

## Free Preview



## Chapter One

It was that night, during my last hurling match, when all that destiny-nonsense started catching up to me.

What's hurling? Only the greatest sport ever. No, it's not that game where they sweep the ice with brushes. That's *curling*. Hurling is an Irish sport that's been around for over three thousand years. Back in the day, it was how warriors trained for battle. There were two teams, and each

person carried a big ol' stick with a club-end called a hurley that you used to whack the ball — the sliotar — up and down the field.

Speaking of goals, I was only one away from breaking the record for most points scored in a match. Nothing was going to stop me. I ran flat-out down the field, balancing the sliotar on the end of my hurley the whole time.

Ma and Jenny were on the sidelines as usual, along with a bunch of the regulars from the pub Ma ran. They were all going mental, holding up signs and chanting, “Go Colin, go! Go Colin, go!”

The only quiet person in that crowd was Jenny, my little sister. Not that she wasn't enjoying herself. Throughout the whole match, I caught her big blue eyes watching me run up and down the field, standing as still as a stone and just as quiet. She was like that. Never overemotional. Always calm. Sometimes she'd giggle and grin for what looked like no reason at all — like she was in on some secret joke the rest of us didn't even have a clue about.

Two of the other team came rushing at me. I spotted a teammate of mine, Ricky. He was open and begging for the pass. I smirked. Nope. Not quite. I had a record to break. I bounced and smacked the sliotar almost straight up into the air. The two on the other team took their eyes off me to see where it might go. I dashed past them, leapt and caught the sliotar in my left hand. A quick bounce off the grass. Then I caught it on the end of my hurley and kept running.

The crowd went nuts. The goal was up ahead. I could already see the fear in the goalie's eyes. Something snatched my foot. Someone had tripped me with their hurley. I landed face first and almost got trampled by some guys from both my team and the other team as they scrambled for the sliothar.

A big, ginger-haired kid on the other team laughed at me. It had to be him. It suddenly felt like everyone was looking at me and laughing. My face grew hot. A familiar switch flipped in my head. Next thing I knew I was sprinting for the big, ginger-haired kid.

I'd promised Coach Finlay, Ma — everyone — I wouldn't fight any more. And I meant it. I'd really been trying. But when that switch I mentioned gets flipped, when someone does something to embarrass or disrespect me, all I could think about was making them pay for it.

The ginger-haired kid had a few inches and a few more pounds on me, but I still just about speared him out of his cleats. I drove him to the ground. My fists moved like they had minds of their own. I landed two shots before the ginger-haired kid got his arms up to protect himself.

I kept wailing on him. Our teammates were too afraid to come near us to break it up. But someone else wasn't. A pair of arms snagged me and dragged me off the ginger-haired kid. Whoever had me, I broke free from them, turned, and shoved him as hard as I could.

Turned out to be the ref.

And I'd shoved him harder than I'd meant to.

A lot harder.

He flew through the air, hit the ground, and tumbled backward. Everyone went dead silent. Me, the kids on both teams, our coaches, even all the spectators. The ref sprang back to his feet, blew his whistle furiously, and shoved a red card in my face.

I didn't even try to argue. I knew I'd blown it big time. I spent the rest of the match riding the bench, staring at my cleats as I kicked at the ground.

I stopped feeling sorry for myself when it felt like someone was watching me. A chill took hold. I turned toward the spectators on the sidelines. My eyes landed on three people. Something

about them just seemed off. Maybe it was the fact they weren't watching the action on the field. Their attention was all on me instead.

They were normal-looking enough. I probably wouldn't have paid them the slightest bit of attention if they weren't staring at me so intensely. It reminded me of how our cat, Donovan, would watch birds. I reached for my hurley and gripped it tight. I glanced their way again. Only now they were gone.

The ref blew the whistle. From the looks on my teammates' faces, I could tell we'd lost. None of them said a word to me or even looked at me as they headed back to the bench. I didn't blame them. I searched for Coach Finlay. He was talking to a couple of the league officials — no doubt about me shoving that ref and getting in another fight.

I knew things were getting bad when it looked like Coach Finlay was almost begging in front of the officials, which was so not like him, but it didn't look like they were going to budge. One shook his head, and the other made a "that's it" sign with his hands before they both walked away.

Coach Finlay just stood there for a moment then let out a big sigh and started walking toward me.

"Well, what'd they say?" I asked, even though I already had a pretty good idea.

"You're out for the rest of the season," said Coach.

"What? C'mon! Playoffs are coming up."

"You don't have to remind me."

"You'll try talking to them again. Right?"

Coach's face reddened. "They've had enough of your behavior, Colin. Frankly, so have I. I've stuck up for you so many times it's not even funny. I was barely able to talk that boy's parents out of pressing charges against you."

"But he tripped me!"

"That's no excuse. And you know this wouldn't have happened if you'd just passed the ball when you had a chance."

"But I —"

"We've talked about this before, Colin." Coach took a breath, like he was trying to calm down. "Your temper. The fights. How many times have you promised me you're going to do better?"

Too many times, I had to admit.

"On top of all that, your selfishness, your showboating," Coach reminded me. "I hope you've finally learned a lesson."

The look of disappointment on Coach's face was too much to bear. I turned away, only to catch my teammates glaring at me. My throat ached. I wanted to cry but forced myself not to. Instead, I started packing my gear. Ma and Jenny came to get me. The look of disappointment on Ma's face was even harder to take than Coach's.

"Sorry," I muttered.

I'd always had a temper. Only lately, it had gotten a lot worse. I was getting in a lot of fights, not just during hurling matches but at school too. I'd been trying really hard to get it under control. I even saw a therapist for a while. For some reason, nothing worked.

"I talked to Coach Finlay," she said. Seven years in the States, and she still held on to her brogue, her Irish accent. "Sounds like he said pretty much everything I wanted to. No sense belaboring the point." She stared at me for a moment, eyes full of worry.

"What's wrong with me, Ma?" I asked.

Ma suddenly looked like she was trying to hold back tears herself.

"It's just the age you're at, Colin," she said.

"Patricia."

Ma and I turned toward Sean, who'd been watching the match with some of the others. He was a regular at the pub and the head librarian at the Irish Heritage Foundation, which was the center of the Irish community here in Phoenix. He'd been looking after me, Ma, and Jenny since we first arrived from Ireland. I was only six at the time. Ma was still pregnant with Jenny.

Sean looked at Ma with his *we-need-to-talk face*. Ma sighed. She excused herself and told me to meet her at the car. She and Sean started walking toward the parking lot ahead of us, already talking. About me, no doubt.

Jenny waited with me. I stared down at my little sis', with her red hair in pigtails and her big blue eyes. Those eyes. I swear, they could look right through me, and don't get me started on her mysterious, little grin. Sometimes, it was easy to forget she was only seven years old and not some little old lady in disguise.

"I suppose you've got something to say to me too," I told her.

Jenny just smiled then stepped up and gave me a hug. I hugged her back and smiled. My little sis', she didn't say much, probably because she didn't have to. With just a look or an action, she could always make her point.

Technically Jenny's my half-sister, even though I loved her with my *whole* heart. Her da's name was Casey. He was a great guy. He died in some sort of accident. Ma didn't go into any details, but we left Ireland for the States soon after that. I've never known my own da. Ma never talked about him and didn't have any pictures of him either. I didn't know if he was alive or dead. To be honest, at this point, I didn't care anymore.

Jenny helped me pack up the rest of my gear. I held her hand as we walked to the parking lot. My hold tightened a little as I felt like I was being watched again, just like I'd been on the bench during the match. That same chill took hold. I started walking faster, but that feeling didn't go away. It was like we were being followed. I thought back to the three people who'd been watching me in the crowd. Was this them?

My heart sped up a little. I glanced at Jenny then at my gear bag. I wasn't sure what to do. Either I was going to grab Jenny's hand and run, or I'd tell her to run while I fought off whoever this was with my hurley. Whatever I was going to do I needed to decide fast.

I heard whispering. But could only make out a few words.

"No. Not here. Not now."

And just like that, it felt like whatever had been following us was gone. I stood there, searching the park for — I didn't know what. I glanced down at Jenny when she squeezed my hand. She gave me her little gap-toothed smile.

"That was close," she said.

## Chapter Two

I tightened my grip on Jenny's hand and hurried us the rest of the way through the park. I kept looking back over my shoulder. It didn't feel like we were being watched or followed anymore. But I wasn't going to take any chances.

Ma and Sean were standing by her SUV, still talking. It looked serious. Each of them looked like they wanted to yell and shout but were forcing themselves to keep their voices down. They stopped talking when they spotted me and Jenny. Yeah, that wasn't suspicious or anything.

I glanced at Jenny. What did she mean earlier, when she said, "That was close?" Did she know we were being followed? It's not like Jenny didn't have a history of saying or doing strange things. But that — that was taking it to a whole new level.

Sean said goodnight to us. Ma drove us home. It was a quick drive, less than a mile. We lived in an apartment above the pub Ma ran, the Fenian. Sean had gotten her a job in the kitchen, not long after we'd arrived in Phoenix. She was an amazing cook and had all sorts of recipes that had been passed down through our family for years.

It didn't take long for word to spread about her awesome food, and new customers quickly turned into regulars, and the Fenian became packed, night after night. A couple years ago, the owner made her a partner and let her run the place while he retired to a cottage in County Cork, back in Ireland.



The Fenian would still be open for another couple hours. Ma told me to put Jenny to bed while she went to check in with Michelle, her assistant manager, who she'd left in charge. I took Jenny's hand and walked her up the stairs to our apartment.

A familiar pair of golden eyes shone from the darkness when I opened the front door. Our cat, Donovan, was waiting for us, sitting on the couch. We'd had him for about five years now. He'd just showed up out of nowhere. Ma had found him sitting at the back door of the Fenian one morning, like he was waiting for her to arrive. He had no tags, and if he'd been living on the streets it sure didn't show. He had a sleek, shiny black coat and was lean and muscular.

Donovan went straight to Jenny, who snatched him up in her arms and immediately started cuddling him. Donovan responded by purring like a finely-tuned sports car.

"Hey you. How was your day today?" she asked him. "Did you catch that pigeon that's been coming around? He's been such a bother, hasn't he?"

She carried him to her room, talking to him the whole time, and by the way Donovan stared at her, you'd think he was paying attention and understanding everything she said.

I cleaned up and changed my clothes. When I checked on Jenny, she was already in her pj's and under the covers. Donovan, of course, was curled up next to her. Jenny had her TV on, and I swore Donovan was watching it too. I mean, paying attention and everything.

I stood there, watching the two of them. One time I'd read how peasants back in Ireland believed cats were fairies because of their *mysterious* nature. Spend enough time with Donovan, and you could see why.

I wandered into my room and dropped onto my bed — only to spring back up again. I'd forgotten I'd left a book on my bed and sat right on it. It wasn't just any book either. It was one of Sean's. *The Cattle Raid of Cooley*, an old story about one of Ireland's greatest heroes, CuChulainn.

He was from the Ulster region of Ireland, just like me. I remember a few years ago, how some of the old-timers at the Fenian were shocked to find out I knew nothing about the old myths of Ireland. They were even more surprised to hear I'd never heard of CuChulainn. I asked Ma about him. She just said he was some hero from the old myths then immediately changed the subject. I tried asking if she knew any stories about him. She said she didn't.

So it was up to me to learn about all that on my own. I was obsessed. What I found out about CuChulainn blew me away. He was known as the hound of Ulster — and he was not only Ulster's greatest hero but the greatest hero in all of Ireland. There was even a statue of him in the general post office in Dublin.

He was fearless and unstoppable, a real machine in battle. Unfortunately, he was known for having these things called *warp-spasms* when the fighting got too intense. He'd swell up like the Hulk and go into a berserker rage. In one story, he killed his best friend during one of his warp-spasms. That part of his legend I didn't like so much. Especially lately, with my temper getting me into so much trouble.

I couldn't understand why Ma hadn't told me any of this. She was all about making sure we were connected to our Irish roots — through history, food, music, dancing, the language. But she never talked about any of the old myths. Not just about CuChulainn but the gods of Ireland too. The Tuatha Dé Danann. And whenever I tried to share something cool I'd read with her, she'd “uh huh” her way out of it and find something else to do or talk about.

At the time, I didn't understand why she did that. But now, I understood completely.

Jenny and I had Irish language lessons at the Irish Heritage Foundation after school. She had step-dancing class after that. I usually had hurling practice at the same time, but since I'd

gotten kicked off the team, I now spent that time doing my homework in the library while I waited for Jenny.

The IHF was our second home. Their staff were like family. It was a cool place, built to look like an actual Irish castle. I'd never forget the first time I laid eyes on it, seeing those big towers and high walls smack in the middle of a modern city. There was an authentic replica of a medieval farm cottage on the grounds too and a great hall, like they had in villages back in the day.

There was a garden and small grove on the grounds as well for the people who were interested in the ways of the Druids, the priests and wizards of ancient Ireland. They'd learn all about the medicinal value of the herbs in the garden and the spiritual significance of the different trees in the grove.

I'd just finished the last of my algebra homework when Sean set a book down in front of me. It looked old. I handled it carefully as I read the title.

*"The Book of Invasions."* A big smile slid across my face.

I couldn't wait to crack it open. I'd already read everything about the Tuatha Dé Danann and CuChulainn that was for younger readers. Lately, Sean had been bringing me real books, old books written by Irish scholars from back in the day.

I knew *The Book of Invasions* was the first written account of how the Danann came to Ireland and their battles with the Fomorians, this race of demonic giants who were their greatest enemies. They were nasty looking buggers. Serious nightmare fuel. Some were covered in scales, others in fur. Some had animal heads. Some even had multiple heads or multiple arms.

Sean nudged his glasses up the bridge of his nose. "I know you've read *Gods and Fighting Men* which covers a lot of the same details. But I thought it high-time you dove into the original version. It's in Irish but with an English translation of each passage side-by-side."

I thanked Sean. He was the best. He was funny, nice — and willing to find books about Irish mythology for me, even though he knew Ma would probably kill him for doing it.

It was kind of hard to tell how old he was. He had some gray hair on the sides of his head, so he wasn't young. He was so knowledgeable about a lot of things. Wise too. I always found myself going to him for advice. It didn't seem possible for someone to know as much as he did and pick up that much wisdom without having lived a very long life.

Sean tapped the book. "This is one of my favorites, so be kind to it. And it, by no means, goes home with you."

I nodded and dove right into the book. Reading Irish mythology was like solving an ancient mystery. There were big holes in a lot of the stories. Characters would die in one story then reappear in another one without explanation, some stories contradicted others, and there were different characters with the same name who'd pop up over and over again. There were huge gaps too where no one knew what had happened for like centuries.

Sean said that was because Ireland had a strong oral tradition. History and myths were passed down like stories around a campfire for generations. It wasn't until centuries later, after Christianity took over, when people finally decided to write things down. No doubt, by then, some details had been exaggerated while others had been added or left out or changed, like what often happens with stories.

Lately, I'd had a crazy idea that maybe all that mythology had been mixed up on purpose in order to keep the true history of the Danann safe.

“That is not crazy at all.” A young woman’s voice startled me. “In fact that is actually quite insightful.”

I whipped around in my chair toward her. She was dressed in a long red gown and a black cloak. She looked like a hot Goth chick with long, blood red hair that was tied in braids that fell down to the small of her back.

“Who are you?” I was shook-up. What she’d said, it was like she’d read my mind. I had no idea who she was either, and I literally knew everyone who worked at the IHF and most of the people who visited on a regular basis.

“It is not important you know our identity. Not at this time,” I turned in the direction of another woman’s voice.

She was older and wore a red gown and black cloak identical to the younger one. Both spoke with brogues. The younger one’s was more lilting. This one’s was slightly deeper and more severe. I glanced from the older woman to the younger woman then back again. They were practically identical. Except for their ages. This new lady could have been the younger one’s mother.

“All you need to know is the Fifth-Cycle is about to begin,” a third woman spoke up. She also had brogue. Her voice sounded positively ancient.

She was dressed exactly like the other two. She looked like them as well but had deep lines in her face and grey streaks through her red braids.

Fifth-Cycle? What was that? I wanted to ask but couldn’t speak. All three women had this presence, this aura, about them. It was so powerful I couldn’t look away. It was like I was frozen in awe. And in fear.

They stood all around me. Their eyes bored holes into three different sides of my head.

“You will play a crucial role in the upcoming events, Colin Caulfield,” said the youngest one.

Wait. How did she know my name?

“Best be ready,” said the grown-up one. “Especially to protect those you love.”

“Starting with your wee sister,” said the ancient one.

“What are you talking about?” My voice suddenly returned. “Are you threatening my sister?”

The three women didn't say a word. They turned as one and started walking toward the big double doors that led out to the courtyard. At that point, I noticed the library had this sort of dreamy feel about it. The edges were all hazy. I couldn't make out any of the finer details like the words on the signs and the posters on the walls.

I ran after the women. Only I couldn't catch up. The air felt heavy all around me. I could barely push through it. The three women had no problem at all. They just kept walking, and the double doors opened on their own for them.

I lost sight of them as they went down the stairs and into the courtyard. By the time I finally got through the doors, they were gone. All I could see were three large black birds, like crows or ravens, flying off into the night.

I blinked —

— and was back at the table where I'd been sitting. I glanced at Sean. He was working away at the front desk, like nothing unusual had happened at all. A chill grabbed me. I shook it off and looked down at the book I was reading.

My eyes were pulled toward an illustration. It was one of the three women. The youngest one. The caption underneath it said she was the Morrigan, the Queen of Phantoms, the goddess of magic, war, and fate. One of the Tuatha Dé Danann.

If that wasn't enough, a shape had been drawn on the cover of my notebook. There were four overlapping circles, and they were surrounded by a fifth one. Had I drawn that? In the middle of whatever-had-just-happened? I must have, seeing as how my pen was still in my hand, and it was drawn in the same color ink. I traced the shape with my finger. Circles. Cycles.

Five cycles.

### Chapter Three

I slammed the book shut and pushed it across the table, wanting to get away from that picture of the Morrigan as fast as I could. I then caught myself staring at the symbol I'd drawn on my notebook without even realizing it. Five circles. Or cycles. The Morrigan had said about the Fifth Cycle getting ready to begin. They also said people I cared about could be a danger. Starting with Jenny.

I remembered what had happened during my last hurling match. How I was being watched by those people in the crowd. And how Jenny and I were followed later.

"No. Not here," I remembered those voices saying. "Not now."

Jenny. I sprang from my chair and ran out through the double doors. Sean called after me, no doubt wondering what the heck was going on, but I didn't answer him. I ran across the courtyard to the Great Hall, where Jenny had her step-dancing class.

I heard music and took that as a good sign nothing was wrong. I opened the door, and there was Jenny with the rest of the girls in her class. They danced a jig in unison, while their teacher checked their form and gave instructions. A sigh of relief slipped through my lips.

Jenny glanced my way. She gave me the stink-eye and waved me off. But I didn't mind. I stepped back, closing the door behind me. I leaned against the wall and chuckled, shaking my head. Man, I felt stupid. But hey, Jenny was safe. That was what mattered most.



I returned to the library, trying to chase all the weird stuff that had been happening out of my head and convince myself that my imagination was getting away from me.

“Colin.” Sean was waiting for me inside, right by the door. “Is everything all right?”

Of course. The way I ran out like that, he had to be worried.

“Uh. Yeah.” I fished my phone out of my back pocket. “Just got an important call.”

Sean nodded and headed back to the reference desk. His gaze lingered on me the whole time. I could tell he didn't believe me. Heck, I wouldn't have believed me. I grabbed my things and brought *The Book of Invasions* back to Sean, thanking him for letting me read it. He said goodnight. And sounded a little concerned when he did.

I sat on the little stone wall outside of the Cottage. It was across the courtyard from the Great Hall. Jenny's dance class was about to end. A load of moms gathered around the door. I watched them walk their kids to the parking lot, one after another, before Jenny finally came out.

“How was practice?” I asked.

She gave me a so-so hand sign. I took her dance bag and backpack and reached for her hand. She started heading for the park.

“What do you think you're doing?” I snatched her hand. “Ma will crease us if we don't come straight home. Let's go.”

I had to yank Jenny to get her walking, which was not like her at all. She was quiet the entire way. I figured she was mad at me for peeking in on her class like that. Whatever.

She kept looking back toward the park the entire time. We finally got home. We climbed the stairs to our apartment, I reached for my key, and Jenny suddenly tugged on my hand wanting to go back down the stairs.

“What do you think you’re doing?” I asked. “What’s the matter? Why aren’t you saying anything?”

Jenny pulled even harder and started down the stairs. I had to grab the handrail to keep her from dragging me down with her. What the heck was going on? Why was she so strong all of a sudden?

“Jenny, knock it off. Seriously, I don’t need this.”

I managed to yank her over to the door and get it unlocked. She fought even harder then. I needed both hands to get her through the door.

A blood-curdling screech made me almost jump out of my skin. It was Donovan, perched on the arm of the couch. His back was arched and just about every hair on his body stood on end. He growled and let another of those horrible cries. At Jenny of all people.

I turned to Jenny. She was horrified, about to panic. Her eyes suddenly seemed larger than normal. Her skin turned gray. Her face bulged and shifted. So did her arms, her legs, her entire body.

It stopped. And she wasn’t Jenny anymore. Just something twisted and inhuman with overly long arms, pointy ears, and a hooked nose.

“Bejaysus!” I cried out.

That *thing* cackled, its mouth opened wide, showing off its fangs. Donovan pounced, screeching. That thing bolted out the door and down the stairs, with Donovan hot after it.

What had just bloody happened? That thing *was* Jenny. I mean it was Jenny before turning into that — thing. It was still wearing her clothes. What was going on? Where was Jenny?

I sprinted down the stairs. Donovan chased the thing all over the parking lot behind the Fenian. By the time I got there, they’d leapt over the back wall. I did my best to keep up, bounding

over the wall after them and landing in the alley on the other side. I couldn't see Donovan or that *thing* — but between the two of them screeching and all the crashing sounds they made I was able to follow them.

They were heading for the park near the IHF. I caught a glance of Donovan chasing that *thing* across the street. Brakes squealed. Horns blared. Two cars came inches from hitting them. The drivers were quickly out of their cars, looking at each other then in the direction Donovan and that *thing* had disappeared, like they couldn't believe what they were seeing.

They still looked pretty dazed as I ran past them and into the park. I stopped in the middle of the jogging path, my head on a swivel, scanning the length of the park, from the playground to the bridge. No sign of Donovan or that thing. Couldn't see them. Couldn't hear them.

There was a rattling sound. An old homeless lady pushed a packed shopping cart my way. She walked with a purpose, heading straight for me. Bushes behind me rustled. A couple of homeless men stepped out with camping gear on their backs. They started toward me as well.

Living in the city for as long as I had, I wasn't usually freaked out by the homeless. In fact, I always gave them any spare change I had on me. But these three, the way they looked at me, they reminded me of the three creeps I'd seen at my last hurling match. The ones who'd looked at me like I was their prey.

Their bodies bulged and shifted the same way that *thing* did earlier in our apartment. They turned into larger versions of it. Much larger. And much scarier. They snarled and growled like gorillas.

They surrounded me. One fainted at me. I flinched. Another one fainted. I flinched again. The three — whatever they were — I swore they were laughing at me. I tried to find an opening. Maybe I could escape. But these *beasties* had circled me. And were now closing in.

The ground erupted. Huge plant stalks shot out from the ground. They snatched each of the beasties by their arms, legs, and necks.

“Hold them,” a familiar voice called out.

The air shimmered. Sean appeared out of nowhere, so did two other IHF staff members, his assistant, Fleur, and one of the groundskeepers, Terry.

Fleur and Terry were concentrating, their hands glowed bright green. The harder they concentrated, the tighter the plants squeezed the beasties.

Sean threw his hands out. Streams of light shot from each of his fingertips, all the colors of the rainbow. They wound around each of the three beasties, weaving what looked like Celtic knots.

“That’ll be enough out of you.”

Sean clenched his fists, and the bands of light holding the beasties tightened and tightened until they exploded into clouds of glowing dust.

“You killed them!” I said.

“They were prepared to do the same to you,” said Sean. “Trust me.”

I struggled to catch my breath.

“There’s another one,” I finally managed to say. “A little one. My sister. Jenny.”

“It’s all right, love. She’s right here.”

It was Mrs. Byrne. She taught my Irish language class. Her husband was with her. He worked in the genealogy library. Don’t tell me they were in on this too? Whatever *this* was?

Jenny stood in front of Mrs. Byrne as they walked down a nearby path. She held Donovan in her arms. I could hear the little bugger purring away.

“They were under the bridge, just like our divining spell showed us,” said Mr. Byrne. “Two goblins were guarding her, but me and the missus took care of them.”

Mrs. Byrne scratched Donovan behind the ears. “This one did quite a number on that little goblin.”

I knelt in front of Jenny. She didn't look shaken up at all. Or even slightly bothered. I hugged her really tight. When I let her go, she looked up at me and said, “I'm hungry. What'd Ma leave for supper?”

I wasn't sure if I wanted to laugh, cry, or scream. Sean set his hand on my shoulder. I threw it off as I sprang to my feet. “What is all this? What's going on? What were those things? Who are you all, really?”

Sean held up his hands, as if to calm me down. “It's high time for you to know everything, Colin. And we will tell you. But first we need to find your mother.”

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**Thank you,**

**Dan O'Mahony**

