just the two of them.

Roarke was quiet for some time, unsure then finally nodded. "I know I was meant to die that day."

"But you didn't," Ian shrugged. "You couldn't help what happened, Roarke, and I'm pretty sure they don't want you to hurt like this."

"Our father's mother was expected that day but Da still chose to go, which made her mad," Kerry could still hear her words but shoved that away while giving Ryan a quiet nod. "Mac, Ry and I were supposed to take our boat out to the island to pick them up but Mac and Ryan found other things to do and I got held up by Kathleen, so I was late."

"By the time I got there it was over." This was one thing Kerry knew he'd never forget. "I parked the boat and felt the difference in the air. I took the stone stairs up from the beach and even before I was halfway up I heard Roarke crying. It hadn't been the tears like I'd heard after a fight with Ryan but a gut wrenching loss. I found him sitting on bloodied ground between our parents, clinging to them."

Lightly touching the younger man's neck, Kerry could feel his emotions. "I knew without looking they were already gone and only the leftover emotions let me know what happened because Roarke was pretty much catatonic by that point and when he did come around, he had little to no memories of what had happened."

"I didn't listen to Mum when she told me to hide on the beach," Roarke whispered, hand now clutching both the stone and Trinity medal Kerry had given him back. "I went back and I saw Da fighting the beast. Mum was already down and Sebastian was there cause I heard him gloating that while it wasn't supposed to go like this he'd take it. That Mum and I were supposed to die but he'd take their deaths and leave my death to his very own mother."

Roarke's eyes looked up fully at Kerry and there was no mistaking the pain and confusion. "Why did she hate me so much that she'd kill them or want Mum dead?"

"I don't know, Roarke," Kerry sighed, squeezing his arm. "Sometime on that island, Mum and Da cast a spell that banished Sebastian for fifteen years and that time is up. Now we fight him on our terms and we win for what he took from us," he vowed firmly, meeting each of his brothers' eyes. "I won't lie and say it won't be dangerous because it will be."

Ryan rolled his eyes. "I figured that out before I got here and the old man used Annie against me," he snorted, still not happy with that. "We're here and we'll cope."

"He's weighing the odds in his head," Mac smirked but nodded to Kerry that he was in.

"May as well," Ian shrugged, giving a boyish grin. "I didn't like the play I was doing, anyway."

Kerry moved around so he could kneel and be eye level with Roarke. "I know how hard this will be for you and if I could protect you from the pain this may cause I would and we will do that, but I need you, little brother."

"I know," Roarke sighed, closing his eyes for a long time. "I'll stay and do this, Kerry, because it's what we're supposed to do but all I ask is you help me keep Jessica safe because I can't lose her. I won't lose her."

"*Aontaim* (agreed)," Kerry held out a hand and felt the warmth when his brother's hand clasped his and held firmly.

"Fine, now can we actually sleep?" Ryan asked, yawning. "Brat's been through hell and we'll all need strength to handle this."

Mac rolled his eyes and heard Maggie giggle. "This is coming from the bloke who gambles forty-eight hours straight."

"It was seventy three hours actually, thank you very much," Ryan threw back ready to defend his gambling skills.

Roarke eased up and nudged Ian. "Tell Kerry I went up to check on Jessica."

"Sure as soon as he's done breaking this up, I will," the boy agreed, wincing as Mac shot something back and Ryan's temper went into sniping mode. "This may be sometime next week. Get some sleep too, Roarke," he urged.

It was odd looking at his baby brother and seeing an eighteen-year-old young man but Roarke nodded, hoping Deirdre didn't decide to check on his brothers.

Roarke decided before going to check on his friend he'd shower and change in order to ease the stress he had left so he wouldn't take that in to her.

Stripping, he stepped into the shower and was again thankful that sometime in the last fifteen years, Kerry had

remodeled the entire manor in which all the bathrooms now had modern showers.

Wincing as the hot water hit him, Roarke leaned into the spray for a long time as he used a meditation routine to force his stress out of his body. He was in the midst of rinsing soap from his long black hair when he felt the presence from his room.

Always a man aware of his surroundings, Roarke was mentally cursing himself for getting so at ease in this house that he'd lost that caution until he sensed something else and he blew out a breath.

"I'll be out in a second, Jessica," he called through the bathroom door that he'd left open as he quickly finished showering and just grabbed his jeans.

Stepping out into the room he saw Jessica Hadley wandering around, her one arm still held gingerly as she moved, and he felt her wariness.

"You shouldn't be up, luv," he spoke softly from beside her, quickly reaching for her elbow when she turned too quickly and got off balance. "Easy."

Blinking up at him, Jessica seemed to be shaking off sleep for a few more seconds. "I woke up and you weren't there so I wasn't sure what..." she seemed to stumble on what to say.

"I had to talk with the others and then decided to take a shower before I came back," Roarke explained, gently guiding her to a chair. "Have a nightmare?"

"No, just woke up," she replied, wincing at the dull ache she had. "I wanted to be sure you were alright."

Feeling her pain, Roarke was careful when he ran a casual hand over her injured arm to ease the pain. "It's still hard but I'm...coping," he admitted, kneeling next to the chair. "I wish you and the others weren't involved but..."

"We've faced worse before, Roarke," Jessica told him, smiling to reassure him on instinct; fingers running through his thick still damp hair when he sat on the floor and rested his head against her legs. "We'll get through this."

"I hope so, luv," he sighed, knowing she was unaware of the pain he was taking as he sat still to allow her to reassure him.

Silence filled the room until Roarke lifted his head to meet her eyes. "You're tired, Jessica."

"So are you, hotshot," the British girl countered, hating to be hurt to the point where she was this weak.

"True enough," he agreed, easily getting to his feet and reaching for her hand. "Mac would say we both need to sleep."

Rolling her eyes about medics, Jessica did yawn but judged that it was safe enough to leave him alone. "If...if you need anything I'm right next door I guess," she had to stretch to lean up to lightly kiss his cheek before starting to turn toward the door.

Recalling what he had been thinking about before this whole mess had started in New Orleans, Roarke's fingers gently curled around her good arm. "Where you going, *a gra*?" he asked softly, bringing her back closer to him.

"Next door to bed I suppose," Jessica shrugged, looking up into his eyes and was surprised at how dark they seemed. "Unless you think you may need me and then I can sit in the chair."

Chuckling softly, Roarke leaned down to lightly brush a kiss over her mouth. "I will always need you, Jessica," he murmured against her ear, bending to easily lift her into his arms. "But you will not, while I'm alive, sit up in a bloody chair all night."

Startled by this sudden move, her arms had automatically gone around his neck. "Roarke, what are you...?"

He heard the unease but shifted so he could see her eyes as he carried her toward the bed. "Stay with me tonight, Jess. Let me hold you, kiss you and wake up with you."

Wary about this more for his sake than anything else, Jessica stared at his eyes. Feeling the emotions rise before slowly nodding her consent even as his mouth found hers for a deep kiss that distracted her while he was gently laying her in the center of his bed.

Feeling the bed shift under her friend's weight, Jessica's hand went flat on his bare chest instinctively.

"It's alright, Jess," Roarke assured her, expecting her fear as he slowly stretched out next to her. "Nothing happens, my love."

Seeing her eyes drop slightly, he felt the instant silent thought and knew he'd phrased that last comment wrong.

“No,” gently he lifted her face in his hand to hold her eyes. “I guess what I should say is nothing happens until you want it to because eventually if you’d let me, I’d hope we could go farther.”

Moving her fingers restlessly on his chest, Jessica chewed her bottom lip. “You know you can do anything...” she stopped at the quick flash in his eyes.

Reminding him that Jessica’s assault several years ago in Las Vegas had left her with very little knowledge on how things should be between men and women. Roarke knew that despite his past he still knew this was a touchy area for them both.

“Since I’ve been feeling things for you for awhile now, it’d be too bloody easy to take you too far too fast, luv,” he was careful when he spoke to keep his voice even but the confusion he saw in her eyes made it hard.

Cursing that confusion and the shadows he now saw in her eyes, Roarke was gentle as he shifted slightly next to her so he could run his fingers down her face. “One day when this is all settled and you’ve gotten used to me saying ‘I love you’ we’ll go slow.”

“We’ve been close before,” Jessica yawned, not wanting to close her eyes as she watched her friend. “Don’t wanna hurt you though.”

“Hurt me?” Roarke frowned slightly, not fully understanding right away then it clicked for him and he rested his forehead against hers. “God, you are so wonderful,” he murmured, feeling the rest of the stress in his body leave, “you could never hurt me like that, luv.”

Jessica watched his face, having years of experience with watching the expressions, eyes, or emotions of friends or enemies, then slowly let her fingers move up to touch her friend’s face. “Can I...?”

A soft kiss interrupted her words as Roarke gently let his fingers stroke through her hair and down over her face and down. “Just let me hold you tonight, Jessica,” he replied, seeing her eyes drift close then struggle to open. “Sleep, luv,” he whispered, letting his own eyes close once he was sure his friend was sleeping, but unaware of the shadows close by.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

Lulled to sleep by his own exhaustion and the gentle heartbeat next to him, Roarke twisted restlessly until finally sitting up with the sudden urge burning inside.

Not sure why but Roarke Fitzgerald, if asked later, would say he didn't remember dressing fully or leaving the house of his childhood to go to the cemetery where his parents were buried, and totally unaware of the danger lurking inside and out.

Sitting at the kitchen table with cards laid out, Ryan was scowling at the cards and wishing for something stronger than coffee to ward off the chill he was feeling.

"Can you cheat yourself?" Ian asked as he entered the kitchen, unable to sleep as nerves or something skittered along his skin.

"Some can but cheating takes the thrill out of winning," Ryan replied without looking up, finally tossing the cards on the table. "I thought you went to bed."

Ian dug through the refrigerator before coming to the table with the rest of Deirdre's chocolate cake and a glass of grapefruit juice. "I couldn't sleep," he admitted after taking a bite of cake. "Just like nerves running under my skin or electricity."

In the middle of frowning at his youngest brother's food choice, Ryan's eyes shifted at that description as it matched his own unease. "What else did you feel?"

"Just like there's something outside watching." Ian didn't see his brother's expression but did finally frown as something else bothered him. "Roarke must have felt it since he's not in his room."

"Shit," Ryan swore, shoving away from the table. "Go get Kerry and Mac. We should have done the protection spell before going to bed."

Ian looked at his snack then shrugged and went for his brothers, not seeing the shadow in the hall.



Mac couldn't relax no matter how hard he tried. Usually a nice friendly fight with Ryan soothed his stress but tonight it hadn't done anything. The shower and the meditation hadn't helped either. He was about ready to give in when Maggie Cavanaugh stuck her head in.

"You awake?" she asked the obvious then entered before he could reply. "Dumb question, but does your brother have dogs?"

"No, not officially he doesn't," Mac sighed, standing easily and seeing the woman's unease. "Something's outside and something's wrong."

Maggie rolled her eyes, for the first time she was actually uneasy since this all started. "Gotta plan to deal with it then, Doc?" she asked, nearly jumping when the quick knock sounded before Ian came in.

"Ryan said to find you. Roarke's gone outside and something's wrong," he spoke quickly.

"Stay inside and stay close to Jess," Mac told Maggie as he quickly pulled his shirt and boots on. "Anything happens, yell for me."

Both men were out the door before Maggie could reply, then all she could do was shake her head and try to put aside the odd feelings she had.

"If Sebastian makes a move on him this soon..." Mac was muttering as he came down the massive stairs to see Kerry waiting and scowling.

"It's not Sebastian," his temper was on the surface and bubbling that he had been so stupid as to think they'd be free of the woman's interference. "She's here."

Mac didn't have to ask who 'she' was, knowing by the tone that Kathleen Murphy Fitzgerald had finally picked a time and place to react to her grandsons' snub earlier.

As the front door shut, the misty shadow slowly formed into a shape and Sebastian smiled as he knew that most people had more than one weakness, and if he couldn't access one than he would fall to the other.

Maggie was sitting cross-legged on Mac's bed reading the battered and worn book her grandmother had given her when a large heavy book bound in ancient leather hit the bed next to her

leg, causing her to look up, and she was very proud of herself for not screaming.

Standing not two feet from her was the image of a man, a tall, slender man with thick jet-black hair and smoky gray eyes. The scowl on his face looked harsh yet she didn't feel any fear.

"Help them, Mary Margaret Cavanaugh, and never fear him," Toryn Fitzgerald seemed to glare at her then his gaze softened. "Patrick needs someone who is an equal but understands him and his family."

Maggie blinked once and the image was gone, but the well-kept leather bound book that was three times the size of her family's Book of Shadows remained on the bed, and it seemed to be vibrating as she reached for it even when she felt the scream more than heard it. "Oh, bloody hell."

The night air held a chill along with a low hanging misting fog as Roarke slowly made his way from the house to the family cemetery where his parents had been laid to rest

Even though he hadn't been down these paths in fifteen years he had no problem finding it in the dark, yet as he passed the gate and neared the stone his head began to buzz.

A sudden wave of dizziness caused him to falter, going to one knee just to regain his balance as images and memories began flooding back.

"God, no," he groaned, feeling his stomach flip as images took him back to that barn and the pain and shame.

"You see the trouble you still cause?" Kathleen spoke from the shadows where she stood, a black velvet cloak shielding her from the mist. "Naughty little boy, you should have died on that island, not your father. Then you couldn't even die in Mayo when I told Ida and Felan to make you their whore, to beat you to within an inch of your life," she clucked her tongue as she crossed the grass toward him, eyes blazing with hatred.

Roarke fought the images, the pain, to focus on the voice bearing in his ears yet having been taken by surprise, he wasn't strong enough yet to combat his grandmother's power.

"Why couldn't you die?!" she screamed at him, hand lashing out and invisible nails raked his face, drawing blood.

Body shaking, Roarke finally lifted his head up to look at the older woman that he still had nightmares about. "I don't know," he whispered, unknown tears shining. "Why didn't you do it yourself that night in Mayo?"

Looking startled, Kathleen stared hard and bitterly. "Why should I sully my hands with such a task?" she chided, waving it away. "I assumed that Ida's lads would finish you off or one of those strapping lads that worked for them. I merely took a strap to you."

"After you cast a spell that would double the damage done, after you sat and watched what they did," he threw back then cried out as pain like a fist hit his stomach, and feelings that were more familiar took over. "No..."

"I could kill you with a thought, lad," Kathleen snapped, glaring down as her grandson collapsed on the ground. "But I think before I do, I want you to recall what those times felt like when you served the only purpose you'd ever have been good for anyway. Feel what Sebastian will make that British whore who ruined my plans feel before she dies."

Roarke's mind flashed on that but couldn't focus on anything past what he was being made to see and feel as his body automatically curled in a near fetal position to fight against the spell that caused the vivid memories to be real to him.

Smiling as she watched the boy she hated so much shake under her control, she took a step closer when a thin bladed dagger landed next to her pointed-toe shoe.

"Back the hell away from him," Ryan's tone was firm as he stepped from the darkness.

"Leave this alone, Ryan," Kathleen warned, still hoping her grandsons could see reason as she started around the dagger that flew back to Ryan's hand at his will. "He's an evil boy that cost you and your brothers a father's love and you wouldn't want to associate with all the dirt and evil he..."

A step sounded from her left and Kathleen found herself staring into Mac's cold eyes. "Evil you caused," he threw back at her. "You knew what was going to happen on that island yet you prevented Kerry from being on time. Now release him."

"You do not give me orders, boyo," Kathleen shot back, whirling to turn back to deal with Roarke, but bumped into Ian who had come from the right.

"Why hurt him?" he asked, eyes chilly as he looked at this woman he felt nothing for. "He's of your blood."

Kathleen's eyes flamed yet her youngest grandchild didn't flinch. "He is of her blood!" she snapped. "That no-good Galway whore seduced my son."

"So why hate Roarke more than the rest of us?" Ian demanded more firmly. "All of us shared the same parents so what did Roarke do to you?"

Silence answered the youngest Fitzgerald as the only sound heard was the effects of her spell on Roarke.

"Damn it." Ryan went to go to his brother but found himself shoved away.

"Leave him!" she snapped, anger fueling her powers. "Let him suffer before he dies or begs for death since Sebastian will claim his woman if he doesn't submit to him."

Glances between the brothers told that none of them liked what that sounded like when Kerry stepped into view, his eyes flashing in a way that said he'd heard everything

"I could forgive your hatred of our mother if there had been some reasonable effort behind it, but you hated her for petty jealousy that she took Da away from you and replaced you in the manor," he spoke quietly while motioning Mac and the rest to stay in place as he crossed closer.

"What I will never forgive you for is the knowing that you not only tore my family apart for your own reasons, but you put hands on my brother, you used magic to hurt your own grandson!" Kerry saw her eyes slit and knew the risks but his anger was too huge.

Kathleen rolled her eyes. "Kerry, let all that go and accept this is a better path," she urged, shrugging. "Besides, for all your powers you still couldn't defeat me."

"I know," he agreed, stepping back slightly to look toward the gate. "I wasn't planning on it, Grandmother. I was planning on leaving that up to her."

Confused, Kathleen followed her eldest grandson's extended arm to look at the approaching, stooped and cloaked

figure and she began laughing. “Darling boys, you four would have more ability to stop me from killing this boy than calling in some crone.”

Lightning flashed in the distance as Kerry chuckled, feeling the power build as this new arrival got closer. “No, not a crone,” he smiled easily as he held out a hand that was accepted.

It was when the lightning flashed on the jade ring that Kathleen stepped back. Doubts turning to concern as the cloak was tossed back to reveal a rather tall, striking older woman who showed some age marks as she didn’t see the need to hide her wrinkles, long flowing reddish blond hair and sharp green eyes that flashed with power and restrained temper.

“Kathleen Murphy Fitzgerald, I believe you should recall our maternal grandmother Fiona Kerrigan.” Kerry saw the fear for a moment. “She’s less than pleased.”

Fiona stared hard at the opposing woman before moving easily and without aid to kneel next to Roarke, who had curled into a tight ball.

“You will never raise a hand to one of my grandsons again, Kathleen,” she spoke with a distinct accent while softly running a hand over her grandson’s hair. “You were spiteful and bitter as a girl and you haven’t changed, only grown more so, but to take that hatred out on mere lads is beyond even you.”

As she stood to confront her former childhood friend, Roarke seemed to grow still and she spoke without looking. “Ryan, stay by your brother. Mac, the pretty red-haired girl you brought with you is about to get in over her head as Kathleen’s canceling of the protection spells has allowed Sebastian access to the manor. Both she and the child are in danger.”

“What?” Mac blinked and quickly sought to get an image from Maggie but found himself blocked. “Damn. Kerry?”

Kerry was hesitant to break them up farther until Fiona shook her head. “You and Ian go with Mac back to the house, lad,” she replied easily. “I’ll help Ryan with your brother as soon as I deal with this.”

“Go,” Ryan jerked his head, seeing the concern in Mac, then just had to put in his usual sarcastic remark. “The brat would never forgive us if anything happened to Jessica.”

"Be careful and use your bleedin' head for once, Ry," Kerry urged, seeing that Ian had already broke into a run with Mac close behind. "Gram?"

Fiona waved his concern off as she looked at the other woman. "I knew from day one you despised Brenna, but I never thought your hatred would allow you to do what's been done."

"My power is still more," Kathleen started to sneer but stopped when the spell died.

"You've kept your strength and youth by using the same methods as that devil," Fiona countered, shaking her head sadly. "You tried to kill Roarke at birth to assure your power base and that's why you want him dead more than the others because Roarke, you believe, inherited that which grants the Fitzgerald clan long life and power, but all five of the boys have that," she replied, seeing the truth start to dawn on the woman. "Leave this place and never threaten these lads again, Kathleen, or next we meet I will remind you of why you shouldn't have caused harm to my kin."

Kathleen knew enough to know when things had turned against her and backed away, but not without a final word. "You haven't won, Fi," she said. "It takes five to form the Circle and if Roarke wants to save the girl he'll have to sacrifice his life, so either way, I win."

"Don't be too quick to claim victory," Fiona Kerrigan murmured as the other woman slowly vanished, allowing her to focus on her two grandsons. "Now, let's see about this."

Ryan had only been paying partial attention to the near altercation between his grandmothers since most of his attention had centered on his younger brother.

He had been quick to kneel next to him once Fiona had eased the spell but was hesitant to touch him fully since he could both see and feel the emotions he had been dealing with.

While the spell vanished, Roarke still fought both the visions and memories of his past.

"Hush now, lad," Fiona Kerrigan had been a hereditary witch since birth and had passed those powers to her daughter, and therefore a part of her grandsons abilities were also from her.

A vibrant, healthy woman in her late sixties, she still flowed with energy and power. Even though she was quite happy being

settled in Galway with her husband and spoiling her other grandchildren, it wasn't said she still didn't practice the Craft.

Easily kneeling on the grass next to the boys, she gently touched Roarke's forehead as he relived his youth.

"He was almost at peace with himself again and us," Ryan muttered, hating the pain he heard in the soft whimpers of his brother. "Can't you stop this?"

Fiona heard the unspoken pain and guilt in Ryan's tone and lightly touched his face as she once had done. "You can stop what he's feeling, my darling boy," she replied, seeing his look, and seeing so much of her own sweet Brenna in these two boys even though they resembled her son-in-law.

"Kerry or Mac or, hell even Ian, maybe, but he'd never let me," Ryan scoffed, nearly cringing under those sharp eyes. "We're not close, Gram."

"Which is why you hover when he's been sleeping or you hurt when he hurts?" Fiona shook her head. "Ryan, your Mum always said you were her most stubborn child and she was right, but it's time to get past this and start to heal, for the both of you."

Ryan looked at the older woman then slowly, hesitantly, let his fingers touch his brother's face and forced his own temper down when he felt the tears.

It had never been a secret that out of the five brothers, Ryan and Roarke had always had the strongest rivalry and it was hard after all the years, the sarcasm and bitterness between them to let go, but as Ryan knew, he made damn sure usually to know what his brother was into.

"Damn," he whispered, closing his eyes before reaching down to do the one thing he'd done only once in their lives.

He had been nine and Roarke seven the time he had dared his little brother to climb the apple tree in the back of their house even though he knew their mother had forbidden it since his brother had never been as strong then.

Ryan had climbed that tree all the time and knew the best branches to go up so he'd done so easily and was high up when he dared his brother to do the same. Knowing he wouldn't be able to, but not counting on him getting halfway up before a

branch he knew was weak did break and Roarke fell to the ground.

To this day at times, he could recall hearing his brother's shout as he fell and landed, breaking his arm and three ribs. Ryan also recalled getting back to the ground himself quickly while screaming for his parents then holding his brother still in his arms so he wouldn't hurt anymore.

"Brenna told her father and me later that when she and Toryn got outside you were holding your little brother and rocking as she often did," Fiona spoke as if knowing what her grandson was thinking. "You were always the one who needed to hide the emotions away, but you did it more with Roarke."

Ryan sighed, feeling his brother go rigid as he held him but ignored it to focus on him. "It's okay, brat. Push past it and come back," he spoke firmly but knew when his brother tried to curl tighter that Kathleen Fitzgerald's spell had done more damage than they thought.

Muttering under his breath, Ryan reached for both the obsidian stone and the Trinity medallion his brother wore, and closed his fingers tight around them while keeping his hand closed over Roarke's hand.

"C'mon, Roarke, open your eyes and listen to me." He tightened his grip on the boy and silently wondered how this had landed on him.

Roarke's labored breathing had started to level off but his body was still rigid and his eyes closed tightly.

Not knowing what to say to make this better or even if any of them even could, Ryan just held his brother tighter and said the only thing he could think of.

"I'm sorry," he whispered, unaware of opening powers he rarely used as he recalled what it had been like that day in the garden. "None of us can take it away or say we know what it feels like. Only Jess can say that to some extent but what you're seeing now isn't real, Roarke. It's just some bitter old woman's attempt at hurting you and I won't let that happen to you or us."

Letting the shields down, Ryan held his brother tighter and took the waves of emotion and pain into himself and off his brother. Unlike the little bits that Kerry or even Mac may have



picked up on earlier, Ryan received the full versions and fought down his temper and own rolling stomach.

“Easy does it, lad,” Fiona knew the dangers of this act for Ryan since he had rarely done this like Kerry or Mac had.

“I’m tired of seeing him scared,” he gritted, feeling the pain take a toll but also feeling his brother’s body relaxing, but hearing the soft hidden sobs of a child. “You’re still safe, brat. Just let it go. I’m here.”

Roarke’s mind and body slowly felt the attacks easing but was confused for a short while until finally his tired, worn thoughts recognized his brother’s voice even though it was softer than he normally used.

As if waking from a stabbing nightmare, his body jerked upright and felt the strong arms holding him but instead of fighting as he had trained himself to do since childhood, Roarke’s arms slowly, lightly, tentatively slid around to hold on; just needing that connection for a time.

“God, Ry. It still hurts,” he finally spoke, voice quiet and fighting to bury the sobs that wanted to escape, though he knew his brother was never going to let him live this down. “Still makes me want to die.”

Eyes sharpening, Ryan remembered what Kerry had warned about using his head before speaking and bit his tongue. “No you don’t because you’re not a coward,” he did finally say. “Let it out, Roarke, but if you ever tell the others I did this I will hurt you, brat.”

Shifting his eyes to lock on his older brother’s, Roarke didn’t see the sarcasm to match the tone. He saw the pain and concern in them and felt the shame burn that, out of all of them, Ryan knew it all. “I never wanted you to...” he started to push back and was surprised when Ryan’s grip tightened.

“It wasn’t your fault and we’ll cope with it after all this is settled,” Ryan told him, holding his eyes and letting his brother make the next step.

Realizing what his brother was offering made Roarke blink but before he could take that step something else hit him. “Jessica,” he whispered, frowning. “Ry, what’s happening?”

"Sebastian's in the house, Roarke," his brother replied slowly, knowing he wasn't ready to face this yet. "Kathleen's spell that broke the barriers allowed him access and he's..."

"He'll go after her to get to me," Roarke tried to stand quickly but fell back then felt a gentle hand on his shoulder. "Who?!"

Fiona knew that this hadn't been fully settled between the brothers but a gap had been closed. Now it was time to deal with the first hurdle. "Sebastian will barter the child's life for your own, lad."

Staring at the older woman, Roarke struggled for a moment then seemed to relax as he allowed Ryan to help him stand. "Gram."

"Ah, you two were always the charmers," Fiona reached up to lightly pat his cheek and in doing so took the rest of the pain and angst. "Does an old Irish woman's heart good to see her five favorite grandsons in one place for a change. It takes too many seeing stones to keep track of just you two."

"Old woman my butt, bet you could still handle us," Ryan rolled his eyes, finally having the chance to lightly kiss her cheek.

"Oh, that goes without saying, my lad," she smiled then grew serious as she centered on Roarke. "You're his target. What will you wager?"

Roarke knew what that meant as he tried to feel for his friend but got only static. "It's me he wants. I won't let him touch her."

"You die or surrender to him, and what they gave is wasted," Ryan went to grab his arm but stopped suddenly when his brother looked at him with pained eyes. "Brat, don't do this."

"I let Mum and Da die because of me, Ry. I won't let him take anything else," Roarke looked at the stone he was holding as he made a choice. "Trust me for once to do what's right."

As he walked away into the night back toward the manor and his destiny, Ryan swore under his breath. "He'll let the bastard kill him to save her."

"To save you all will be his risk," Fiona corrected, taking his arm. "What your brother faces will require all of you to be

there to support him for the choice he makes may cost him both life and soul before it's over."

"No, because we failed to protect him before, we aren't failing this time," Ryan vowed, knowing he'd give anything to protect his family if it meant not making the same mistakes he had as a youth. He didn't plan to lose his brother like he had Annie.

With a smile, Fiona waved a hand to take them back to the manor and to the danger that waits.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

Jessica Hadley stirred restlessly, uneasy as she woke up alone.

Looking around she saw she was still in Roarke's room but he didn't seem to be there. "Roarke?" she called, thinking maybe he'd stepped into the bathroom or something.

Standing slowly to avoid the dizziness that came often when she was hurt, she looked when the door opened and her friend entered.

"You keep disappearing on me and I'm going to have Cam or your brothers put a tracker on you," she told him with a grin, putting off the sudden chill to being tired and still hurt.

"I couldn't sleep," Roarke replied, shrugging as he neared the bed. "Decided to walk the house for awhile to see if that helped."

Knowing her friend could often be ill at ease that didn't sound strange, yet for some reason Jessica was ill at ease the closer he got.

"I was hoping you'd be awake when I got back," letting his finger trace her jaw, Roarke slowly closed the distance between them until he was next to the girl.

Yawning again, she looked closer but frowned a little when their link seemed dull. "You alright, luv?" she asked, wanting a little space when his arm slid around her waist. "Roarke?"

The strength in his arm felt wrong to her but her thoughts were going fuzzy and they didn't clear again until she felt the pressure of the mattress as she was eased back down.

"No, I...I need up," she shook her head to clear it but something now seemed very wrong. "Roarke, let go."

"Do you know how easy it is to manipulate those boys when it's really needed?" the words spoke from her friend's body, yet the voice wasn't Roarke's soft lilting Irish tone any longer. "Much less how easy it is to get past your own shields when hurt?"

Jessica's eyes shot up and saw the image shimmering and blinking between the one she saw and reality. "Shit," she hissed, realizing the truth and trying to use what strength or power she had to fight back.

"Ta-ta, young lady, be still now." Sebastian had been expecting that, easily restraining her as he waved a hand over her.

Normally able to resist such spells, her wounds had weakened her to the point where his anti-resistance spell made her body go limp under him.

"That's much better," He nodded, sitting back to look over his latest prize and seeing her inner struggle. "No use fighting, child. You've been too weak and concerned over the boy to allow your powers to build back up so until I release the spell, you will do whatever I wish you to and since all of Toryn's sons are busy elsewhere, I don't think we'll be disturbed right away."

Laying a smooth hand on her face, the ageless sorcerer smiled as he slowly stroked it down her body. "Young Roarke chooses his mate well," he surmised, nodding to himself, and with a wave of his hand, the nightshirt she wore opened. "Been several centuries since I allowed myself the pleasure of a slave, but I may make an exception in this case even though I promised Kathleen I would make the boy that."

The fear that was building tripled over that comment yet she still couldn't summon the strength to fight the spell, but as his finger slowly touched her skin did manage to scream.

“Enough!” Sebastian snapped, capturing her jaw in his hand to hold it closed while running his finger across her lips and they seemed to seal. “This will keep you silent like a good slave until I wish you speak.”

Bitterly struggling, she knew what was happening even as the bedroom door slammed open.

“Leave her alone, devil!” Maggie Cavanaugh snapped, hoping to buy time for Mac to return but wasn’t expecting the power that launched her back out of the room and halfway down the hall.

“Away little witch and you may survive this,” Sebastian laughed at the attempt as he sealed the room until he was ready.

Maggie struggled to her feet, ignoring the blood she felt from her head as panic nearly set in. Knowing without Mac or his brothers to deal with the warlock, she wasn’t sure what to do to help when... “The books, there has to be something in them,” she ran back to Mac’s room for both Books of Shadow and hoped there was an answer in them.

“Now, where were we?” he looked down curiously. “Did you know that even while I was banished I was able to see what my enemies were doing as they grew to manhood? I saw what Kathleen had done to the boy,” he stroked her face, leaning closer and slowly running his tongue down her neck. “Shall I show you?” he asked, rubbing a hand across her bare stomach before cupping her breast. “You will moan for me, girl.”

Struggling against his power, Jessica tried to mentally get help but found that blocked as well as his will grew, and she heard the small moan escape her sealed lips.

“Good,” he nodded, squeezing harder as he sat back. “Sit up and kiss me, slave,” he ordered, keeping a mental eye to how Kathleen was faring so he knew how much time he had. “Obey me or when I capture him, I will rape your friend like those peasants in Mayo couldn’t have dreamed of.”

Between fear for Roarke and the spell, she didn’t have much chance of fighting the order as she was forced to move, sitting up and slowly kissing the evil warlock as slightly as possible but wincing as his fingers dug into her neck.

"No. Kiss me as you would Fitzgerald," Sebastian ordered, fingers squeezing her neck until he felt her mouth on his and his spell eased enough to let it open to kiss him. "Again, slave."

His mouth was harsh as it pressed against hers but his will won and she closed her eyes against the tears while being forced to kiss him as she had wanted to do Roarke.

Growling, Sebastian pulled the limp girl against him as his mouth plundered and his hands and mind groped.

"It's been too long since I had a slave," he groaned, rubbing his mouth over her neck as he bit. "Scream for him, girl," he ordered. "Scream for Fitzgerald as you see him in your mind."

Trying to fight, Jessica was powerless as he forced the image into her thoughts and when she screamed this time, it was Roarke's name.

"Good, now moan for him." He ordered, tearing one bra strap to free the cup so he could ravage the breast and hear her moan. "Moan, slave and hold onto me."

As he did this, Sebastian shoved her back on the bed and easily hovered over her. "Now, move slave," he ordered, slapping her face. "Keep your eyes open at all times and squirm, girl."

Staring up into the burning eyes of the warlock, she felt her body move on the bed as he used his powers to feel, stroke, and poke.

Hovering an inch above the helpless girl, Sebastian lifted a finger then placed it in her mouth. "Suck and squirm my little slave," he murmured, licking his lips as he forced her to draw his finger into her mouth and suck on it. "Good, slave. Now, let's see what else you do so well."

Sebastian took the finger from her mouth, which instantly resealed, and held it up so she could see, then positioned it and shoved it forward, and her body seemed to buck as she felt the finger between her legs and her scream was nothing but a dull moan.

"Nice," he crooned, moving his finger around so it would feel in her. "Now, grab the finger you feel," he ordered her, seeing her hands move as if to grasp a hand between her legs but there was nothing. "Grab at it, on your knees and get it."

Trying to fight, she was unable as her body was forced on her knees on the bed while her hands struggled between her legs to get the finger she could feel but wasn't there.

"That's very good," Sebastian smiled, pleased at this. "Now, let's see how much Toryn's favorite son is willing to give for his whore,," he sneered, sitting back at the bedside, but his hand waved and her eyes went dark. "You will not fight, you will not speak," he whispered against her ear, wrapping his hand in her hair. "Let us go greet the boys."

Slamming through the front door with more panic than even he had thought possible, Mac felt the evil but he also felt fear and anger.

Hearing all this commotion had caused Deirdre to come from her room. "What is all this noise, boyos?" she demanded, tightening her robe.

"Mac, wait for us!" Ian shouted but knew it was useless as he quickly turned to the housekeeper. "Go someplace safe that isn't in this house," he urged, hurrying up the steps after his brother when he found himself hurled back down. "Damn!"

Before Deirdre could go to the youth, Kerry had her arm. "Go to the guest house and stay there until it's over and keep the Mavericks back too," he ordered her, turning to see his brother was back on his feet and mad.

Looking up the steps, Kerry felt the power radiating back at him like a slap but he closed his eyes. "Not in my house," he vowed, lashing out a hand that had windows rattling. "Find Mac. I'll go for Jessica."

Ian just nodded and was off, dodging the black tendrils that felt like ice when one touched his leg. "Light of good versus dark of evil, your power holds no sway here or on me so back off."

Maggie had gotten back to Mac's room just in time to hear the snarls. Slamming the door against whatever was out there, she lunged for the books but didn't have a clue what to look for.

Hearing the door come down, she screamed even before she saw the dog. It was normal-looking except for the blood red eyes and foaming mouth.

"I'm not lunch, Fido," she snapped, using powers she hadn't in years, and soon came to see they were too weak to deal with magic on this level. "Oh, bloody hell," she whispered, looking for a weapon even as the dog jumped for her.

Flame shot from the door, striking the animal in mid-jump and turning it to ash on the floor a mere few inches from her.

Looking through the fingers she had covered her eyes with, Maggie blinked, then threw herself across the room into Mac's arms. "God, I thought that was it and my powers didn't hurt it and I didn't know if you'd get back in time and..."

"I know, luv." Mac let the woman ramble as his arms tightened around her. "I shouldn't have left you and..."

"Jessica!" Maggie's eyes shot to his, panic clear. "Mac, he's here and he threw me out of her room and I think he's going to..." she broke off with a sob as for the first time her fear showed. "Mac, I think he's going to rape her."

Swallowing the emotion that brought, Mac eased her back and for the first time saw the blood. "You're bleeding, Mary Margaret."

"Damn devil tossed me down the hall when he shut me out," she huffed, waving away her head wound to pull him to the bed to show him the books. "Your Da left this one. The answers to this are in here, Mac, but I don't know where."

"They were given to you so it'll be you who finds it, luv," He knew that even as he moved a hand through her red hair to find the wound and stop the blood. "God, Maggie. You could have cracked your skull."

Looking up at him, she smiled to reassure him. "Too thickheaded for that, Doc, and we need to stop him before..." she stopped as Mac took her face in both hands as he knelt down.

"I don't want you hurt," he told her, not yet willing to admit why that was important to him yet.

"I'm fine, Mac," she promised but sensed his worry, and sat the book down long enough to ease into his arms, needing it as much as he did. "So long as you're here I'm safe."

Nodding, he gently brushed a kiss over her mouth. "Always, though I'm not often good at it," he promised as Ian skidded to a halt in the door. "This boy has timing down pat doesn't he?"



“Well, you did say he’s an actor,” Maggie laughed shakily as she reached for the books again. “Go, Doc. I’ll find you an answer.”

Hoping it was that simple, Mac saw his youngest brother’s concern. “Call me when you do. Don’t come near us since Sebastian will know he can use you.”

Maggie already knew that as she settled down to try to a spell-finding spell but couldn’t figure out what would be needed in this instance, even as she felt the house shake. “Damn, what spell does it take to stall or put down a centuries old warlock?”

“A spell that may not yet have been written, Mary Margaret Cavanaugh, or one that the lads will have to create,” a voice from the door had Maggie looking to see a rather small but spry-looking older man with silvery blond hair and twinkling blue eyes looking at her. “Or one that may just need a little modern tweaking.”

“Does everyone know my given name?” Maggie complained, not getting any bad feelings from this grandfatherly looking man as he laughed.

“I pick up a thing here or there but don’t tell my wife as she’s not fond when I do that,” he came over to plop down next to her just as easily as she’d seen Ian do downstairs. “Name’s Lorcan, lass, Lorcan Kerrigan and we have a task ahead of us to put some walls ahead of that wily devil so the lads can do what must be done.”

Blinking at him, Maggie decided to wait for answers later then settled down to business.

Mac saw Ian was bleeding from the hand but sensed now wasn’t the time to ask about it as they ran back down the hall to the other side of the house when a violent tremor shook the whole manor and nearly knocked them to the ground.

“Is that an earthquake or temper?” Ian questioned, grabbing the wall to stay upright but feeling the same evil as he had in Dublin. “He’s here.”

“Yeah and I’m sure there are generations of our kin rolling in their graves that Sebastian’s in this house, which is supposed to be protected,” Mac sighed, rounding the corner and diving back to shove Ian to the floor just as a wall of flame shot at them.

"I hope Kerry's insurance is up to date," he muttered after seeing the damage.

Ian had slid forward to peek around and blinked. "Kerry!" he shouted, seeing his brother in an all out power war with a smirking evil witch.

"Get out!" Kerry snapped without sparing either brother a look as he concentrated in a battle that was too one-sided.

He had known that when he saw the upper hand that their enemy had on them.

Sebastian's power was great when he focused or at certain times, but he also had the edge of a hostage that he knew that none of them would want to harm as he kept his hand wrapped tightly in Jessica Hadley's hair, using her as a shield.

"Oh, damn it to hell and back," Mac groaned on seeing this turn of events. "We're screwed."

"Why isn't she fighting?" Ian asked, not liking how pale the girl was.

Wondering about that, Mac looked and swore violently. "He's cast a spell on her. She can't fight him and..." he drew off as he saw what else their friend had had done to her. "Kerry! We need more space!"

"Well, almost all the involved parties are here," Sebastian launched another wave toward Kerry and this time the blow hit him in the shoulder. "A pity your grandmother couldn't keep your attention longer. I really wasn't done enjoying my new slave, was I my dear?" he spoke as he pressed a kiss into the girl's neck.

A shot of light and power struck from the other side as Ryan entered the hall while Mac got to Kerry's side. "Let her go, Sebastian."

"Do you regret not taking my offer now, Ryan?" Sebastian countered, tightening his grip on the still girl. "Giving up all this?"

Rolling his eyes, Ryan snorted. "What? Molesting a girl you had to use a spell to control because you know damn good and well she could fry your ass if you didn't? No, thanks, I can find my own women."

“Like young Annie?” Sebastian taunted, pulling Jessica tighter against him when he saw the boy’s hand flash. “Hurt me, and I will hurt her. Where’s your brother, boys?”

“If he’s smart, he’s halfway back to America,” Ryan shot back, needing his ever useful sarcasm to fight down the fear and anger he had right then.

Ian looked between them, not sure what would happen, when he saw Mac close his eyes.

“Your Family book says each one of the Circle must break and reform his own,” Maggie was tearing through pages while her companion snooped through Mac’s dresser. “There is no one spell for this, Mac.”

“It makes sense in a bad way,” Mac spoke back to her silently, while sharing that with his brothers. “For the Circle to fully form, each point must prove his strength and worth so each would react differently to the threat and since this is Roarke’s fight then...”

“Then it must be Roarke who finds his path,” Kerry finished, wincing as his arm still throbbed from the blow.

Maggie closed the book slowly as it dawned on her. “He’ll offer her life for his,” she realized, looking up to see the spry little man frowning at a piece of Mac’s underwear. “Oh, and by the way, Doc? For someone so level-headed, you have some rather interesting underwear.”

“What?” Mac nearly choked as he ducked another blow from the wizard, as he was distracted. “Mary Margaret, what the bloody hell are you doing?”

“Not me, Mac,” she laughed. “The little old leprechaun that’s been helping me is going through your dresser.”

The four brothers exchanged looks in between blasts and Mac simmered. “Just stay in my room, Maggie.”

“I’m getting bored, lads,” Sebastian sighed, beginning to walk away from them toward the steps but always keeping Jessica in front of him. “I know the lad’s a coward but I really do have an offer for him.”

“What is it, Sebastian?” Roarke spoke from the bottom of the steps, his voice hallow as he looked up.

His blood had gone to ice upon seeing Jessica in Sebastian’s grasp, but his temper sizzled as he fought to see past the shields

and saw the spell that held her, blinded her and... he couldn't look further right then.

"Ah, there's the boy I'm looking for," smiling, Sebastian focused his attention on him as he pulled the girl's head up. "You can't see him but your friend has arrived."

"Let her go, Sebastian. Jess has no part in this," Roarke struggled to look into this man's eyes even though he could still feel his friend, deep through the spell, and that was what he needed. "It's me you've been wanting for fifteen years and here I am."

Mac watched this grimly, wondering if they could catch the older man unaware, when Ryan laid a hand on his shoulder.

"Let the brat handle it," he seemed grim as he looked on. "Either way, it's up to him, but you may want to brush up on your medical skills."

Sebastian dragged Jessica down the steps with him but stopped on the first landing, shifting his gaze both up and down. "Kerry, if you or they try anything, I will rip her heart out," he warned as if knowing what his foes above him were thinking. "Before I forget, Patrick—that interesting little reporter has guts but no brains. Teach your woman better before we meet."

"You son of a ..." Mac's eyes had gone to slits but Kerry shoved him back, not liking that he couldn't feel his brother.

"Sebastian!" Roarke's eyes flashed and little blue lights danced on his fingers as he shot it toward the wizard. "No games! Release her and face me or say your peace!"

Ian stared as his brother's attack came within an inch of Jessica. "What's he doing?"

None of the brothers had an answer as Sebastian narrowed his gaze at the black haired man. "You take great chances with your woman, Roarke."

"Kill her, kill me. In the end, we all die, so what's the difference?" He countered as he struggled to maintain a poker face, keeping Kerry out of his head but hooking a link to Jessica just once. "You said you had an offer, so make it."

Surprised by the tone and attitude, Sebastian finally nodded. "It's quite simple. Even though I was looking forward to having this cow as my slave, I will release her if you surrender to my will," he explained easily, holding Jessica's head up by the hair

as he cupped her chin. "She's very beautiful, Roarke. Have you had the chance yet to taste her?"

A low rumbling could be heard but his face didn't change expressions as he locked eyes with the man responsible for his parents' deaths. "And if I refuse?"

"Why, I keep her until I grow bored and kill her," Sebastian laughed. "Another death for you to live with, knowing you could have spared her if you hadn't been so selfish. Just like you could have spared your parents if..."

"No, you won't use that on me," Roarke replied firmly, swallowing the sour taste in his mouth. "Being here, dealing with you, them, things since then have let me see that I wasn't the cause of my parents' deaths. You and my grandmother were. Not me."

The wizard seemed to consider, looking hard down at this boy. He'd been expecting to see some emotion by now from him yet there was nothing but an icy calmness.

"So you're willing to give this one to my mercies?" he taunted, letting his hand slide down to part the torn shirt. "My demons and I could enjoy her for a long time."

"No," Roarke closed his eyes finally, having slid his hand behind him out of sight slowly. "You won't."

Sebastian smiled, pleased. "So you will surrender to me."

"Didn't say that either," Roarke returned, bringing his hand back into the open to show the glowing orb. "I'd see her dead myself before that happens."

"Roarke!" Kerry snapped, starting to move but a firm hand gripped his shoulder, and he spun to see Ryan's eyes were smoky and he'd removed something from his jacket.

"You wouldn't try that while I'm holding her, boy," Sebastian sneered, tightening his grip on her. "Speak, girl. Beg him for your life."

Even though the spell blinded her, Jessica had a good idea what was happening and what would happen as she remained in his power. She knew what Sebastian wanted her to say but in his doubt, his spell had weakened slightly that she could fight it some.

She couldn't see her friend, but felt his thoughts weakly and his emotions as she fought against the words to say what she needed to. "I...I love you."

"I know that, *a gra*," Roarke sighed, adding in a whisper he hoped she could hear. "I'm sorry."

His hand was a flash as the orb flew up the steps, then things seemed to go into slow motion.

"Shit!" Mac snapped, not believing this was happening even as he saw Ryan smile grimly.

"No!" Sebastian, in a panic, yanked the girl to one side more to shield him when a whistle sounded from above them.

Ryan tossed what he had pulled from his jacket out in a careless toss down to his brother, even as the ball of light exploded in front of Sebastian, blinding him. "One shot, brat and don't miss," he called in what he hoped was a calm voice, despite the hammering in his chest.

The item tossed landed perfectly in Roarke's hand to which he quickly aimed and cocked the 9mm Walther handgun. "Sebastian!" he snapped, eyes going black with both temper and power. "Steel and magic routed you once when my father stabbed you with the pocketknife he had, tiny magic then, but a 9mm parabellum round cast in magic is a hell of a lot more effective these days."

The gun aimed and fired once, striking Jessica once in the upper chest and passing through to hit the wizard who, once struck, screamed as if struck by acid and released his grip on Jessica to grab his chest and face.

"Jessica!" Ian saw the girl fall forward but before any of them could move, Roarke was there.

Catching her firmly in his arms, Roarke still held the gun firmly as Sebastian writhed on the landing. "Born of the Five, to the Five I belong and will swear my blood and that of my kin on it and the Circle that will come," he chanted, eyes blazing now as the wizard snarled up at him. "You lose and don't ever touch what is mine because this time I'll fight for them."

"There are four more times to lose, little boy!" Sebastian screamed as he began to dissipate, wounds showing as burns. "You won a small battle this day but did you win by selling your soul to beat me, and will she ever recover?"

With those words ringing, the wizard vanished and the house was again silent.

"Guess I'll cross that bridge when it comes," Roarke finally whispered, then was on his knees with Jessica leaning against his chest. "Jessie?"

Mac had shrugged Ryan off to take the steps two at a time to get to the first landing, seeing the blood spreading rapidly. "Ian, run and find Cam's medic!" he snapped, not looking at his brother, but anger was plain. "You shot her just to get to him!"

"I know what I did," Roarke was quiet, running his hand over the girl's pale, clammy face and felt it. "His spells still..."

"You should have thought of that before you shot her," Mac saw both holes and knew she was losing blood too fast.

Kerry and Ryan had gotten there by then and had taken in the grim scene. "Mac, a little less lecturing would be nice," Kerry saw the pain his brother was in but also knew he didn't have the strength to remove the spell, so he knelt down to lightly run a hand over their friend's head.

"Remove the evil that has been done to taint this child," he spoke the spell quietly and felt it lift instantly even before Jessica jerked against Roarke's hold.

Her eyes snapped open, blinked rapidly then started looking around even as pain seared, and she began gasping.

"Be quiet, luv, and just lay still," Mac urged, hearing Peter Daniels arrive in the house. "Single GSW, in and out, and she's losing blood. Probably other wounds but we deal with this first."

Peter stared hard. "How the hell did she get shot?" he demanded, knowing Cam wasn't going to like this.

"Later, just help me get her stable," Mac shot his brother a look that could have killed and probably would have if Maggie hadn't come tearing down the steps at him.

"Mac!" she stopped when she saw the blood and felt the tension between the brothers. "My God, what do ye...?"

Shaking his head, he mentally told the reporter what he would need then scowled. "Give her to me, Roarke."

Peter had a good hunch on what happened from the way their mystic was yelling, but knew there had to be a reason.

"I can..." Roarke didn't want to let go but felt Kerry ease him away from the girl. "Kerry, I had a reason..."

"I know, but right now let Mac have her and go get cleaned up," Kerry urged, looking at Ryan, who merely nodded his understanding.

Watching as Peter helped Mac carry Jessica back upstairs with Kerry following, Roarke looked at his bloodstained hands before heading downstairs without a word to anyone.

"Why would he shoot her, Ryan?" Ian felt dumbfounded by this. "I thought he loved her."

"He does, kid," Ryan sighed, scrubbing his face. "Mac's thinking like Mac right now and not asking what he'd have done if little Maggie had been in the same position."

A snort behind him caused him to see the aforementioned woman coming back up with a bag, towels and Deirdre. "Well, I'd like to think Mac wouldn't shoot me just to prove a point to some evil witch."

"Roarke shooting Jessica was the only way Sebastian was going to let go and they both knew it," he replied, hearing glass breaking from downstairs. "Go help big brother, Maggie. I have to go be big brother again myself."

Pausing, she looked down at the black haired gambler. "I didn't think you liked doing that."

"I don't, luv," Ryan returned, motioning to Ian to come with him as he tracked the noise to the living room where the mirror above the fireplace was now shattered. "Well, I'm not sure if letting Mac pull glass outta you is a bright plan right now."

Roarke didn't move as Ryan stepped up behind him to see him staring at his hands, which were now bleeding from being put through the mirror. "Did I have another option?" he whispered. "If we had fought him, he'd have killed her or done so much worse than he did."

"It's alright, brat," Ryan assured him, knowing it wasn't getting through as he put his hand on the shaking shoulder, and then what happened took them all by surprise.

All the emotion, the pain and fear that he had buried that night suddenly came out as Roarke whirled at the touch, but instead of lashing out as both really Ryan and Ian had expected him to, he latched onto his brother like he had never before and all the walls crashed at once.



"I'd never hurt her, Ry," he whispered, gripping harder as his body was suddenly overtaken with waves of trembling. "I... just..."

Ryan closed his eyes as he felt the emotions swamping his brother sitting on the sofa, and just gave in and pulled him fully into his arms to let him release all the anger, the fears but when the sobs from the past began, he sent Ian out with a sharp look.

"Find where Deirdre hides the hard liquor," he told him, wanting a drink and figuring one couldn't hurt his brother.

As Ian darted out, Ryan sat back and stayed silent. Figuring what his brother needed was to vent more than anything right then.

By the time the youngest of the Fitzgeralds returned with what appeared to be an ancient bottle of something and some glasses, Roarke had become mostly silent except his breathing was labored.

"Okay, before we get you cleaned up and even try to approach Mac, let's have some of this," Ryan spoke with his usual tone, taking the bottle as his eyebrows shot up. "Where'd you find this?"

"It was in a locked cabinet in the kitchen," Ian shrugged, sitting on the coffee table. "Since it was locked I figured there had to be something good inside."

Turning the bottle over in his hands, Ryan recognized it as a bottle of whiskey his father had kept.

"Ah! A good stiff drink is just what this situation calls for," the wiry silver haired Irishman who had been upstairs with Maggie announced cheerfully as he entered the room, clapping his hands. "Good year this bottle was. Be a good boy, Ryan, and pour us some drinks."

Ian blinked at the whirlwind that was the little man even as he saw Roarke pull back at the new voice, wiping his face quickly.

"Don't want any of..." he started to object when the older man plopped down on the sofa on his other side and laid a hand, slightly weathered with age, on his leg.

"It's the height of bad manners when any true Irishman refuses to drink with kin, boyo." His eyes bright as he grinned, took the glass, and held it up to the light. "Especially when that

kin is your own grandfather and the drink is an excellent aged whiskey.”

Ryan smiled into his own glass, knowing he’d be answering questions until hell froze over from Ian over this. “One drink, Roarke. It’ll settle things a bit.”

He poured some of the amber liquid into a glass, then while Lorcan Kerrigan kept Roarke’s attention, he shifted his wrist slightly. “Drink up, then we’ll go see if I should toss Mac outta the house.”

“You...” Ian began when a sharp kick shut him up then he blinked at the glass that was shoved into his hands. “I’ve never really...”

Lorcan shook his head, his full thick mane of silvery blond hair moving. “Damn bloody shame too, lad. I had me first drink at the age of two at my own sainted grandpa’s knee.”

Hesitating, Ian caught Ryan’s shrug that meant he might as well, and saw that Roarke had downed the single drink without a wince, so he did the same and then saw stars.

“Should probably have warned the lad this is one hundred fifty year old stuff and will kick like a mule,” Lorcan mused, holding his glass out for a refill.

Ryan shot his grandfather a sour look, then looked to see that Roarke was staying still as the combo of the liquor and the sleeping spell he’d slipped into it started to work, which allowed him to grab Ian before he fell forward.

“Just breathe through it, kid,” he laughed, gently slapping his baby brother on the back until he stopped choking.

“Lorcan!” the sharp accusing tone of his wife had the wiry little man sitting up straight.

Fiona entered the room and took in the sight with one look. “Are we trying to get our grandsons drunk on purpose?”

“Now, Fi, this isn’t what it appears.” He began soothingly but stayed sitting as one brow rose. “It’s a man’s right to have a drink with...”

“I told Ian to get the liquor, Gram,” Ryan broke in once Ian was breathing again. “Though Ian drinking it wasn’t exactly in the cards.”

Shaking her head at both her husband and the elder of her present grandsons, Fiona walked over to look at Roarke who had fallen asleep still sitting up. "This will hurt him more."

"We'll see," Ryan spoke quietly, downing his second drink easily then rising to his feet to pull his brother up with him. "Right now, all the brat needs is to sleep this off."

Ian, still unsure about all this, decided to help his brother get Roarke upstairs. "You think it'll be that easy?"

"I make a good chunk of my living off weighing the odds, Ian," Ryan had just shifted to lift his sleeping brother up over his shoulders to go upstairs. "I never make a wager I don't think I can win, lad."

As the boys left the living room, Lorcan Kerrigan lost some of his cheer as he reached for the whiskey bottle again. "They will suffer so much before this is over."

"Aye, my heart, I fear you're correct," Fiona sat on the sofa with a sigh, waving a hand toward the bottle to bring it to her. "I think you've had enough of this and it can be put to use elsewhere," she decided, standing to go see to her other boys. "Don't be annoying to those lads outside."

Lorcan laughed as his wife walked out silently and he sat back on the couch, wondering what else he could find interesting.

Maggie Cavanaugh had watched silently while Patrick 'Mac' Fitzgerald and Peter Daniels worked to stop the bleeding that was very close to costing Jessica Hadley her life.

Finally, after what seemed like hours, Peter stepped back. "If those stitches hold and she stays stable overnight then it looks good." He didn't add that it had better stay that way since they were out of blood to use as replacement.

"Damn bloody lucky that that bullet missed all vital organs and didn't do any muscle damage." Mac countered bitterly, slumping back on the floor and accepting the clean towel Maggie handed him.

"Was it luck or skill?" Kerry asked quietly from where he'd been standing by the window all through the operation.

Mac scowled as he got to his feet, temper still on the surface. "Roarke shot Jessica through the bloody chest, Kerry!"

he snapped, whirling. "None of us were expecting him to do that and he couldn't have known it wasn't a kill shot. No one's that good."

"Little brother is that good and I knew what he was planning," Ryan spoke from the door.

Having taken his brother to his old room and gotten him settled while Ian helped Deirdre wash some of the blood off and treat his hand where he'd slammed it into the mirror, Ryan had gone to change himself, then decided to check on the others.

"You knew he was planning on shooting her?" Mac was livid but Maggie's slim hand kept him still as his brother came into the room. "Do you have any idea the risk if I couldn't save her?" he demanded. "She can still die if infection sets in if I can't heal her totally."

"Roarke can heal that once he wakes up," Ryan shrugged, looking at the young woman to see she was pale under the blankets, and felt the low emotions that the painkillers and Mac's powers hadn't dulled. "He had reasons."

"He risked her life!" Mac shot back, all the recent events making his normally calm temper snap as he went nose to nose with his unusually calm brother. "It was plain stupid macho tricks. How do you think she'll feel if she wakes up to learn her so-called 'boyfriend' shot her?"

Maggie was watching this closely, knowing that with the tempers involved, this could get ugly, when Kerry finally stepped between his brothers.

"Relax, Mac," he urged, looking at Ryan. "You should have told us."

"If I had, one of you would have stopped it and Roarke needed it to go down like he planned it if he had any chance of pulling the lass out alive," he shrugged, running his hands through his long black hair as he wondered how to explain this.

Ryan walked around their parents' former suite, fingering a small photo on the master fireplace as he did so. "He figured out in the cemetery that he had to face Sebastian down and what he'd use against him. The question was how he could get the surprise on Sebastian without Jessica being hurt more."

"I'd guess shooting her worked," Mac snorted, turning to walk away when he suddenly felt himself yanked around.

“Go look at him and then tell me he isn’t hurting more by what he had to do,” Ryan shot back angrily. “All this pain, the guilt he’s had has tripled by knowing that he hurt this girl when he’d rather cut his own heart out, but do you think he’d have risked it if he hadn’t found a way to let her know it would happen?”

Several sets of eyes looked at the security expert warily, then Kerry sighed. “You were working against Sebastian’s spell on Jessica while his attention was centered on Roarke. That was how she was able to speak to him, but not what Sebastian wanted her to say.”

“Gold star for you, big brother, nice guess,” Ryan smirked; this night’s events had left him rawer than he had been in years. “I couldn’t break the full spell but did allow their link to come back enough that she could feel Roarke’s thoughts. He needed her to understand and trust that he could do it.”

“But will she when she wakes up?” Maggie had to ask, remembering what she had seen and the residual effects she’d picked up from Mac. “That thing hurt her so much, so will she be able to understand all that happened?”

This caused Ryan to frown at his older brothers. “How bad is it?”

“Physically, he molested her,” Mac sighed, suddenly too tired to argue. “Mentally, we’re not sure.”

“Sebastian’s cruel, so it’s a safe bet he hurt Jessica badly,” Kerry felt the mild tension and quickly ran his finger over her forehead to ease it. “Roarke fought him back once but it’s not over.”

Ryan rolled his eyes. “Yeah, we each have to go through this. Joy,” he muttered, and then glared when he felt his brother smack his head. “I wouldn’t.”

“While that’s true, we also have to do something else.” Kerry’s eyes were serious as he looked between his two brothers. “We need to recast our circle.”

Knowing what that meant, Mac looked at his left wrist and the small scar it held. A scar that shared by all five of them.

“It won’t matter if we’re not all on the same page,” Ryan slid an even look to Mac who finally nodded.

"I'm a doctor and healer so I jumped when I saw my brother shoot my friend. Sue me," he muttered, looking at Maggie. "Sure you don't want to skip that interview?"

Laughing slightly, Maggie just shook her head. "Nope, I'll stick it out just to see what other surprises you have," she looked when the door opened and her fingers closed on his arm. "There's that leprechaun I told you was digging in your dresser."

Mac's eyes narrowed dangerously as his grandfather laughed. "Didn't Gram teach you not to snoop?"

"Well, since you were always fond of it yourself as a lad, I thought it only fair," Lorcan returned, stepping up to smile down at Maggie. "Boy got me in so much trouble with his Gran it wasn't funny."

"Oh, did he now?" Maggie wasn't sure who this older man was but decided to play along.

Knowing it wouldn't take much prompting to get his grandfather talking, Mac cut in. "Mary Margaret Cavanaugh, meet Lorcan Kerrigan, our maternal grandfather," he introduced.

"I knew who the lass was, boyo," Lorcan rolled his eyes then winked at Maggie. "Boy's a bit slow, lass so you may have to..."

"Gramps, shut up!" Mac cut him off, seeing Ryan smirk and shooting his brother a look of warning. "Why are you here?"

Lorcan waved that away with a snort. "Your Gran is here so I thought I'd take the opportunity to see my grandsons and what all this fuss is about."

The agile older man could read his grandsons easily and felt the tension between them. "Now, you three take yourselves to bed and let those rowdy lads outside with the guns protect the house. Fi and I will see to the magics."

"No, I should redo the protection spell," Kerry sighed; smiling at the short look he got, which reminded him of his mother. "Alright, I'll check on Roarke and..."

"Lord but you lads got your Da's hard-head," Lorcan complained, shifting an exasperated look at Maggie. "My girl was stubborn as can be since she got that from Fi, but these five got that from Brenna and they also got Toryn's hard-head."

"Gee, thanks Gramps," Ryan scowled at him, grinning at the scowl he got in return. "These two can fight with you but

I've taken in way too much from Roarke tonight, so I'm crashing."

Kerry was about to say something when that simple comment sank in, but a look from his grandfather had him staying silent as Ryan left the room. "Ry's never been much of an empath."

"He hasn't been close enough to Roarke to be much help either," Mac muttered, wincing as he felt the mild slap.

"He's taken a lot tonight and you've both used too much power recently, so off to bed," Lorcan shooed as Peter left to report to his leader. "Off with you before Fi starts yelling at me."

Maggie couldn't help but be amused at the wiry little man trying to physically move two grown men who were both a good foot or so taller than he was.

"C'mon, Doc let's go," she urged, laughing. "Let's get you washed off and maybe I'll tell you a story," she offered, using the same bribe she often tried with one of her brother's children.

"I'd take her up on that if I wasn't so tired," Mac yawned, shifting a final look back at his patient to be sure she was resting well before leaving the room.

Leaving Mac in Maggie's hands, Kerry paused to look at his grandfather. "I can't thank either of you enough for coming or..."

"You're of our blood, Kerry," Fiona spoke from beside him as she had come from checking on Ian. "You only had to ask sooner."

Knowing this, Kerry nodded as he finally took his grandmother warmly into his arms, but something nagged him. "Did you... I mean..."

"Kathleen's power was strong back then, plus the grief of losing Brenna," Fiona had guessed what he was going to ask as she brushed a hand over his light hair. "Lorcan and I had no idea what she had done or what was being done to your brother."

Lorcan Kerrigan's light blue eyes seemed to darken in temper at that. "Had we known, that boy wouldn't have spent a single night in that place," he vowed, still angry over the abuse his grandson suffered and still suffered. "You should have let me deal with that treacherous..."

“Lorcan, that’s enough,” Fiona’s tone was mild but her eyes held a warning that she waited until Kerry had gone down the hall to speak of. “We don’t have to like or approve of what’s happened, but Kathleen Fitzgerald is still their grandmother.”

Huffing a little at that, he shook his head. “Maybe, but I doubt if she’s done yet.”

“I fear you’re right,” Fiona sighed, feeling the house settle for the night.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

The singing of his mother and his father’s laugh is what Roarke Fitzgerald woke up to, sitting up quickly and falling back as his head pounded.

Having been on the receiving end of hangovers, tranquilizers and sleeping aids, Roarke knew which one he’d been given and swore to make Ryan hurt the next time he saw him.

Looking around, he was surprised to see he was in his old room, but it was clear that the remodeling in here had been sparse. Mainly updated furniture, curtains, etc., but the memories still were clear if he thought about them.

Glancing at the clock told Roarke it was barely dawn so he doubted if any of his brothers were up yet, and a part of him wasn’t sure if he was ready to see them. But it was something else that drew his attention and fear.

“Calm her down, Mac,” Ryan was short-tempered since he hated being woken up at any time and especially if it was before the sun was even up fully.

“Kind of what I’m trying to do,” Mac shot back, sitting next to Jessica as she twisted in her sleep.

The girl had begun to move in her sleep an hour before and by the time Peter thought to get help, her fears had grown to the point where Mac was having a hard time.



“Her mind isn’t always open so calming her down isn’t like it is with someone else,” Mac complained, feeling her panic and pain grow as she struggled past the most recent memories. “New plan, mates?”

“She’s scared,” Roarke spoke quietly from the door, not stepping in since he didn’t want to scare his friend more with any fighting. “Jess gets like this when hurt real badly.”

Kerry looked between them, sensing the same thing but also sensed his brother’s unease again. “She’s closed herself off to us.”

“She needs you to do for her what she did for you after Athens,” Ryan spoke directly to his brother, seeing his eyes jerk.

“How did you...?” Roarke stared hard at Ryan, not understanding how his brother could know about that when only Jessica and Cam knew what he did.

Ryan had stretched out on a sofa in the room with his eyes half closed, but he looked at his younger brother from under his lashes, serious fully. “Because I was with Jessica the whole week and a half you were comatose,” he replied, not liking to admit that or to recall the emotions that dredged up. “I stayed with her as she talked to you, held your hand, and hoped you’d forgive her for letting you get hurt, and then when the doctors assured me you’d live, I paid a visit to the back-stabbing little traitor who blew your cover.”

Mac had turned to stare between his brothers even as Kerry’s mouth was thinning, a sure sign he didn’t like what he was hearing. Ian wondered which would speak first.

“I want medical records on you,” he told Roarke without a beat as he narrowed his gaze as if looking to see for himself.

“You never told me any of that, Ryan.” Kerry knew why even before his brother smirked.

Roarke still hadn’t stepped into the room but his gaze had lowered slightly as what his brother said penetrated. “It wasn’t her fault. I took the job and let my cover go in order to shield her,” he paused. “Why were you there?”

“Brat’s supposed to be smart but at times he’s an idiot,” Ryan muttered, sitting up on the sofa. “I was there because some group of racist Neo-Nazis decided to use my little brother as a

guinea pig and despite it all, I loved you enough to know that no one but me gets to hurt you.

“Now get your bleedin’ ass in here and talk to the lass,” he finished with a growl, throwing Ian a look. “Don’t grin at me like that, lad.”

Still surprised, Roarke was hesitant until Jessica’s cry took them all by surprise and Mac found himself across the room.

“Well, her powers are working again,” Ian noticed, smiling at the dark look Mac gave him. “You were worried if the spell that bound them was gone, right?”

“Shut up, Ian,” Mac growled as Kerry held out a hand to him but then stopped when they saw that Roarke had responded on instinct.

Seeing his brother shoved away in the girl’s panic, Roarke went with his heart and moved to the bed, sitting next to his friend and gently reaching for her hands.

“*A gra*, you’re safe,” he spoke softly, hoping she’d respond to his thoughts as well as his voice, but knowing his friend would be wary of their link since she’d been controlled so violently. “It’s Roarke.”

Jessica’s body jerked suddenly at his voice causing a frown to form on his handsome face.

“This is bad,” Mac murmured upon seeing the rapid flickers of images from the British girl. “When Sebastian first approached her...” closing his eyes, he shook his head. “That’s how he breached her defenses.”

Roarke had gone still when he also saw the flashes and felt her fear growing. “Damn.” He twisted to stare at his brothers. “How can I do anything when she’ll be afraid I’m another trick to hurt her?”

“She’ll be scared for awhile but Sebastian could fake the image and your voice, but he couldn’t have faked the feelings of the link you share with her,” Kerry replied, stepping closer to lay a reassuring hand on his younger brother’s shoulder. “Talk to her but let her feel you’re here.”

“Tell her what you told me last night, brat,” Ryan stated, meeting the wary gaze. “It’s time to let go of the fear and shame, Roarke. If you love her then fight for her or the bastard will have won because he knows she’s your greatest strength.”

Mac couldn't help it as he stared at his brother. "Did you get replaced by an alien or something recently?"

"Shut up or I could tell the perky little reporter some other things about you," Ryan countered, smirking.

Roarke had stopped listening to his brothers by this point and despite his nerves and angst, began focusing on his friend, letting his thoughts and emotions flow fully between them in a way he hadn't before.

"It's alright, luv," he spoke carefully, keeping his voice even and not wanting the anger to show as he saw fully what the events of last night had caused. "You're safe, and just ignore them. Kerry."

Knowing what the younger man wanted, Kerry shot both Ryan and Mac a sharp look. "A little emotional support would help him," he decided but knew they were just trying to relieve stress.

While Kerry dealt with their bickering siblings, Roarke knelt on the floor by the bed so he'd be closer to eye level with her, but his fingers were gently stroking her hair as he recalled Athens and his injuries.

He didn't recall many of those but his biggest memory was waking in the hospital, and his first feeling and sound was hearing Jessica's soft voice, feeling her hand on his face and knowing he was safe.

It was those feelings that he wanted to give the girl back but wasn't sure if he could since it would be his face and voice she'd very nearly be afraid of.

"I love you so much, Jess," he whispered, letting his head lean on the side of the bed and closing his eyes. "For so long when we were kids I adored you. Before Mum and Da died, I always thought you were so pretty, but knew Ry would bug me if any of them knew how I felt.

"After that all happened, you were the only thing that saved me. I would have bloody well died in Mayo if you hadn't come that day. So many days or nights afterward when I wanted to die rather than face the memories, or knowing I could never go home or let those events hurt my family," Roarke gently let his fingers run over her face and down to her fingers where he held her hand.

So involved in what he was doing, Roarke didn't even notice that his brothers had fallen silent, or that his powers had activated so to cause a soft glow to surround the bed.

"We've been through so much and no matter what, you are always there when I need you to be even when I'm not the greatest to be around," he continued, hearing Ryan snicker at that but he didn't care by this point. He only wanted to see his friend's blue eyes open.

"I know what Sebastian made you see, luv." This time Roarke let his other hand rest on her cheek, feeling the wetness from tears she'd cried in her uneasy sleep. "I know what he did. I know he used my image, my voice and your trust of me to hurt you in the very way I said I'd never but I need you to hear me and I need you to trust me just one more time, *a gra*."

Leaning up slowly, he lightly pressed his lips to her brow, then let his forehead rest against hers. "Wake up, *muirnin* (sweetheart) and let me take the pain."

"Can he do that?" Ian whispered, knowing one didn't have to be an empath to feel the emotions in that room.

Mac was considering while Kerry sighed. "Yes, but it's more dangerous for Roarke since he's always been too susceptible to strong emotions or wounds," he explained, seeing that Mac also knew this. "If he were to take too much..."

"He'd hurt himself rather than help her," Mac rolled his eyes, wondering how he'd gotten so many stubborn brothers.

Ryan had been watching more closely and saw his brother's power was coming on stronger as the lights seemed to glitter and as always, Roarke's eyes and face took on an almost ethereal look when he used them at this level. "Think it could be too late for those concerns," he called.

"Roarke, be careful," Mac warned, knowing why he was doing this. "I can heal Jess if you get her awake."

"No. I left Jessie alone, I left her open to him and I hurt her, so I'll do this," Roarke replied, voice tight, as he didn't want to admit the strain this was having on him.

Ian shook his head as he neared the bed. "You were lured outside which left Jessica alone, and that was what they had planned, Roarke," he told his brother, seeing the strain. "Let Mac help."

Roarke was about to speak when Jessica whimpered, twisting violently until her eyes snapped open, and looking around quickly while she struggled to sit up.

“Take it easy, luv,” Kerry spoke soothingly, seeing that her eyes had a cloudy sheen over them, she was rubbing at them, and he nudged Roarke’s arm.

Remembering that Sebastian had blinded her, Roarke gently took her fists away from her eyes and lightly ran his hand over them to ease any leftover effects.

When she jerked at the touch, he sighed and began to ease away. “She’s still scared, Kerry, and I don’t want to make it... What?”

Roarke looked down when he felt her make a grasp for his arm. “Jessica?” he made no further moves to touch her, just waited.

Still frightened and uncertain, the girl fought to clear her vision so she could see and also to clear her inner vision so she could be certain if what she did see was correct.

She had begun to wake up and was instantly overwhelmed with the memories of last night and the pain in her upper chest. The voices and thoughts near her were familiar and didn’t cause the same bad feelings, but it wasn’t until she had heard Roarke’s voice and thoughts that she had come around more, but she also felt his darker thoughts.

When she felt him start to move away, her first instinct was to latch on, needing his presence most of all, but was still too weak and scared from the aftereffects of Sebastian’s spells to do more than try to grasp his arm.

“Give her time, brat,” Ryan urged, knowing they all had doubts to the extent of her injuries at the wizard’s hands.

Wanting to hold her but afraid to rush it, Roarke just took Jessica’s hands in both of his and held on as tight as he dared right then. “I’m here, Jess,” he promised, fighting to keep his voice from breaking as he watched her eyes slowly refocus and lock on his. “We’re here with you.”

“I doubt if she really cares about that right about now,” Ryan muttered, wincing as Mac threw a hard elbow back to his ribs.

“Let’s leave them alone for a minute,” Kerry decided, placing a hand on his brother’s neck to reassure him and felt him nod.

Neither Mac nor Ryan seemed to like that plan, but Ian had leaned out the door and blinked. “Mac, did you know our grandfather is telling Maggie about changing your diapers?”

A low growl came before Mac bolted from the bedroom and Ryan snickered. “Yep, this should be fun,” he paused to lean down to whisper something to his brother.

“I know, Ry,” Roarke murmured, and then his full attention was on his friend who still seemed so pale and edgy to him.

A strained silence filled the bedroom for a long while as he just looked and felt. His own emotions going through a varying range of changes until finally he was satisfied both his tone and emotions were in control.

“God, I am so sorry,” he whispered, still on his knees by the bed, and he just brought her hands to his lips, holding them there as he held her eyes. “I knew telling you how I felt would place you more at risk but I couldn’t have... I mean... this shouldn’t have... God.”

“...Roarke...” her soft accent strained but just hearing her voice made some of the unease in his gut smooth. “Not your... fault.”

Jessica still labored to breathe right due to the trauma but she could feel his emotions and knew what he was doing to himself and had done for her.

“The son of a bitch made you see me.” That was his biggest issue, but something else tugged though he was afraid to ask. “Did... did you think it was me, luv?”

“Maybe for a few seconds, I did,” she replied quietly, watching him turn her one hand over in his. “The vibe was off and I... couldn’t feel you like I do now, or how I felt you on the steps finally.”

Those comments made his eyes lift back to hers, pain clear. “I didn’t know what else to do, Jess,” he admitted, feeling her free hand brush weakly against his face. “My powers weren’t at full and I couldn’t have risked a full out fight, power-on-power, with him while you were so close but...” Roarke swallowed the

lump as he recalled last night and seeing her in his enemy's hands.

"I'd rather be dead than let him..." Jessica cut off, eyes dropping until a gentle hand cupped her face to bring her gaze back to his. "I knew what you needed to do and I trusted you to do it."

"You had more faith in me than my brothers," Roarke snorted, sighing. "Mac spent the night trying to hurt me, but I think Ryan got me drunk and then knocked me out."

"I trusted you because...I...I love you," she murmured, seeing his eyes start at those words and trying to move, but pain seared.

Moving quickly and without thinking, Roarke eased an arm under her to help lift her slightly so she was leaning against pillows, but was surprised when her hands slid around to try to hold onto him.

"Easy." He wanted this contact but didn't want to hurt or scare her, then he felt her lean into him, burying her face against his neck and felt the first shudder. "Sshh, go ahead, luv," he whispered, easing his arms around Jessica to support her when the shields she'd placed on the fear started to crack.

Jessica's arms were shaking as she clung to Roarke, feeling his hand gently rubbing her back when the tears began to burn. "Don't let go?"

Shaking his head slowly, Roarke turned his face into her hair in an effort to reassure them both. "No, luv, it's fine. I'm not letting go," he promised softly, slowly starting to rock her in his arms when he heard the sob. "I love you, Jessica," he told her, hoping he could take the pain and fear as she had once for him. "I'll make it up somehow or let Ryan beat the crap out of me or..."

Roarke knew he was talking non-stop but it helped to keep him calm while he held his friend as she cried, but knew he had to control her emotions so she didn't tear the stitches until they could be healed.

"What?" Slowly Jessica's tears had calmed along with the fears and she knew deep down that Roarke had been easing both, but right then something he had said finally gelled. "Roarke, I don't blame you. It's... just hard..."

"I know," he replied grimly, slowly easing her back on the pillows but keeping his hand on her face while his other slowly hovered where he knew the bullet had struck. "Jessie, let me take the pain."

Still wary, the girl bit her lip. "It would hurt you." This she knew since she had always known her friend didn't open himself like that for that reason.

"How many times have you done it for me, *a gra*?" he countered, still watching when her fingers slowly reached for the nightshirt buttons, but he stopped her. "I'll do it."

Accepting the risks, Roarke slowly eased the shirt open enough to see the soft colored T-shirt with a scoop neck that showed the bandage on her chest.

"Roarke, it's not..." Jessica had been watching his eyes and saw the smoky gray darken as he looked lower and thought of whatever else she'd had done to her. "Don't, please."

"I should have done more to him for what he did to you." Roarke's eyes lifted back to hers. "How can I expect you to be able to let me ever touch you after what he did?"

Tired and still jumpy, Jessica considered that and knew her friend would never fully be at ease. "It wasn't you."

"You didn't know that at first," he argued bitterly, dragging his fingers through his hair in a motion that was of pure frustration. "I know what he did and..."

Slowly, she took his hand and placed it on her chest, over her heart. "I trust you more than anyone except maybe Cam," Jessica spoke slowly, tired and in pain but knowing she had to make her friend understand this as she eased his hand down lower so it was just on the swell of one breast.

"No, wait..." Roarke frowned, seeing her eyes were wary but calm, though he hesitated when her hand moved his and on instinct, it cupped the breast through the T-shirt. "Jessica, you're hurt and..."

"I'm not afraid of you, Roarke, and I don't want you to be scared of me over what he did," she told him quietly, keeping her hand over his. "Sebastian hurt when he touched here but you won't."

Understanding what she was saying, the Irishman knew that might not always be the case. "I love you with all my heart but



Jess, I can't promise to always be as gentle as you need," he replied, needing that to be clear but as he was talking, his thumb was gently rubbing over the tip of her breast.

"Not asking you to be, mate," Jessica countered, surprised that she wasn't scared when he gently kneaded. "Take away what he did?"

"Some but the mental stuff he did will take longer," Roarke declared, not aware when his native accent got stronger as he was suddenly very aware of how close he was to her but also saw the need she wasn't speaking. "Trust me, luv, and I'll take the pain," he promised, leaning closer to move his hand back over the wound but was caught off guard when, despite being weak and hurt, the girl moved slightly to kiss him.

Nearly freezing at this, Roarke almost pulled back when he caught the emotions, the desire and need and knew if he did, then Sebastian will have won.

The kiss was awkward and uneasy as if she wasn't sure if he would accept it and was gauging his own feelings when Roarke gently cupped the back of her neck and returned the kiss slowly, deeply.

"You know, my brothers could say I'm taking advantage of your shock," he mused upon breaking the kiss, tracing her mouth with his thumb but keeping eye contact. "Tell me, Jessica. I need you to say it."

"He wanted me to be scared of you, Roarke," Jessica still felt the kiss and could feel his eyes on her. "I'm not and I...I want you to make love to me."

Roarke's eyes were steady despite the hammering of his heart as he let his hand continue to lightly touch and stroke. "The fact you can say that to me means so much, and if I didn't know what we've both been through in the past twenty-four hours then I would but..." he paused long enough to hold her eyes. "When we make love I want to be sure it's for the right reasons, you're fully alright and I know I'm in control."

Waiting until Jessica nodded in understanding, he gently brought her hand up so he could kiss her hand lightly. "Now, do you trust me to heal you?"

"Yeah but I don't want you to hurt..." Jessica started to say but a soft kiss stopped the words.

“How much did you get hurt by taking what you did for me in Athens?” he felt her tense slightly and could see her running that over in her mind until she began muttering.

“Ryan took most of that,” she muttered. “I mainly just sat and talked to you.”

Nodding, his hand caressed her face. “We’ll talk about you not telling me my brother was around then later,” he told her, gently easing her up again so she was leaning against his chest. “Just close your eyes and listen for the music.”

Suddenly tired, Jessica didn’t argue as she laid her head against his chest so she could hear his heart while slipping her arms around him. “What music?” she asked through a yawn, feeling the chest wound pull slightly.

“This was my parents’ room and it’s said that if you listen close enough and you believe, you can hear the fairies singing from the fairy hill outside,” he replied softly, gently holding her, and began to let his powers build up slowly.

Roarke was concentrating on the girl in his arms so much that he failed to see the candles around the room were lighting themselves and in addition, how the fireplace glow seemed to flicker.

It had never been a question that of the five of them, Kerry and Mac got the stronger empathic and healing abilities even though all of them could do both acts.

““You must always be cautious when using those powers, my son,”” Roarke recalled his father’s words when he was a child. ““Never open yourself fully because it’s too dangerous to leave yourself that vulnerable unless it’s with someone you trust explicitly.””

Knowing that and accepting the dangers, he knew that was exactly what he’d have to do in order to do what he needed for his friend.

“Just listen, luv,” he murmured, pressing a kiss to her hair before closing his eyes and letting the powers flow out of him, around her and back.

He felt the pain and emotion but pushed them down as he soothed her softly, beginning to rock her and sing a quiet Irish song that he hadn’t considered since he’d toured with his brothers.

Jessica had fallen into an almost half-sleep as she listened to his heart, to the lilting Irish accent as he sang and to something that seemed to be coming from the room itself.

Unknown to either of them, the girl's hands that lay on his back seemed to shimmer as she snuggled closer to his chest.

The flame in the fireplace seemed to shoot higher as Roarke struggled to contain the pains, fears and emotional wounds when he wasn't up to full strength yet, when he almost felt the light touch on his shoulder; as if someone was saying it was time to stop.

He hesitated until he felt Jessica murmur sleepily as her body seemed to relax against him. "Sleep now, *a gra*," he whispered, laying her back on the bed so she could sleep peacefully, but he made sure the room was safe before kissing her forehead and stepping out of the room to go get coffee or something to remind him he was alive. "Be back in a second, luv."

Deirdre O'Connor had long ago gotten out of the habit of preparing breakfast in a kitchen filled with people, yet she decided it was time to get back into that habit since it appeared as her young Lords preferred the kitchen to bicker than the dining room.

"Ignore anything that demented old devil says, Mary Margaret," Mac was saying after having spent a good portion of his time convincing Lorcan Kerrigan to go see the horses.

"I think your Grandda is a dear old man," Maggie countered, rolling her eyes. "Once I figured out he wasn't really a leprechaun."

Ian was choosing a topping for his pancakes when he saw his brother in the door. About to make a joke, the youngest Fitzgerald frowned upon seeing how pale he looked. "Roarke, you okay?" he asked.

Ryan's smirk toward Mac turned to a frown when he looked to the door and saw his younger brother.

"I'm..." Roarke started to say 'fine' but didn't get the chance when he felt his legs start to buckle under him.

“Roarke!” Kerry turned from the kitchen cabinet but stopped when he saw Ryan already grabbing their brother as he fell forward.

Mac shoved a chair out and helped Roarke onto it, knowing by how clammy his skin was, the paleness and weakness, what he must have done.

“Dammit, Roarke, why didn’t you wait for one of us?” he demanded, kneeling next to the chair and laying a hand on his arm.

“Thanks,” Roarke took the glass of water Maggie had quickly gotten and sipped before dipping his fingers into the icy water and flipping in onto his face.

Kerry accepted the cold cloth from Deirdre and placed it on his brother’s neck, fingers slowly rubbing his neck and felt what Mac had. “You aren’t strong enough yet to have taken her wounds, Roarke.”

“I just eased her pain and leveled the fears,” the younger man spoke, leaning his forehead on his arms, which were lying on the table. “She still trusts me, Kerry. That was my bloody biggest fear was that she wouldn’t be able to trust me or...”

“Jessica loves you, brat. Of course she still trusts you.” Ryan rolled his eyes and lightly slapped his brother’s head. “Now sit up so Mac can look at you.”

Ian finished his pancakes and slid a glass of orange juice across the table. “Drink this,” he urged, blinking as he noticed something. “Mac, look at his arms.”

Roarke’s t-shirt showed the scars usually on his arms, yet as Ian had suddenly noticed, they didn’t seem as bad.

“What the bloody hell?” Mac gently eased his brother’s shirt up and was quick to hold him still when he felt the first movement. “Stay still.”

The sharp tone made Roarke sit still, but still didn’t like having his brothers see them.

Mac knew what he should see but as he lifted the shirt up, his eyes narrowed upon seeing only a few scars, the deeper ones, still visible to the naked eye.

Looking up, he lifted an eyebrow at Kerry, who frowned while Ryan knelt down to look for himself.

"Roarke, what happened when you healed Jessica?" Kerry asked curiously, moving around to sit across from his brother and seeing him pause to consider.

"Just held her and listened to the music from the fairies," he shrugged, looking down at his arms, then pulled his shirt off to look down. "Why... where'd they go?"

Mac placed his hand on his brother's shoulder and saw the images of what occurred upstairs and he frowned as he saw the candles light themselves, the fireplace flames changing and actually heard the music of the fairies.

"Get him to drink the juice and eat something," he told Ryan quietly while shooting Kerry a look to come across the kitchen with him. "Something happened between them when he used his powers."

"It could be their link, her trust and the fact they've both accepted the feelings they share, caused his feelings of guilt and shame to ease. It was enough that while he was healing her, Jessica's own powers took some of his," Kerry mused while looking back to see Ryan's hand was lightly rubbing his brother's back while Ian and Maggie worked on getting him to eat.

Picking at the steak and eggs that Deirdre had placed in front of him, Roarke didn't seem to mind Ryan being so close. "Will they stay gone or come back?" he wondered, handing Ian a piece of bacon he didn't want.

"It may depend on your moods or stuff," Ryan shrugged, not feeling the same emotion from the scars that remained as he had earlier in the week. "Are you alright, brat?"

Looking over at him curiously, Roarke honestly thought about that. "I think I am, Ryan," he nodded, easing back in his seat to meet eyes that were like his own. "So, should I thank you for Athens?"

"I didn't do anything but make sure the lass didn't starve herself while sitting with you," Ryan wanted off this subject or his image would suffer. "You take too many bloody dumb chances most of the time."

"That's what I do for a living," Roarke shrugged, looking at his brother fully. "She's not out of danger, is she?"

Ryan knew what he thought but wasn't ready to answer that. "Does one of you care to tackle that?" he asked over his shoulder.

"Not if I had a choice," Mac threw back, retaking his seat and feeling Maggie's hand on his shoulder. "Kerry?"

Shooting both brothers a dark look, Kerry sighed as he looked at his younger brother's hopeful gaze. "Sebastian will never be able to do what he did this time, but until we deal with him fully, Jessica could be used against you."

Seeing that news sink in, Kerry gripped a clenched fist. "You aren't alone, Roarke, and neither is Jessica, but you have to accept help and let us in," he declared.

"I know that," Roarke sighed, thinking of something. "Is the attic room still the same?"

"Yes," Kerry looked harder and saw what his brother was thinking. "I think the tower room would suit your idea better."

Both Mac and Ryan knew that room had been their father's sole sanctuary, and none of them had ever entered it.

Roarke also knew that and stared at Kerry. "We never went in to Da's room."

"True, but I doubt if he'd mind in this case," Kerry replied easily. "You want to reassure yourself that Jessica will be safe, and you'll need their energy."

"Can you check on her?" Roarke asked, standing slowly but not feeling as weak as he had. "I don't want her to be alone if she wakes up."

Maggie lifted a hand. "I'll go sit with her until you get done with whatever you're doing."

"Thanks." He looked deeper at the red headed reporter, then shifted a look toward Mac and smiled.

"Shut up, Roarke," Mac warned, catching the thought.

As their brother left the kitchen, Ian sent a look toward Kerry. "Can he protect her?"

"Not totally, no," Kerry replied grimly, reaching for his coffee. "What he wants is to give her some type of protection. Like a talisman or something, like the Trinity medals we wear."

"He needs both his charms," Ryan frowned, seeing Kerry nod. "You still have it, give it to him."

Their brother knew what he meant. “I was going to but wanted to be sure it was alright.”

Mac snorted, knowing Ian was confused. “Mum had a necklace, a rose quartz heart, that Roarke bought her one year on her birthday,” he explained before looking back at their older brother. “Give it to him while I go make sure Gramps isn’t letting the horses loose or planning another tale of my life to spin to Maggie.”

“When will he see it?” Ian asked Ryan after they were alone in the kitchen.

“Mac can be a bit dense about some things.” Ryan finished his drink before deciding to go upstairs to check on things himself. “Besides, sometimes having deep feelings or being in love just leaves you open to pain,” his eyes seemed to go cold as he added while walking out. “I should know.”

Ian frowned, wondering if he’d ever understand everything he should, and once again wished his memories were as clear as his brothers.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

The tower room of the Fitzgerald Manor had always been off limits and Roarke still was wary as he stepped inside, surprised that it still felt as if his father had just been there.

It was a nice-sized room that Toryn had made special so he’d have a private room to do spells or other things he felt he’d need solitude to do. In the center of the room sat a handcrafted table, the tools and wands laid out passed down through generations.

Letting his fingers run over the chalice that was sitting on the shelf, Roarke knew he was no longer alone even before he felt the breeze.

“Hello, Da,” he was proud that his voice remained steady but he didn’t turn to look behind him yet. “Kerry said it was alright to come up here.”

A thin shimmering glow was around his six-foot plus frame as Toryn Fitzgerald leaned casually against the mantle of the black obsidian fireplace across from his fourth born son.

"Your brother would know the right time for things," he finally spoke, his deep voice still heavy with the Irish brogue he'd had when alive. "He knew it was time to send you up here, didn't he?"

Roarke knew what he'd see if he turned, but in his heart the fear was still too huge until he felt the warm hand actually close over his shoulder and he glanced over, into his father's smoky gray eyes. "Are you real, Da?"

Chuckling, Toryn's eyes were amused. "You see me, don't you?" he countered then grew more serious. "Your mind is clear, lad. Look for yourself."

He did just that and probably would have collapsed again if his fingers hadn't closed on the table to keep him standing, and he felt the emotions swell. "Da, there's much I wanted to say. To do or apologize for..."

"Roarke, I said before you needed to let go of the guilt and that's true." Toryn kept his hand on the boy while his eyes looked into his fully. "Brenna and I did what was needed to save you and it's time to let the pain go."

Pausing as he considered things, the senior Fitzgerald saw his son's pain. "I should have allowed for my mother's downturn but I didn't think she'd do what she has. Especially what she's done and had done to you." He held on when his son went to move away. "Roarke, what happened wasn't your fault, and none of it could have been prevented. Now, you need to stay with your brothers and deal with what I couldn't."

Swallowing hard, Roarke stared at his father. "I never wanted you to be ashamed of me or hate me because I caused you to die."

"Saints, boy!" Toryn gave him a slight shake. "Your Mum and I have never stopped loving you and we're not ashamed of you," he assured him. "I wish I could say things would get better overnight but there's still much pain you all will need to handle, but Sebastian will never be able to hurt her this bad if you give her your protection."



He let go to walk away slightly, as if looking around the room. "I gave Brenna a silver hair comb to protect her but our protection can only do so much," he warned, looking back. "You need protecting too. As each of your brothers and those who are involved with you lads will also."

"You mean Maggie," Roarke snickered, seeing his father's familiar smile. "Mac's got really possessive without knowing it."

"Perhaps, but that will come as it comes." Toryn came back to him to take both the lucky stone and the Trinity medal his son wore in his hand. "These will protect you as my power is still in the stone, but you will need to finish the closure with your brothers so you all can begin the healing."

"I know, Da," Roarke sighed, blinking when he felt his father's arms close around him as solid and firm as when Ryan did the same. "I...love you, Da."

Toryn let the embrace hold longer than he had planned when he felt his son holding on. "I know you do, son," he returned, giving one final squeeze before letting go. "Listen to Kerry and love that girl as I did your Mum."

Roarke blinked suddenly when he realized he was alone again. "I will, Da," he whispered, quickly wiping the tears he hadn't known were there when he heard the quick knock before his brother stepped in.

Kerry started to ask if he was all right when he caught the feeling in the room and knew he wouldn't be.

"I wanted to give you this," he held out the small black velvet box. "It's better to bless this for Jessica than to lessen your protection by giving her your stone."

Not understanding, Roarke took the box and felt his pulse jump when he saw the lovely rose quartz heart necklace he had once given his mother. "This is...this was Mum's."

"Yes I know, but I think she'd like it if you gave it to Jessica," Kerry replied, feeling his brother's emotions falter and knowing he was recalling when he'd given it to their mother. "She'd want this to go to someone you love and unless you really don't..." he left the rest unsaid as sharp eyes snapped up to pin him. "That's what I thought."

Looking back at the necklace, Roarke nodded his thanks. "Kerry, I still don't know if I can do this."

“We’ll all get through this, lad,” Kerry assured him, pausing at the door. “Can you do this alone?”

Knowing he meant the spell, Roarke just shot him a dry look. “I may be a failure at a lot of things but even I can handle a simple protection spell on a necklace,” he assured him, waiting until the door closed to add a quiet “I hope.”

Gathering the items, he knew he would need to cast the spell over the trinket; Roarke slowly began adding things to the small caldron his father had in the fireplace.

Doing simple spells like this was second nature to him as they had been the first time his parents had taught him, though fire had actually been the first spell he’d done on his own.

Taking a few strands of his friend’s hair that he’d taken from her brush, he let them drop into the now boiling liquid of fragrant herbs and crushed powder before removing the rose quartz necklace from the box and slowly lowering it in and taking a deep breath.

“I am born of the Five and I ask those that have come before me to guide my hand as I cast this spell to protect what is mine for all time.” Roarke spoke the words in Irish as he took the small silver-coated dagger and sliced it over his palm to allow several drops of his blood to mix in.

“Blood to blood, life to life, I cast my power and love into this given item so the wearer will know no harm from my enemies. All shadows, all-evil, no darkness will harm this girl as she wears this charm and ask that no harm shall come to any. As I will, so mote it be. Blessed be.”

Flames and energy shot from the cauldron as he closed the spell, making him waver a bit under the intensity, yet when he looked in, only the rose quartz necklace remained.

“Thank you, Mum,” he whispered, picking up the necklace and feeling it seem to pulse in his hand a few seconds before he placed it back in its box, and went about the task of placing everything back in its proper spot in the room. “I’ll try to make you proud of me this time, Da,” he spoke this as he closed the door and didn’t see the shimmering form.

“You already have, my boy,” Toryn spoke to the empty room.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

“The man is charming one second and bloody frustrating the next,” Mary Margaret Cavanaugh complained as she paced the former master bedroom, tugging on a strand of her fiery hair as she did when frustrated. “Plus, do any of them have the same traits or anything in common?”

Jessica Hadley had woken up to find Maggie sitting in the room, muttering about stupid, hardheaded Irishmen.

Having been around the Fitzgerald brothers for years, the girl was more accustomed to them, their ways and little habits than Maggie was, clearly.

“Are we picking one in particular or just all five as a general rule?” she asked through a yawn, sitting up against the headboard to sip the orange juice Maggie had brought with her.

“I’m speaking of Patrick MacKinley Fitzgerald for the most part,” Maggie replied, rolling her eyes at the thought. “He’s keeping things from me and...”

“There’s your common trait,” Jessica replied. “All five of them are protective. Mac and Kerry feel the most responsible since they’re the oldest. Ian has the same traits but hasn’t really had a chance to get annoyingly overprotective. Ryan can be but you need to catch him in the right mood, though he is about the others.”

Maggie stopped pacing long enough to stare at the British girl. “What about Roarke?”

While there was a small smile, there was also some concern in the girl’s blue eyes. “Roarke can be protective if he gets past his own doubts and guilt.”

“Oh, I think he’s past those in some regards,” Maggie murmured, watching the girl try to stand. “The Doc probably wouldn’t like that move.”

“You probably drive Mac nuts by calling him that,” Jessica grinned, knowing that Mac had always been the most serious of the five, but wanted to be up and moving.

That made Maggie laugh as she turned when the door opened. "Well, hello there, handsome," she greeted Roarke cheerfully, already sensing that he seemed more relaxed than he had before. "Have ye come to tell me that your brothers are bickering, drinking or gambling with your dear old Grandda?"

"Hell, that could happen at any given time on any given day with my brothers, lass," he returned easily with a smile and he could see why his brother would be attracted to her, assuming they didn't kill one another. Then his gaze moved to the bed. "Bucking to give me or the lads a bloody stroke, Jessica Jayne?"

"I feel well enough to get up," Jessica countered, managing to stand on her own but feeling her legs still shake slightly, even as his hand was holding her arm to steady her. "Roarke, I feel fine."

Shifting a look over his shoulder, he saw Maggie only nod her understanding and slip out of the room, leaving them alone.

"Did she eat anything?" Mac was waiting in the hall when she stepped out, and he saw her jump at his unexpected voice. "Nervous are we, Mary Margaret?"

Glaring, she slapped at the hand he extended. "No, I am not nervous. A bloody body should be expected to jump in this house when you blokes seem to pop out of thin air anytime you want to," she snapped at him, then seeing his eyebrow lift slightly, she sighed. "Sorry. Not enough sleep last night. She drank the juice."

Reaching out more easily, Mac placed a hand on her shoulder and felt the tiredness and stress the young woman had. "You should get some sleep," he encouraged, but did ease some off her.

"No, I told Deirdre I'd help her today, plus I'm interested in speaking with your grandparents since my Gran always spoke so highly of Fiona Kerrigan," Maggie saw him roll his eyes and she laughed, patting his cheek. "Don't worry, Doc. I won't ask about you as a toddler."

Placing a hand over the one she had on his cheek, Mac looked down in to her eyes. "I want to apologize for how I've been acting the past day or so," he saw her surprise but went on. "It's been awhile since I had to deal with this much emotion and

stuff, and it's hard to handle all that plus concern for Roarke protecting himself, etc., that I get cranky."

"Doc, you've been more than cranky," Maggie replied with a grin, leaning up on her toes to wrap her arms around his neck. "But you're still cute, so I'll let it go this time."

"Gee, that makes me feel better," he returned dryly, tightening his arms as he lifted her off the floor into his arms. "Give me time, Maggie," he requested, letting his mouth touch hers softly.

Returning the kiss fully, she drew back to look him in the eyes. "Don't wait too long, Mac, 'cause I could take Ryan up on his offer to sail away to paradise."

"He's been making that offer since he was old enough to talk and proposition his nanny," Mac snorted, setting her back down, and walked downstairs with her. "Gram's in the living room with morning tea," he told her, feeling Kerry's thoughts. "Don't drink anything my grandfather gives you since he spikes his drinks."

"That's nice to know," Maggie sighed.

Back upstairs, Roarke Fitzgerald had gotten his friend to sit down again as he sat next to her on the bed, and saw she'd only picked at the food.

"You need to eat," he winced as he could recall his own mother and Deirdre saying that to them.

"I'm not hungry yet," Jessica Hadley replied, seeing his fingers spread through hers. "You took too much."

Taking the time to look at their meshed fingers, Roarke slowly met her eyes, then used his other hand to push hair out of her eyes. "I took what was needed to help you," he told her then slowly moved his shirt up so she could see. "You did some healing yourself according to Kerry."

"Bloody hell, Roarke, where did they...?" she whispered upon seeing some of the many scars were gone and those that remained seemed less severe.

"The going theory is through our link when I healed you, your powers came on and healed some of these." He felt the light touch of her fingertips where his wounds had been. "When I used to say that you saved me all those years ago, that wasn't fully a joke."

As her eyes lifted to his, Roarke gently leaned over to kiss her; careful this time to keep it light as he reached into his pocket for the velvet box. "This is for you," he told her when he eased back.

Looking at the box he'd pressed into her hands, Jessica frowned at it then up at him. "You and Ry didn't kill Cam and this is a bribe, is it?" she asked suspiciously.

"That's cute, Jess. You're very funny," he laughed dryly then turned more serious. "Open it."

"What is it?" Opening the box, she blinked upon seeing the rose quartz heart necklace. "It's beautiful."

Roarke slowly took the necklace from the box so it could dangle in the light coming in the window. "I'll be honest from the start, luv," he began slowly, wanting no secrets between them. "I wanted to give you something as a token of my love but I also want you to wear this for protection."

Looking from the necklace to his eyes, she could feel his concern, but also wondered if he was aware of the vibes the necklace was giving off. "This was your mothers'."

"Yeah, but like Kerry said, I don't think Mum would mind if I give this to you," he shrugged, adding, "I love you, Jess, and that will never change now that I told you."

Considering, Jessica finally nodded. "Can you put it on?" she asked, not certain how sore her arm would be on the side where the gunshot wound had been.

Gently easing her hair aside, Roarke slipped the necklace on and fixed the clasp, surprised by the sound of the wind chimes outside the window ringing even though there was no breeze.

"I told you Mum would approve," he whispered, letting his forehead touch hers as the chimes sounded.

Looking at his eyes, Jessica saw the emotions he wasn't speaking. "Love you, hotshot," she whispered back, surprised when his arms slid around her from where he sat.

"There is one more thing we need to do that will leave you in the house alone, even though Gran and Gramps will be here" Roarke told her, hoping the recasted protection spell on the property could keep any danger away. "So I need you to promise me that you'll stay inside no matter what you see, hear or feel."

Frowning slightly, she considered that. "You think Sebastian would try to enter the Stone Circle that's inside the woods?" she asked, knowing that to fully begin the cycle, the five of them would need to redo a ceremony originally done years ago. "Is he that powerful?"

"Against the five of us once things level out, maybe not," Roarke admitted then faced the one thing he hated facing. "If he has teamed up with Da's mother, then I'm not sure what his scope is." He leaned around so he could meet her eyes. "I don't want you to..."

"Roarke, I'm expecting his tricks now and I won't just be waking up," Jessica interrupted him, smiling gently to put him at ease. "I'll be fine. It's you I worry about."

Pressing a kiss into her hair, Roarke closed his eyes. "I'll be fine, *a gra*," he promised, then slowly shifted so he could lay her back on the pillows. "Let me stay with you for awhile?"

"Avoiding your brothers?" Jessica teased but moved slightly so he could lean against the headboard next to her.

"No, avoiding my grandfather's probing," Roarke countered, easing an arm around her when Jessica snuggled against his chest. "You still need to rest and I need to think."

Jessica nodded, letting her eyes drift closed as she listened to his heartbeat. "Remember after that job in Vegas?" she asked sleepily.

"Aye, I remember." Roarke did recall that job he'd been asked in on in Las Vegas several years earlier.

He recalled his friend, seriously injured and emotionally wrecked, while he sat with her and sang to help get her over the traumas.

The gentle Irish song had been one his father had taught them as boys and he sang it softly to her now as his arms tightened to hold the girl closer until his own eyes got heavy and he slipped into sleep.

This was how Ryan found his brother several hours later when he had come looking for him.

Leaning in the doorway, he stayed silent for a long while just watching the couple then walked over toward the bed, being careful to make enough soft noise to wake his brother without alarming him but not to disturb their friend.

“Brat, Kerry wants to head out since it’ll take a couple hours to prepare the site and all that other rot he muttered on about,” he announced, seeing his brother’s eyes open slowly, and was silently pleased to find them clear and alert but without the wariness they’d been having.

“I know I felt him,” Roarke sighed, clearheaded and alert for the first time in a long time since coming home. “Stay safe, luv,” he whispered kissing Jessica’s cheek softly and brushing a hand over the necklace she now wore. “Protect what is mine.”

Ryan had seen the necklace but stayed silent as he watched his brother close the bedroom door with a quiet click. “She’ll be fine, Roarke,” he assured the younger man but behind his back did place a hand on the closed door to softly add his own protection.

In the foyer, Cameron Young was clearly unhappy as he paced. “You redid the protection spell on the property but advise me on what could come knocking?” he demanded, having pulled all his current team into a closer watch area near the manor.

“Not knowing what else Sebastian or Kathleen may have planned, it’s hard to say,” Kerry Fitzgerald replied as he tightened the clasp on the cloak that he only wore at certain times. “No matter what, don’t let anyone inside the main house unless Nick or someone can assure they’re real and not a spell-image.”

“I knew I should have stayed in New Orleans when all this happened,” Cam muttered seeing Roarke roll his eyes. “Don’t start the ‘I told you so’ crap.”

Simply holding his hands up, Roarke shrugged. “You made that choice, mate.” He looked to where Maggie was standing. “Jessica’s sleeping but every once in awhile could you...”

“I’ll check on her, mate,” Maggie assured him with a smile, pointing a finger at him. “You blokes just better all come back in one piece.”

“That’s the plan,” Ian grinned, zipping his leather jacket up against the chill in the air. “Of course, being allergic to poison ivy makes me wary of going out into some woods.”

Mac shook his head as he came out of the kitchen with a small bag over his shoulder. “You do know you can cast a spell to get rid of it, right?”



"I thought we weren't supposed to cast spells for personal gain?" Ian frowned at him.

"That only applies to Ry using a spell to win in the casinos, not for an itching rash," Mac told him, winking at Maggie as he paused next to her. "Keep the books close to you and stay in the house with Gran. No matter what, Mary Margaret, stay in the house," he intoned firmly, hoping the woman listened to him.

Maggie merely nodded, leaning up to kiss his lips in encouragement. "Don't worry so much, Doc," she replied easily. "We'll be fine here."

Fiona Kerrigan had stood and watched her grandsons prepare for this act. "Focus on your task tonight and know that this house and those who dwell inside will be safe," she lightly kissed each of them on the forehead.

"Aye, and I'd say so," Lorcan slammed his fist into an open palm as his eyes shined with energy and mischief. "Been awhile since I've been in a good scrap but..."

"But all will be well," Fiona soothed her husband. "Remember that your strength comes from your unity. Once united, he cannot harm you."

The brothers knew that. It was just a question of having the time to do what would be needed to make that unit complete again.

Once the front door closed, some of Maggie's cheer lessened. "He'll try to stop them from doing whatever it is they're doing, won't he?"

"They will re-form a circle, a bond so to speak, between them that was last done when Ian was a babe. It's how to begin the prophecy of the Five," Fiona replied, her musical Irish lilt never wavering as a dog howled in the distance.

"It's the issue about them surviving it that concerns me," Cam muttered under his breath, making sure his handgun was close. "Nick's reporting some bad vibes from outside the perimeter of the property line."

Fiona knew what that meant as she walked into the living room to look out the window. "If they break the spell it will weaken them, but the danger is still there."

"I hate magic," Cam rolled his eyes, reaching for his radio. "I really hate it."

"You've been saying that for years," his employer's voice spoke from the stairs causing the mercenary leader to sigh.

"Yeah, and I'll keep saying it," he returned, looking up as Jessica Hadley came down the steps slowly, and he noticed she had more color to her cheeks but he was wary about it. "Pete will yell."

Jessica waved that off as she concentrated on hooking the shoulder holster of the 9mm Browning Hi-Power she usually wore. "So will Roarke but what they don't know won't hurt me."

Lorcan laughed heartily. "There's a lass after my own heart. Our boys need strong women to stand up to them now and then."

"You better stop the matchmaking plans," Jessica told the older man easily. "I'd think having twenty-two grandchildren already would make you happy."

"Their Gran can never have enough babies to spoil," Lorcan snorted, hoping his wife was far enough away not to hear that.

Maggie was still staring at that when the wind started kicking up and her sixth sense began screaming. "Something's wrong."

"They need time to make the circle ready, so Cameron, we're going to play with the dark side," Jessica announced, walking toward the kitchen.

It took a good five seconds before either Cam or Maggie realized what she had said and then both were racing to the kitchen after her.

"Whoa, boss!" Cam skidded in front of her, hoping he had heard wrong. "You didn't just say what I thought you did, right?"

"I'm sick and tired of being a target of this bloody son of a bitch or some hateful old woman, Cam," Jessica replied, not slowing down as her friend kept pace. "I also won't let him or anyone else hurt my friends."

As Young swore under his breath, Maggie was deciding the best tact to take with a girl who could be as hardheaded and stubborn as anyone else she'd ever met.

"Jessica, luv, I'm pretty sure Roarke and his brothers want you, well all of us, to stay inside during this," she said quickly but when the girl turned to her, she saw the fierce determination and power shining in her eyes.

"Maggie, I've been fighting things for a very long while so I know what to expect to some extent, but as a reporter, I'm not sure what you're willing to risk," Jessica knew she had missed some things but the one thing she had noticed was the sparks between the Mayo reporter and Mac Fitzgerald. "I know Mac can be a huge pain, but all of them can be that. They need to prepare to form their link again so that means Sebastian's monsters or whatever he sent needs to be distracted to buy them time."

The red haired reporter bit her lip as she considered that while thinking of the voice in her dreams as of late, as well as what else she's seen. "Well, at least I can tell Mac I just followed you into the bowels of hell," she reasoned easily enough even as she was pulling her unruly mass of red hair back.

"Sure, they're used to that," Jessica smiled, knowing Cam would follow.

"The lads won't be likin' this turn," Lorcan knew, feeling the increasing evil on the outskirts.

Fiona knew this as well but also knew some things meant to be weren't always what may be wanted. "As you yourself said, our grandsons will need strong women to stand with them in the coming days," she looked fondly at a small photo hanging. "There were many a time when Brenna stood by Toryn even when he would have had her safely away."

"Aye, I know," Lorcan sighed, laying a hand on his wife's arm. "We'll wait and see and help where we can."

Stepping outside the kitchen door, Jessica Hadley looked around and felt the strain in the air. "Kerry's spell won't hold for long. It will once they do it together, but this one won't last much longer."

"Translated, shoot anything that comes near us," Cam's Magnum was out and cocked as he directed his team. "Most of the baddies should be centered near the Druid clearing."

The girl knew this but she also knew that was what they needed to stop. "Depending on what Sebastian's sent, the dumber ones will be scenting on magic and I can probably lure them to the meadows."

“Roarke’s going to flip if he finds out about this,” Cam muttered, but knew they were out of time when he saw the first shadow. “Nick’s magic bullets better work or we’re screwed.”

Maggie had seen a lot since she had originally taken the assignment to interview Patrick Fitzgerald, but nothing had prepared her for the massive group of shadows that were entering the empty meadows, much less the wave of power that simply shot from Jessica’s fingers.

“If you can cast fire then use that, if not go inside,” Jessica told her, knowing what type of things these were. “Shadow creatures can’t stand fire or light or...” she paused as one imploded after a bullet hit it. “Or a magically coated .357 slug.”

“I can handle it,” Maggie replied tersely, hoping she was right, but couldn’t help wondering what Mac and his brothers would face.

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

The walk from the manor house took a little under twenty-five minutes on foot and through dense woods until they reached a clearing from the woods that had nine large stones standing in a circle and surrounding a center stone that was flat on top.

The stones radiated an easily-felt energy as the five brothers stepped into the center of the circle, and it seemed like thunder cracked in the distance.

“That a good sign or a bad one?” Ryan wanted to know, already removing his black coat to lay it off to one side.

Kerry Fitzgerald simply eased his cloak over a shoulder as he listened to things only he could hear. “No, we still have a little time. That was just a way to acknowledge us.”

“Y’know Sybil and Brandon took me to Stonehenge a few times and I’ve seen other circles, but none that have had the energy I feel from this one,” Ian was looking around in an almost awe. “It’s weird.”

Roarke touched a hand to one of the standing stones and felt the power pulsing from it. “This set has been on the land since the house was built,” he told the boy, shooting Ryan a look before he could smirk. “You could say each of us was christened here.”

The sudden howling made them glance toward the woods and Mac frowned. “We have company.”

“Then let’s do this,” Ryan muttered, shifting a look to Kerry and knowing he saw what he was seeing.

Kerry took the bag Mac passed him and began to lay out items like candles, a box of salt, stones of varying color and finally a ruby encrusted dagger.

“Ian, make a circle of salt around the center stone.” He handed the box of salt to his youngest brother while motioning to the candles, but Ryan had already taken them while Mac laid a bowl on the center stone and poured a bottle of holy water into it.

As this ancient ritual was occurring, none of the Fitzgerald brothers could deny the ominous feeling that seemed to be coming closer.

"They breached the property line," Roarke whispered, having felt the intrusion, but couldn't see past the fog. "I thought he'd focus on us."

Seeing him shake his head lightly, Kerry squeezed his arm. "By going close to the house he seeks to distract us." He knew that wasn't fully the case but didn't need his brother more worried than he was.

A deep growl from outside the stone circle made Ian look and whistle. "Well, Fido came back."

"Oh, go away," Ryan waved a hand and the large black beast vanished with a yelp. "We need to do this because he's not playing this time."

Kerry knew this but needed Roarke focused on him. "I know what you see, but he's using your fears to attack you from within. Focus on this," he urged, nodding as Mac lit the candles just as a scream came from the woods.

The same black shadow creature that Mac had seen at his house in Cork stepped from the woods with blazing red eyes.

"You cannot cross into this place, demon," Kerry's voice was stern as he made sure the circle would hold. "Go back to your master."

"If he ever got that bullet my brother shot him with out of him yet," Ryan smirked, feeling the evil from this thing.

The creature seemed to stare at them, then smiled cruelly as his blazing eyes landed on Roarke. "Your woman will die in agony as my master's minions shred her flesh," he bragged. "The foolish little mortal seeks to draw us to them in order to give you time to do this hopeless little act."

"What?" the young man frowned and soon saw the violent images of the bitter fight in the meadow. "No."

"Go back to hell!" Ian snapped, taking a sharp stone he had in his pocket and hurling it at the shadow mass.

Ryan and Mac grabbed Roarke before he could lunge but he remained steady, his temper sizzling, but he didn't move. "I want this done," he muttered.

“Join hands around the stone altar,” Kerry ordered, feeling the wind pick up as beasts stalked outside the circle. “Don’t let go until we need to and just say the words that will come.”

The tensest moment Roarke had was at the sight of the dagger, and it seemed like a hand closed on his shoulder in a reassuring move yet when he looked, no one was there.

“We are born of the Five, to create the Five to send this demon back to hell where he came from,” Kerry began, feeling the energy pick up and power start to flash. “We five gather in this place of nine stones to recast what was cast years ago and torn asunder by greed and jealousy.”

Mac shuddered as wind howled outside the stones. “The stones have always represented a magical energy as nine has been a symbol of good. It represents the nine grains of salt we use to exorcise evil or the nine months to bring a new life into being.” He felt the blow that struck him in the back but ignored it. “We call on that energy and power now as we five seek to add it to unite our strength.”

“Separate we each share a part of the Five but we ask those that have come before in this place to guide and shield as we seek to combine those parts into one as it was long ago.” Ryan’s eyes had gone black as he took the blow to himself but managed to shield the raking claws that would have struck his two younger brothers.

“Combine our powers as we combine the blood we share so that the Five may fight the evil that comes.” Ian took a deep breath as Kerry lifted the dagger and ran the blade over the scar he had on his left wrist, a scar they all shared.

One by one, they each re-cut the small scar they had had since childhood to allow blood to trickle into the bowl of holy water.

When it was Roarke’s turn lastly, he looked at the dagger as lights and flame shot around them while the beasts outside the stones howled. “My choice is freely made as I share this blood in order to unite our power and strength to make five into one and to form our circle into one whole.”

Again, the images came vividly to his mind but he shoved them back as he felt Ryan and Kerry grip his hands again.

The combined blood had mixed instantly and a blast of white light exploded from the bowl up into the air, then shattered into glimmering lights that floated to the ground.

“As this blood mixes, we call on all the Fitzgeralds of the past to offer their guidance and protection as the Five are formed and may nothing tear this bond apart again,” Kerry slowly met the eyes of his brothers as they finished the spell. “As I will, so mote it be, blessed be.”

As they closed the spell, the lights that had been shimmering down seemed to glow brighter and the shadow beasts blew up with screams and yelps as if touched by acid, leaving everything in an eerie silence.

Blinking as his eyes adjusted to the dimmer light again, Ian stared around, never experiencing anything like that before. “What did we do?”

“We just reformed the bond we had originally and started the path to forming the Five,” Mac told him, seeing Roarke’s eyes tightly closed. “Are you alright, lad?”

“That cleared them from here but there are still some on the lands,” he replied quietly, frowning deeply. “Jessica.”

With a wave of his hand, Kerry took the circle down properly and easily cleansed the area. “Now we finish this part by kicking those things off our land.”

“Mac, that red head of yours doesn’t listen well,” Ryan spoke easily, seeing Mac scowling and muttering.

“I thought Sebastian would make an appearance to stop us,” Ian felt concerned by this lack of attention.

Roarke had been moving out of the stones when he stopped dead. “He sent his proxy,” he whispered, seeing the images from the meadows clearly.

Mac scowled more now. “I hate that thing,” he snarled, looking at the others. “Roarke needs to...”

“I know what I need to do,” Roarke sighed, eyes changing as his powers took full control and he looked at what Kerry held out to him. “Help Maggie and the lads. This thing touches Jess and I’ll handle him.”

At this firm promise, Ryan nudged Ian’s arm. “Want to have a friendly wager after this is over they have one hell of a fight over her not listening?”



Ian just rolled his eyes. “Sucker bet, mate. I’m not touching it this time,” he refused with a laugh, following Roarke with the others close behind.

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Wishing she’d actually been a more active student when her grandmother had wanted to teach her more, Maggie Cavanaugh was cursing herself soundly as she felt herself getting more tired, yet the shadow shapes didn’t seem to be slowing.

“Get back to the house,” Cameron Young stopped to reload his weapon but knew the red-haired woman was growing weaker. “They’ll target you more if they sense a weakness.”

The Mavericks had regrouped in the meadow where most of the shadows had concentrated their attacks. “The bullets are working on them but it’s taking too long,” Michael White complained.

“How long will they do this?” Maggie asked, gasping as one lunged at her but was blasted apart.

“Until they’re called back or we’re all dead,” Jessica Hadley replied grimly.

The young British warrior knew there was a limit to even her power, which still hadn’t gotten back to full strength yet, but was willing to risk it in order to buy her friends the time they needed.

She was bleeding from several scratches and seemed pale but her eyes still showed the power, which seemed to darken as she turned to look over her shoulder.

“Cam, take Maggie and the team back to edges,” she saw the lone shadow man and knew what it was. “Sebastian’s sent a mouthpiece this time.”

Maggie knew it was the same creature as what she had seen at Mac’s house when this first started. “You can’t be considering...”

“Go back to the house or stay with the Mavericks, Maggie,” the girl spoke quietly as she took several steps forward and felt the evil energy blasting out toward them. “Your boss too busy to come and play or does he only show when he can cheat?”

Even though merely a shadow, his eyes blazed red while the smile seemed to sneer. “My master will lay claim to what is his in due time but sent me to handle those such as you,” he spoke arrogantly. “He also wishes me to remind you of what he can do.”

He raised a hand but this time, Jessica shifted her own hand and repelled what he sent out.

“I’m ready for him this time,” she told him, still feeling the edge of the power and shuddering at the memories it dredged up, but forced them back.

Even as she did this, she saw the sudden flash of lights from over the tree line and knew what it meant even as a lot of the single shadows began vanishing but several others remained, including the one Jessica faced now.

“The circle has been formed, the Five will be united and your master will burn,” she spoke firmly, seeing the rage in the thing’s burning eyes she knew instantly she wouldn’t have the power to deflect this attack even as she felt it strike.

“Jessica!” Maggie screamed when she saw the girl lifted off her feet and slammed into the ground a few feet away, but as she started to run to help a shadow demon was in front of her.

Hoping she had enough power for one for shot of flame, she started to cast it when she watched it disappear in front of her.

“I really need to start locking you in the house, Mary Margaret,” Mac spoke dryly from behind her, lowering his hand from where he’d raised it to deal with her attacker.

“Lecture me later, Doc!” she snapped at him. “Jessica needs help now.”

Mac caught her arm to keep her still. “He’s handling it,” he replied quietly, slipping the small fiery woman into his arms, and fought to ignore his deep relief at feeling her against him.

Jessica Hadley had hit the ground hard and lay stunned, her head ringing and feeling her back burn, as she knew the thing was getting closer but couldn’t summon any power as she fought to breathe.

“My master would have preferred you alive but he will have to accept your death as a tribute.” The shadow demon raised a hand to strike again when he suddenly seemed to jerk as the tip of the ancient Fitzgerald sword pierced its chest.

“No, you’re both going to be disappointed,” a strong voice spoke from behind the creature as the sword blade twisted harder and it began to glow with power. “I am Roarke Michael Quinn Fitzgerald, fourth born son of Toryn and Brenna Fitzgerald and one of the Five who will see your maker destroyed.”

Roarke’s usually calm and gentle smoky gray eyes were a pulsing black as his face seemed to shine in full power while he pulled the sword free in order to step in front of the snarling shadow creature.

“Fifteen years ago, he tried to take my life but took my parents. I am not a child any longer and will no longer allow him or his accomplices to threaten or harm what is mine,” he spoke firmly as he locked eyes with the dying creature but knew its master could hear every word. “Be it my brothers, my friends or the woman I love. You didn’t beat me or destroy me this time, Sebastian, and you won’t do any of the same with my brothers, so deal with it.” The sword lifted with barely a blur and struck a killing blow to the creatures’ head.

The scream it uttered seemed to echo in the wind as a voice howled in outrage from somewhere far off, and the evil energy the creature exuded seemed to blow into the wind as Roarke shielded as much as he could.

“Okay, now that was neat,” Ian let out a breath as he watched the rest of the demon creatures vanish.

“I’ll admit he handled that better than I thought he would,” Ryan shared a look with Kerry, as both knew this would only be a small victory for them.

Roarke slowly lowered the sword after a moment of thick silence, then was on his knees a second later next to Jessica, who was struggling to sit up.

A quick look showed him the bleeding scratches she had but he also sensed the wound on her back and other wounds gained from the last attack as his hands gently eased her up until she was leaning against him.

"Don't yell," she warned, sensing his temper was on the surface but also feeling his fear. "I knew you needed the time."

Mac's hand on his shoulder stopped him from speaking. "I guess Maggie's excuse that she was just following you was true," he sighed, starting to kneel down, but his brother just scooped the girl up easily but carefully. "Roarke, you are using too much power at once."

"I can do it, Mac," his younger brother promised him, knowing his emotions weren't level yet but wanting the girl out of the field as he felt her lean against his shoulder.

Cameron Young wondered up, eyeing the pair. "Should I tranq him?"

"Leave him be. Ryan or Mac will know if the fight gets too loud," Kerry replied, eyeing the field even as Ian cleansed it without a problem. "Ry, we really need to test Ian's power range."

Ryan laughed as he also watched their youngest brother. "Hell, I knew that when he was nine and like to reshape things while he slept."

Mac and Kerry both turned to stare at him. "I want to know just what you haven't told us," Mac muttered, feeling Maggie's arm around him. "Let's go back."

Fiona waited at the front door, her lips pursed in an amused smile. "Your brother isn't happy," she spoke calmly.

"That's probably the understatement of the bloody year, Gran," Ryan laughed, heading for the parlor and a drink.

Roarke had remained silent until he got to the bedroom upstairs where he gently placed his friend on the bed, then stepped into the bathroom for water and towels.

"Are you going to say something soon or just brood?" Jessica finally asked, head hurting from where it had hit ground.

Sitting back beside her, he pushed his long black hair out of his eyes as he took one arm to start cleaning the scratches manually, but did remove the sting. "Did the part where I told you to stay in the house escape you or what?"

The absent, tense tone to his accent told her he was angry and hiding it, yet his touch was gentle.

"You needed the time to do the spell and I knew Sebastian would send his goons so they needed a distraction," Jessica

shrugged, wincing slightly as the long red scratches on her back pulled. “Just wasn’t expecting so bloody many of the buggers.”

“They knew that if you were hurt I’d feel it and lose concentration,” Roarke sighed, sitting the towel aside and motioned to her shirt. “Let me see your back.”

Clearly hesitant on that, Jessica’s fingers fiddled with the material for a few moments then slowly then lift it over her head and shift so he could see the minor wound back there.

The other scratches had come from the lesser demons, but these he knew came from the stronger one. These he wanted removed totally, so he carefully placed his fingers on them and worked on removing them.

“Roarke, what...?” Jessica felt the sudden power and shivered but didn’t move as his other hand stroked through her hair.

“Just breathe through the pain, luv,” he murmured, gritting his teeth as it hurt to take these wounds, but felt it ease as she took his free hand in her own and closed them over the rose quartz heart he’d given her.

Smiling as he leaned his face into her hair, Roarke felt the wounds going away, and when he ran his fingers gently over her back and shoulders, he felt no pain or anything else except for her soft skin.

“We need to come to an agreement about your plans that give me strokes,” he commented, looking back at her eyes and seeing the concern. “I’m not angry, Jessica... well I was, but it scares me now to know how easy you can get hurt.”

“Roarke, we’ve been friends over twenty years and we’ve worked together on cases where we’ve both been hurt,” she reminded him with an eye roll that usually made him smile.

Nodding, he couldn’t disagree with that. “The difference being here is I’ve accepted being in love with you and I don’t want to see you hurt.”

“Then I see a lot of fights because you can’t baby me, Roarke,” Jessica replied firmly, lightly touching his face. “I love you but you have to trust I know what to do.”

“I do trust you, luv but...” Roarke closed his eyes. “I’m scared.”

Jessica had known that was his biggest issue. The fear of losing those he loves again. "I trust you, Roarke, but you need to trust me and yourself." With that, she took his hand in hers and placed it lightly over her heart then let it slide down.

"I know *a gra*," he whispered, frowning slightly as she pressed his fingers so that they slid over the swell of a breast. "Jessica..."

"Trust is a two-way street, Roarke, and it isn't only about sharing the danger of facing either magical bad guys or modern urban terrorists. It's also about letting you trust in other ways too," she spoke quietly, holding his hand still as she saw his indecision, then she leaned up to kiss him lightly. "Trust and love don't have to be scary, but we both have seen the bad sides of both."

The young Irishman remembered he'd heard those words from his mother recently as he gave in slightly to return her kiss, his fingers gently molding her flesh while going on sudden instinct and moving forward until he was lying next to his friend, but kept his hand on her.

Lifting her eyes, Jessica let her fingers touch his long black hair, then murmured lowly as his fingers stroked over her breast and she felt the nipple strain the fabric of her bra.

"Bloody hell," he whispered, sitting up on the bed for a moment before looking back at her, then pulled his t-shirt off in one quick movement, then his mouth was on hers for a long deep kiss.

The one thing he had always made sure of since his childhood experiences was that whenever sex had been in his life, it had usually only been a release for him or part of an assignment. This would be the first time that it was important to him, that it would matter to him that his partner also enjoys it since he knew she'd be more wary of it.

"Keep your eyes open, Jessica," he knew what she'd be expecting as he was careful to lay next to her to go back to feathering his fingers across her ribs then up to her breast. "I do trust and I will love you forever."

The words she'd started to say dried up when he pressed a kiss to the swell of that same breast, then closed on the nipple

through silk. “Roarke...” she whispered, fingers automatically running through his hair.

He gently tormented her for what seemed, to her, like hours as he kissed, caressed, stroked her until finally he lifted his head from where he’d been laying gentle, lazy kisses across her stomach and saw her eyes had gone from blue to a deeper blue.

“Tell me now, luv,” his voice was tight with emotions he was keeping in check along with his desires.

Jessica wasn’t sure she could talk but finally focused on his eyes until she could nod, though she tensed when he touched her jeans.

“Sshh, relax now,” he soothed, speaking Irish as he often did when it was just the two of them.

Roarke was slow as he slid her jeans down and off, then stood to remove his own, smiling when he saw her eyes move on him.

“Let’s keep the thoughts clean, luv,” he laughed, leaning down to kiss her mouth as the bed shifted with his weight when he laid back down, but drew her closer to him to let her adjust to this slowly, and his hand had slid to unsnap the bra.

“The sun’s coming up, Roarke, we can’t do this now,” she replied hastily, concern turning to fear as his slowly slid the bra straps down to free the silk.

Catching her hands, he leaned up to kiss her more gently. “I want to see you, Jessica,” he explained, leaning over her to deepen the kiss while lightly teasing her lips with his tongue until he felt them part.

Shivering slightly as her body seemed to throb under his touches, Jessica whimpered under his kisses and wasn’t really aware when he finished undressing them both.

Needing her relaxed, Roarke continued to kiss and stroke until the young woman was twisting restlessly, then he moved to position himself. “Look at me, *muirnin* (sweetheart).” He waited until her eyes were on him. “Trust me to make this good for you.”

“Roarke, I know what you need to...” her words cut off as his mouth claimed hers hotly just as he slipped inside with a strong solid push.

Swallowing her sudden cry at the unexpected pain, Roarke held his own control tightly while holding his friend still until her body adjusted to the first act of sex since her assault several years prior.

Jessica had gone rigid; her first instinct was to fight and escape, but Roarke's hold remained gentle, and he did not attempt to move until she had calmed down some.

"It'll be alright soon, luv," he promised tightly, taking as much of her discomfort and fear as he dared right then.

Several moments passed before she opened an eye to see him watching her carefully, unsure what was happening or what he wanted her to do. "Now what?" she finally asked, seeing him smile.

"Now we both feel," Roarke replied, kissing her gently as he made the first gentle thrust and saw her eyes go wide.

It was easier than he thought it would be, teaching Jessica that making love could be enjoyable and not cruel. "Easy," he soothed, feeling her tense at times when she wouldn't know what to do. "Do what you feel is right, Jess."

He groaned when her long legs moved and on instinct rolled on his back, doing the one thing he'd never done with anyone else, and that was allow someone else control.

"Roarke?" her eyes snapped to him as his fingers spread to hold her gently when she straddled him. "I don't know..." she knew he didn't like to be like this since it often reminded him of his confinement in Mayo. "You need to..."

"Just move a little, luv," he urged her, fighting not to show how his emotions were twisting at being on his back and feeling the weight on his body. "I'm alright."

That was a lie and she knew it but to make him happy, she did let her hips shift a little and felt her body tighten more around him. "Does it hurt?" she asked softly, seeing his eyes had closed, but his fingers were moving on her legs.

"No, not in the way you mean," Roarke fought the urge to push up and lay still as she found a nice steady rhythm to move against him with. "God," he groaned, not aware when his fingers gripped her hips tighter or when they cupped both of her soft breasts and began squeezing.



Jessica whimpered as his fingers molded as she leaned into his hands, which also deepened her hold on him as her hips lifted slightly then slid back down more and she felt his control getting looser. It was when her hands splayed on his bare chest to rub lightly that it cracked.

*“A Dhia dhilis! (My God!)”* Roarke groaned, sitting up quickly and locking her to him with a strong arm as his hips began to move quicker and his mouth was hot and hard as it took hers.

Fighting for control, he bent Jessica back over one arm so his mouth could find her already hard nipple and heard her cry his name as he sucked it gently, tongue swirling on it until he heard her moan.

“You are so sweet, so soft,” he watched her twist and climb higher as her nails raked across his chest and back, as his mouth continued to make love to both breasts. His hands stroked her back and stomach, when he placed one hand flat on her stomach between them he felt her cry out, her body exploding against him. “There’s my girl,” he smiled as she moved then waited until she was still, then flipped her onto her back and surged forward.

“Roarke, wait,” she tried to regain some breath but he was pushing her up again. “I can’t...”

“Aye, you can,” he replied hoarsely, thrusting forward and up as he sought his own release, soon felt her moan his name as he brought her up closer, and felt her own small lips close on his nipple to do what he had done.

She felt his emotions changing but kept up his pace as she lowered her head to kiss his chest then up to his jaw, feeling him grow harder inside her until she moaned; falling back as his hips moved but his hands were still gentle on her skin.

Tightening his grip, Roarke’s long fingers massaged her body until she was writhing under him again, then when he felt she was about ready, brought her up to him again.

“I love you, Jessica,” he whispered against her mouth, then pushed and felt her second climax hit her and he let himself follow her.

There was a long silence in the bedroom that had unknown lights flickering throughout from the energy that that been expended by the couple.

Finally bringing himself back to reality, Roarke knew he was too heavy and sought to shift some of his weight, but felt her cling to him.

“Not letting go, luv,” he promised, reaching for the blanket to spread when he felt her shiver as her body cooled.

Jessica snuggled closer to his chest, her hand laying flat over his heart as she listened to it. “Did I do that right?”

Grinning, he was about to laugh until he saw the honest concern in her eyes. “Jessica, my love, you did everything just fine,” he assured her, brushing a thumb over her cheek, as he turned more serious. “Thank you.”

Frowning as her eyes began to droop she was confused. “I should be thanking you for being patient.”

“No.” Roarke let his fingers run through her hair as he laid next to her. “This was the first time I could let myself feel. I’ve been with the occasional hooker or a woman if the job called for it, but this was the first time I ever really could say I made love and meant it,” he smiled into her eyes. “You gave me that and for all things you’ve ever given me, this is the one thing I will treasure always.”

Blushing slightly at the intensity of his gaze, Jessica met his gentle kiss then let herself fall to sleep; knowing Roarke would be there when she woke up.

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Deirdre O'Connor was preparing dinner in the kitchen as she did every day, but this time it felt different.

Hearing the voices of her young Lords reminded her that things would never be as silent as they had been the past decade or so.

After the events of the prior night and early morning, none of them had seen a Fitzgerald brother until late in the afternoon, then Ian came stumbling into the kitchen looking for chocolate, his favorite after-power snack.

"You'll be ruining your dinner, boyo," Deirdre chided, clucking her tongue only when he inhaled a whole piece of cake in less than five seconds and went for more.

"Remind me to x-ray his stomach," Mac decided when he entered and saw what his youngest brother was eating. "I think it's lead."

Maggie Cavanaugh, who had been up all morning, sat drinking coffee and watching the boy. "He eats anything coated with sugar, yet won't drink tea or coffee."

"There's way too much caffeine in that junk," Ian replied, lifting an eye at Mac who had stopped to lay a casual hand on Maggie's shoulder. "I thought there was an earthquake earlier."

Mac saw Maggie's cheeks turn a light pink, knowing she must have figured out what was behind it. "No, Roarke just needs a little more practice controlling his emotions."

"Huh?" Ian blinked then nearly choked. "That's gross when I'm eating," he muttered.

"What you're eating is gross, kiddo," Ryan shot at him, entering the kitchen with damp hair from his recent shower. "Where's Kerry?"

Deirdre looked up from tasting her sauce. "He's saying goodbye to your grandparents, who have decided it's safe for them to leave for now."

Mac and Ryan both knew that was probably far from the truth, but knew it was up to them to face this matter.

"What about Da's Mum?" Ian asked curiously. "Will she come back after Roarke?"

"I figure she will since it's him she hates the most, but I'm guessing we'll all be targets now that she won't have what she wants," Mac sighed, sitting down and drinking the tea Maggie gave him.

Kerry stepped into the kitchen. "We'll handle Kathleen and anything else that threatens us because we won't be separated again," he vowed firmly.

"Deirdre will be kicking us out within a week because you know that the five of us cannot coexist without fighting," Ryan replied with a sneer that turned to a smile as he looked at Maggie. "Though I could make an exception in...Shit!" he snapped as he jerked his fingers away from his cup as electricity shot through it.

"Don't play like that, Ryan," Mac's tone was mild but his eyes weren't as he looked over his cup at his brother.

Ryan moved his fingers carefully then glared at his brother. "I said the next time the brat made me bleed I'd do the same," he growled, standing slowly. "I can change targets since I don't feel like having Cam put a bullet in me."

"You can try, little brother," Mac returned, meeting the glare and the silent challenge fully. "You were older than Roarke when we were kids and you cheated to win, but you never could take me in a fair fight."

China snapped as Ryan's temper sizzled after all the recent things, and this time it snapped. "So take me now then."

"I suppose I should have been expecting this scene sooner or later," Kerry sighed, seeing Maggie's eyes were wide. "We fight. It's rare for Mac to fight since he was usually the peacemaker but he can and will. He will, especially if Ryan pushes him too far."

The red-haired reporter stared as the eldest brother and Ian followed outside. "Men are so bloody stupid," she huffed and picked up her tea.

Upstairs, Jessica Hadley stirred slowly, stretching, and felt the gentle fingers rubbing her back. "Hello," she opened her eyes to see Roarke's smoky gray eyes were clear and alert, a sign he'd been awake awhile. "You should have woken me up."

“Liked watching you sleep in peace for once,” he replied, smiling as he brushed a kiss over her forehead. “Besides, I just wanted the peace being with you gives me.”

Jessica was about to reply when a loud, shot-like noise came from outside and lights exploded along with shouts and curses.

“What the bloody hell...?” she started to get out of bed to look but his arm eased her back.

Roarke had sensed the growing tension in the kitchen. In fact, it had been that which had woken him up, yet he remained in bed until he saw which way it went.

Now he slowly stood to dress, going to the window while pulling his t-shirt back on. “Yep, this looks real good,” he muttered, seeing Ryan and Mac facing off in front of the house, next to the huge fountain.

“Stay here, Jess,” he lightly kissed her before heading for the door. “Ry’s picked a fight.”

Blinking at that, she frowned. “I thought he only did that with you.” She quickly sought to dress to see what this was.

“I don’t see your issue,” Ryan was complaining as he stepped outside, shooting his brother a look. “Half the bloody time you act like she doesn’t exist. Why should my flirting with her make you mad?”

Mac Fitzgerald was simmering, knowing he was usually calmer but this just bothered him. “Maggie’s not like the tramps you play with in the casinos, Ryan,” he stated. “She doesn’t need you to play your games like you did with...”

“Mac, stop!” Kerry snapped sharply but it was too late when his brother found himself hit with an invisible fist that shoved him into the fountain.

“Don’t say her name,” Ryan gritted, eyes going to black instantly instead of the slow turn as he glared at his brother. “Don’t you even think about her, you son of a bitch!”

Ian was staring at the sudden change as the fight went from a playful, brotherly argument to something far more volatile.

“Ry, I’m...” Mac had started to say but the physical fist hit almost as hard as the other had as Ryan was beyond hearing now.

Kerry had been choosing a method on breaking this up when a hand suddenly grabbed Ryan's wrist. "Oh, bloody hell."

"Yep, this is bad," Ian closed his eyes as he sat down in a chair to wait for blood.

Roarke Fitzgerald tightened his grip, stepping between his brothers but making sure he stayed facing Ryan. "I'm not supposed to be the one who stops this kind of crap," he spoke easily but his eyes stayed on Ryan's and felt his anger, pain, and more of a surprise, his guilt.

"Mac didn't mean what he almost said, Ry," he spoke carefully, feeling his older brother's eyes shift to his and finally recognize him. "You come off all fast and loose with the ladies but not a one of us could ever doubt your devotion to Annie or how her death hurt you."

Breathing raggedly, Ryan slowly started to calm down as he felt his younger brother's hand on his arm. "I know, I know," he muttered, closing his eyes as he took a deep breath. "It just rubbed the wrong way."

"We each have issues that still need sorted out, but tearing out each other's throats won't help," Roarke replied, then shifted agilely to push Ryan into the fountain with Mac. "It helps to cool off some too."

Ryan had almost been expecting that move and had grabbed his brother's belt at the last second to bring him in too. "If I'm getting soaked then so are you, brat."

"Guys, these don't dry well," Mac complained as he looked at his soaking wet slacks even as Roarke was twisting away from Ryan's grip with a laugh.

"I should have thought of that before," Ryan shot over his shoulder, deciding to have fun with dunking his younger brother now that he didn't feel like fighting with Mac anymore. "Damn brat is like a fish," he complained.

Kerry sighed, stretching his legs out before deciding to go closer to the fountain. "One splash and I drown all three of you," he warned, holding a hand out to Mac.

"You're still a fuddy-duddy," Ryan snorted, noticing but not commenting that this was the first time that Roarke hadn't tensed when one of them had touched him.

"That's the curse of being the oldest," Kerry countered, turning at Ian's sudden gasp to see that the boy was staring out toward the grassy, rose-covered path.

Looking to see what their brother had seen, it was Roarke who first saw the couple walking hand and hand down the path as they had every day at this time while their sons played.

"This fight's over," Mac murmured, seeing his parents walking and knowing they had gained some peace finally.

"And we'll make sure the fight stays over," Ryan shrugged out of his shirt as he looked to see Roarke's eyes were on their parent's shimmering spirits. "Is this okay with you, brat?"

Roarke's eyes stayed locked on his parents but heard his mother's voice in his mind.

"Trust and love those closest to you, my beautiful little boy," Brenna spoke to him alone as she waved slightly. "Your Da and I will always be there for you boys, but now is the time you accept others in."

Blinking, he finally nodded and looked at Ryan, then the others. "Yeah, I'm fine," he whispered, seeing Jessica come out of the house and he smiled fully for the first time in a long time. "And I'll be fine."

"Maybe, at least until Cam thinks too hard about you seriously dating little Jessica, that is," Ryan snorted, grinning as his brother rolled his eyes.

"Roarke? What the bloody hell is going on?" Jessica had come down the steps just as Roarke reached for her. "Is everything alright?"

Looking at his brothers, Roarke nodded before drawing her fully against him and kissing her. "I love you, Jess," he whispered, surprised to feel at peace even though he knew there would still be dangers for them as well as his brothers.

Hearing Deirdre shouting for them to quit playing in the fountain, the brothers turned to go back to the house to face the next turn of the wheel, as fate decided who would form the next point of the Circle.

## **Epilogue**

Sebastian still smarted over his defeat this time and the scars he had as he glared into his mirror and at his enemies.

So perhaps they wouldn't be as easy to defeat as he once thought, but as he had learned, they each had weaknesses, and it would be those that he and his allies would exploit when next he struck, focusing on his next target and smiling as he moved a hand over his looking glass. There was more than one way to skin a cat, kill a witch or break a circle.

It would just require calling in old favors a little early, even though he still had plans for all of his hated foes' sons and those allied with them.

**THE END...FOR NOW**



## About the Author:

Sierra Rose is a penname for the author who is a local resident of the Upper Ohio Valley in Eastern, Ohio

Born in Martins Ferry, Ohio in 1974 she moved to Rayland, Ohio in 1980 with her family and still resides there today. She is a 1993 graduate of Buckeye Local High School.

She began writing while being tutored due to illnesses and has continued writing. She enjoys writing in many genres that include paranormal, romantic suspense and also action/adventure stories. She also has a published book of poetry with poems written during an incredibly emotional time of loss.

As of today, she lives in rural Rayland with her family, three spoiled cats and a semi-fierce Beagle that likes to think he's a Pitbull.

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