

WITCH IN THE CITY  
THE WILD ATLANTIC WITCH



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## PROLOGUE



**T**he Morrigan was tired of being defeated. After the Second Great Battle of Halloween, her fury knew no bounds – even her favourite raven was hiding from her. She raged for several days, blasting boulders and firing songbirds out of the sky, the lion’s share of her wrath being directed towards The O’Connor woman. That creature seemed to thwart her at every turn, but now she knew for sure that the woman’s Achilles heel was her one and only daughter.

She had been a fool to swap the girl for the foppish Fae prince before - she would make sure not to make such a mistake the second time around. And she most certainly wouldn’t waste her time going after the girl’s father again. Queen Dana had duped her into believing he held value for The O’Connor Woman when clearly he did not. Yet, even then, the witch had released him from Hades, with the help of the dragon she had previously stolen...

The thought caused The Morrigan to become apoplectic. She raised her head, opened her mouth and let out a fearsome roar, black particles emanating from her throat and poisoning the atmosphere around her head.

Once she had calmed down, The Goddess of Death and Destruc-

tion lowered herself into the lotus position, closed her bloodshot eyes and opened her third, powerful, inner orb. It was as if she was traveling at speed down a spiral tunnel that hurtled onward to its final destination - a college dorm room in London, England, where Molly O'Connor sat on her bed, reading a book, completely unaware of what was about to befall her.

## CHAPTER I



A fine November mist had settled over everything. My hair was wet, even though it wasn't raining and although I'd only been in the garden for a few minutes. The last of the amber leaves clung to the twisted oak and every so often, one would float to the earth. Everything was drippy and still, so still that I could hear the car in the distance a full minute before I saw it. My heart rose when the blue Toyota came into view and eventually pulled up outside the cottage.

Bridget got out and the slam of the car door caused two more leaves to fall. She looked at me expectantly.

"If the mountain won't come to Mohammad, Mohammad will go to the mountain."

"I'm not sure I like being described as a mountain. Come in."

I turned and walked back into the cottage, feeling Bridget following me.

"Tea or coffee?" I said, opening the press where I kept the mugs.

"I don't mind. I just came to see you."

We both sat down at the kitchen table and looked speculatively at one other.

“You haven’t been to the café for a while.”

I shrugged. “I’ve been exhausted since the battle. I’ve mostly been resting, trying to get my energy back.”

“So it’s nothing to do with Finn, then?”

I got up and filled the kettle from the tap at the sink.

“He won’t even look at me, Bridge. The thought of bumping into him is too upsetting.”

“Well, maybe if you *did* bump into him you could talk and...”

“No.” I said, pressing the button firmly down on the kettle.

I kept my back turned to her as the annoying tears formed at the back of my eyes again. Only when I’d successfully managed to blink them away did I sit back down.

“What are you going to do then?” She was gazing at me, her chin cupped in her hands, her elbows resting against the table.

“What do you mean, what am I going to do? I’m not going to do anything.”

“But Finn...”

“I’m thinking of going to London.”

“What, permanently?” Her eyes widened in alarm.

“No, you big numpty. For a holiday, to see Molly.”

Bridget’s face took on a faraway look. “I’ve never been to London.”

“Really?! How come?”

“I don’t know. I always meant to get around to it, just never did.”

“But it’s so close.”

“I know.”

“Oh, you’d love it, Bridge. All the different restaurants ... you should come with me!”

“What? Sure, I couldn’t.”

“Of course, you could. Come on, let’s do it.”

“But what about the boys and the café...?”

“What about your husband?”

“But...”

“But nothing. He owes you big time for all those rugby international trips he goes on.”

“He does, doesn’t he?” I could see the excitement in her eyes. “It *would* be nice to get away.”

“I’ll book everything. How long do you think it’ll take you to get organised?”

“A few days.”

“It’s settled then.”

## CHAPTER 2



**I**t was with some trepidation that I set out to Bridget's on the morning of our trip. I had agreed to pick her up and drive us to the airport, as Brian needed their car, but I was regretting it now. What if 'you know who' was hanging about? Although this was unlikely if he knew I was coming.

A vague sense of guilt hung about me too, as I felt I was running away: not just from the awkward Finn situation, but also from Jewel's dreadful grief. When she wasn't out looking for her egg, the dragon was filling The Sacred Wood with her heart-wrenching cries. I could even hear them in my head at times when she wasn't making a sound. I wondered if Angus could hear her too...

But there was nothing I could do about that right now. We had all taken part in the initial search but at this stage, every lead had run dry. Besides, I needed to fully replenish myself before I could be of use to anyone again.

The front door was open but there was no sign of life. I got out of Zoë and looked around. I couldn't see anyone but I could hear voices coming from inside the house. I walked through the front door and into the kitchen.

"Where is it? It can't have just vanished!"



“Boys! Did one of you take your mother’s passport?!”

“I didn’t, it must have been him.”

“I did not!”

Barra and Brendan started wrestling under the breakfast bar.

“What are you looking for?”

Bridget and Brian looked up at me.

“It’s my passport, Rosaleen, it’s gone!”

“What’s that sticking out from under your coat on the counter?”

“Oh, thanks be to God! Come on, let’s go before I lose something else.”

“Come out and say goodbye to your mother, boys.” Brian picked a twin up by the collar with each hand and held them both aloft until they’d stopped struggling.

“Will you bring us back presents?”

“Of course I will.”

“I want to go too!”

“Well, you can’t. I’d hardly get much of a break if I brought the two of you with me now, would I?”

But she hugged them both fiercely.

“Go on, Bridge, or you’ll miss your flight.” Brian urged her out the door. He looked me in the eye. “Have a good time.”

Since the battle, Brian’s iciness towards me had melted. And all I’d had to do was save his life...

As we drove off, with a loud beep of the horn, we could see Brian framed in the rearview mirror, a twin clinging to each of his legs.

“Oh, I hope they’ll be okay.”

“You won’t even be gone for a week.”

“But I’ve never been away from the boys before.”

“Not even for one night?”

“No.”

“Well, all the more reason to go now. You can call them every day.”

“Only once a day?!”

“As much as you want.”

“You won’t get annoyed with me if I keep ringing them.”

“Only a little bit. But, Brian will have plenty of help won’t he?”

She nodded without looking at me. I knew Finn would be there a lot of the time.

Her expression brightened. “There’s a service station outside Mullingar I really like. Can we take a pit stop there?”

“If you like.” I smiled to myself. I couldn’t *wait* to show her London.

## CHAPTER 3



**I**t must have been eighty years since The Morrigan had last visited London. The place was almost unrecognisable, of course, as were most cities nowadays, but still, there were the old, familiar landmarks: Big Ben, The Houses of Parliament and Buckingham Palace, to name but a few, and her personal favourite – The Tower of London. She'd always loved the ambience of *that* particular building and she hoped she'd have the opportunity to hang out there for a while and visit with some of her favourite ghouls.

But right now, she found herself on Oxford Street, travelling by foot so as not to draw too much attention to herself. She stood at a crossing, waiting for the tiresome little green man to appear. A boy child kept staring at her, as he clung to his mother's hand.

"Look, Mum, it's a drag queen!" He pointed at her with his free hand.

The Morrigan snarled at him before his mother could turn and the boy promptly burst into tears. Served him right, for he'd only grow up to be a pesky man. Although at least he'd recognised her as a queen, so perhaps there was some hope for him.

The little green man flashed and beeped and The Morrigan strode across the street in the direction of Selfridges, oblivious to all those

who stared at her - a striking figure in a PVC catsuit and thigh-high boots. Surely, they thought, she was on her way to The West End, where she was bound to be starring in a show. Or perhaps en-route to the red light district in Soho... But she was not. She was on her way to The University of London's student accommodation in Camden Market.

"WE'RE HERE." I NUDGED BRIDGET WHO'D BEEN DOZING ON AND OFF on the train from Heathrow airport. She leapt up and instantly began gathering her belongings.

We followed the throngs of people onto the platform, and then Bridget caused a bit of a blockage as she stood and gaped all around her.

"But this is..."

"King's Cross Station."

"You're not serious. What platform are we on?"

I laughed as I tugged her by the arm, forcing her to move before she could get flattened by an angry Londoner. "You're not on platform nine and three-quarters if that's what you're thinking."

"But this is the station, isn't it?"

"The one in Harry Potter, yes."

"Where they get The Hogwarts Express?"

"That's right."

"I don't believe it!"

The Harry Potter books were the only ones the twins would ever listen to, although I suspected Bridget often ended up reading them to herself.

Next, she found the pretend platform nine and three-quarters that had been constructed for the tourists.

"Oh my God, I have to have my photo taken!"

So we stood in the queue with the other mugs for half an hour, before Bridget got her photo taken, gripping onto the trolley that was half embedded into the wall, her Gryffindor scarf floating out behind her. Then she headed to the gift shop and bought a toy Hedwig and a toy Dobby.

“This one’s for Barra and this one’s for Brendan.”

“Do the boys even like soft toys?”

“I don’t care! *I’ll* have them.” Her eyes were shining. “God, I *love* London!”

I burst out laughing. “We haven’t even left the station yet.”

“You mean it’s even better outside?!”

OUTSIDE KINGS CROSS STATION, BRIDGET WAS AGOG AT ALL THE black cabs and the red double-decker buses.

“It’s just like a James Bond film!” She announced.

We crossed the street, trying to locate the hotel.

“Have you not been there before?”

“No, I always stay with Sienna when I come over.”

“Why aren’t you staying with her this time?” Her expression grew alarmed. “It’s because of me, isn’t it? She didn’t want me there.”

“No! I didn’t even ask her.”

“Why not? Are you ashamed of me?”

“Jeez, woman. Not at all! It’s because this trip is about you and me. And I didn’t know if you’d be comfortable staying in the house of someone you didn’t know.”

Bridget nodded, seeming satisfied with my answer. Although perhaps I wasn’t being entirely honest with her: Sienna and Bridget were both vastly different people and I wasn’t sure they *would* get on.

“I *did* tell her we’d meet her for lunch tomorrow if that’s alright.”

But Bridget was no longer listening. She had stopped walking and was staring open-mouthed into a shop front.

“It’s a bakery.” She said.

“It is.”

“A London bakery.”

“Not only that, it’s a Jewish bakery.”

“A Jewish bakery.” Her voice came out as a whisper. “Can we go in?”

“Of course.”

“Did I mention I love London?”

. . .

MOLLY LOVED LONDON TOO. SHE ESPECIALLY LOVED HER NEW student flat in Camden Market, and she was *so* looking forward to hanging out with her mum. She had smiled to herself earlier on, trying on hats at a stall in the market, reminding herself of her mother. Then she'd had a falafel at her favourite stall with a couple of friends and now she was returning to her room for a few hours of study. This meant she'd have the weekend free to hang out with Mum and Bridget.

It had started to rain and the drops kept up a steady beat on the rooftops as she ran to the door of the lobby and let herself in.

"Hi, Ed."

She greeted an acquaintance as she checked for mail in her mailbox.

"Hey, Molly. Are you going to the match tonight?"

"'Fraid not, the books are calling."

"Poor you."

"You can let me know who won."

"I will."

She hummed to herself as she rummaged around for her keys and let herself into her room. The keys, the letters, her bag... they all dropped to the ground, and Molly's mouth almost hit the floor too. Because, sitting on her bed was an eerily familiar woman with long, jet-black hair, wearing a PVC catsuit, thigh-high boots and an intimidating scowl.

"Hello, Molly O'Connor."

Then a raven flew screeching into Molly's face and that was the last thing she remembered.

## CHAPTER 4



“**Y**ou don’t mind sharing a room, do you?” I asked Bridget.

“That depends, do you snore?”

“Not as loud as Brian, I bet. And I speak from experience, having shared a tent with him in Iceland.”

“True. You can’t be as bad as him. I brought my earplugs with me anyway.”

So we were both happy with our twin room in the three-star hotel near King’s Cross station. I rang Molly to let her know we’d arrived safely, but she didn’t pick up.

“That’s weird. I thought she’d be expecting my call.”

“She’s a student. She’s probably asleep or with some boy. Or sleeping with some boy.”

“Do you mind? That’s my daughter you’re talking about.”

“Sorry. I’m sure she’ll ring you back.”

I nodded and tried not to bite my nails as Bridget perused the room service menu. Then she threw it down on the bed.

“What am I thinking? We’re in London, we should go out to eat.”

“It’s already dark.”

“How old are you, eighty-three?!”

“Rude.”

“Ah, come on. Live a little. It doesn’t have to be anything fancy.”

“Fine.”

While Bridget applied her make-up, I tried Molly again. This time she *did* pick up.

“Mum!” She sounded scared and the line was all crackly.

“Moll! What’s wrong.”

Then I heard a horribly familiar spine-tingling cackle and the phone went dead.

“Molly!” I screamed.

Bridget was at my side.

“Did you hear that?” I was hysterical.

“I did.” Bridget’s tones were hushed. She placed a comforting hand on my shoulder, but I shook it off, got up and paced around the room.

“Oh my God, Oh my God, what are we going to do...? That bitch!! I’m going to kill her this time, I swear it.”

And because I couldn’t think of anything else to do in the moment, I phoned the police.

“I’d like to report a kidnapping.”

The police officer on the other end of the line sounded bored. Bored! They probably got multiple reports of kidnappings every day. We weren’t in Mayo anymore...

“I don’t think you’re taking me seriously!”

“I can assure you, Madam, I am. Give me the address please and we’ll send someone over.”

I had to look up the address, tipping the contents of my handbag all over the place to find it. When the call was finished, I sat on the edge of the bed with my head in my hands, rocking slightly. I felt Bridget sit beside me and place an arm around my shoulder.

“Will we go over there too?” She asked.

I nodded emphatically.

But I couldn’t face the underground in my addled state, so I called Sienna for a lift.

SHE PULLED UP OUTSIDE THE HOTEL TWENTY MINUTES LATER AND hopped out of her Aston Martin looking as fabulous as ever, her sheen



of blonde hair falling over her shoulders like something out of a shampoo ad. Without closing the driver's door, she ran around to the pavement and embraced me.

"What's all this about Molly?"

"Can you drive us to Camden?"

"Of course."

"I'll tell you about it on the way."

I got into the passenger seat beside her and Bridget sat in the back. The two introduced themselves to one another, as I didn't have the wherewithal. I sat there gnawing my lip, watching the pretty Christmas lights blurring as my eyes filled up with tears.

"You said on the phone that she'd been kidnapped?"

I could feel Sienna staring at me. It was hardly surprising that she had questions.

I nodded. How much to tell? She had no idea of my magical life in Ireland and I had very deliberately kept it that way, insisting I visit her in London and not the other way around. I think she thought I was ashamed of my humble cottage.

"I rang her and I heard the ... kidnapper in the background."

"Do you know who it is, then?"

"Sort of."

"Oh my God, is it an ex-boyfriend or something?"

"Not exactly."

"Who then?"

I struggled for words. "It's hard to say."

"Not Bill?" Sienna wasn't a fan of my ex-husband.

"No!"

"Well, did you at least tell the police you knew who it was?"

"Not yet."

"But, Rosaleen, you have to ..."

"We're here. Take a left."

A police car was parked outside Molly's building and the door to the lobby was open. We all jumped out of the car and ran inside. The door to Molly's room was ajar and two officers, a man and a woman, were inside. We could hear one of them on the radio.

"... no sign of a struggle."

I burst into the room. "I'm Molly's mother!"

The policewoman nodded at me. "We're going to do everything we can to sort this out. I'm Officer Jean Brady."

I nodded back at this young woman who looked barely older than my daughter.

"Molly, you said her name was?"

"Yes, Molly O'Connor."

"And you are..."

"Rosaleen O'Connor. I'm her mother."

Had I already said that?

"And what makes you believe your daughter has been kidnapped?"

"Well, she's not here for a start."

"Okay... well, she might have gone out for the night."

"I heard her kidnapper on the phone."

"Oh. What did you hear?"

"I heard them laughing and Molly sounded... so scared."

I gulped back the tears.

"Do you know who this person is? A boyfriend?"

I shook my head. "It's a woman."

"A woman?" The male officer had stopped searching the room and was now looking at me. "Why would a woman kidnap your daughter?"

"Revenge."

"For what?"

I knew then that I was on a road to nowhere. There was no way I could explain this one.

"Look!" Bridget suddenly exclaimed.

We all turned to see her standing in the centre of the room, holding a black feather in the air.

"Here's your proof!"

The two officers exchanged looks.

"It's a feather." Said the man.

"We're not making this up, you know." I could see Bridget struggling with the same restrictions as I was. "I heard the kidnapper too."

"And you are?"

"Bridget O'Connor."

"Are you a relative of ... the missing girl too?"

“Sort of. Fourth cousin, I think it is, or maybe third cousin once removed. On my father’s side... never mind. Yes, we’re related. Listen, don’t you have any female criminals in London?”

“Of course we do.” Said Officer Jean.

“Ladies.” I could see and hear the man getting impatient. “There’s no evidence of a kidnapping here. If your daughter still hasn’t shown up in twenty-four hours, contact us again, in the meantime, there’s nothing we can do...”

“Officers.” Sienna stepped forward with a confident smile. “Let me introduce myself - Sienna Campbell-Hamilton. You may have heard of my husband, Stuart Hamilton.”

She offered her hand to both of the officers and they shook it uncertainly.

“You mean The Minister for Defence, *that* Stuart Hamilton?”

“That’s exactly who I mean.”

“I thought I recognised you.” The male officer sprang to attention. “Officer Kyle Rooney, at your service, Ma’am.”

“I can personally vouch for these women and I can *assure* you that my husband will be *most* appreciative if you assist them in this matter.”

“Absolutely, Ma’am.”

“So I can assume you’ll give this case top priority? That you’ll get a team onto it right away?”

“Of course, Ma’am.”

The two officers immediately went out to their squad car, both making calls on their radios.

“*That* was impressive!” Bridget said to Sienna, looking duly impressed.

Sienna shrugged. “Let’s hope they don’t find out that me and Stuart are getting a divorce.” Then she turned to me. “I’m going to need an explanation, you know.”

I nodded, not caring about anything else at that moment except Molly. I looked around the room. I recognised the fancy stationary set I’d bought her in Liberty on my last visit. My heart caught in my throat as I saw her familiar handwriting. Then my eyes travelled to her bed. I saw the dent in the covers where her body had last been and stroked it with my hand.

“You probably shouldn’t do that,” said Sienna, “it might disturb evidence.”

“We don’t need any more evidence,” I said. “Bridget, do you have the feather?”

She held it up by way of answer.

“Let’s go then.”

SIENNA INSISTED WE GO BACK TO HERS INSTEAD OF THE HOTEL. WE drove in silence to her townhouse in Kensington. As we got out of the car, Bridget grabbed my arm and hissed into my ear.

“Isn’t this where Princess Diana used to live?”

“Well, not here exactly, but close by, yes. In the palace.”

“The palace!” Bridget’s voice was breathless.

We walked past the black railings and up to the elegant front door of the pristine, white townhouse, which was set into a curve in the road.

As we stepped inside the ridiculously impressive entrance hall, Bridget gripped my arm again.

“Oh my God, remind me never to invite her to *my* house!”

SIENNA LED US INTO THE SITTING ROOM, WHERE SHE PROMPTLY poured out three tumblers of brandy and handed them around. We sat on the swallow-you-up couch, sipping silently, the only sound coming from the grandfather clock ticking in the corner.

“Well,” She said eventually, “are you going to tell me what this is all about?”

Bridget and I looked at one another.

“What?!” Sienna was almost shouting, “I’m going nuts here!”

I sighed. Luckily there were few people in the world I trusted more than Sienna. My reasons for not telling her that I was the latest in the long line of powerful witches had more to do with protecting her than anything else.

I got up off the couch. “Let’s go into the kitchen.”

“The kitchen?”

But she followed me just the same, as did Bridget.

“Now.” I leaned against the island. “Do you have an object you don’t care about? Something you didn’t buy in Harrods.”

“Let’s see.”

Sienna began searching through her cupboards. It took her an inordinate amount of time to find something that wasn’t valuable. Eventually, she held out a cup.

“This. I don’t care about this.”

“Okay. Can you put it in the sink please?”

Frowning, Sienna did as I asked.

“Now, stand back.”

Sienna stood back, just a little bit. Bridget took her by the shoulders and moved her further away. Then, I lifted my right hand, focussed, and blasted a jet of blue light from my fingertips. It connected with the cup which instantly shattered and combusted.

“Holy crap!” Sienna exclaimed. She broke away from Bridget and ran to the sink, staring at the smoking pile of ash that, a few seconds earlier, had been a cup. Then she stared at me.

“How did you do that? Do you have a special gadget?”

I shook my head. “No. It’s just... me.”

“What do you mean, it’s just you?”

“I’m not exactly who you think I am.”

“What do you mean? You’re Rosaleen. What are you talking about?”

“Yes, I’m Rosaleen, but... you know when I went to Ireland?”

“Of course I do. I’m not allowed to visit.”

“There’s a reason for that.”

“Because you can blast things to kingdom come with your fingertips?”

“I’m a witch, Sienna.”

“A what?”

“A witch.”

“That’s what I thought you said.”

“I’m what they call The O’Connor woman. There’ve been witches in my family going back centuries. I’m the latest one.”

Sienna was staring at me goggle-eyed. I hoped she didn't pass out. But instead, she said:

"Son of a bitch. I always knew there was something different about you."

A small laugh escaped from my lips, I couldn't help it. "Did you?"

"Yes, but never in a million years would I have guessed... and Molly?"

"She's the future O'Connor woman."

"Does she know?"

"No... well she did..."

"And this woman that's taken her..."

"The Morrigan."

"The Morrigan... that sounds familiar. Isn't The Morrigan a figure from mythology?"

"Not so mythological." Said Bridget.

Sienna swung her head around to look at Bridget.

"What about you, you're an O'Connor. Are you one of these O'Connor women as well?"

"Not really, a little bit I suppose. Rosaleen lets me take part in spells sometimes and I'm a member of her coven."

"Coven! You have a coven?!"

"Well, yes, we're witches."

"Holy shit, I've always wanted to be part of a coven, can I join yours?"

"I don't think so, Sen, it's more dangerous than you might think, and right now..."

"Right now we have to focus on poor Molly, yes, sorry, I'm losing the run of myself. I'd better ring Stuart, and let him know what's going on in case he gets a call."

She paused in the doorway as she was about to leave the room and turned to me.

"Bloody hell, Rosaleen."

"I know."

Then she was gone.

Bridget and I looked at one another.

"How do you think that went?" I asked.

“As well as can be expected. You didn’t have a choice, you had to tell her.”

I nodded.

“And what are we going to do about Molly?” Bridget looked at me keenly.

“Well, the police aren’t going to be any help. I don’t know why I rang them really, I sort of panicked. I kind of regret it now.”

Bridget nodded. “It’s down to us.”

“Yes.” I agreed.

“And we have the feather.” She said.

“And the power of three.” I added.

“Oh yes, we *do* have that.”

Sienna came back into the room.

“Okay, I spoke to him and gave him the heads up. I told him if he helped us I wouldn’t fight him for the house on the golf course in Florida.”

“Sienna, I don’t want you to...”

“Don’t worry about it, I had no intention of going after that house anyway. I hate golf and they’re always getting hurricanes there.”

“Alright then. Sienna. You know how you said you wouldn’t mind being part of a coven?”

## CHAPTER 5



**M**olly was waking up, although it might have been more accurate to say that she was regaining consciousness. She had no idea where she was, only that it was dark and cold and kind of ... breezy. She shifted around and whatever hold she was in immediately tightened. She froze with fear. Where the hell was she? Was she in a car boot? Rolled up in a rug? But no, whatever had her was alive. Was she imagining things or was she wrapped in feathers? And she could have sworn she was moving – smoothly and swiftly – as if she was flying! If she didn't know any better, she would have guessed she was in the possession of a giant crow. But it couldn't be... was she having some kind of lucid nightmare?

She forced her mind back to the last thing she remembered. She'd been in Camden market, she'd had a falafel, Jude and Carrie had been there, then back to her room, then the woman sitting on her bed, the shiny black outfit, the cruel, haughty expression, the bird flying into her face, then... nothing. And the strange familiarity about it all. She'd met this woman before, she knew she had, only she didn't know how or where. Somehow she connected her with Ireland. And heat. Intense, oppressive heat. But all she got were fragments of memories that frustrated more than they enlightened.



Her mother! She thought of her mother. She was on her way to visit. Mum would find out she was missing and she'd come and get her. But what could a middle-aged housewife and occasional writer of interior design articles possibly do to help?

"OH MY GOD, THIS IS SO EXCITING!" SIENNA WAS BOUNCING ON THE edge of the chair as if she was about to pee herself, then she looked at me. "Oh, I'm so sorry, Rosaleen, I'm such an idiot, this isn't exciting at all, it's..."

"Let's just get it done." I could tell my voice was gruff.

"What do you need from me?"

"A map of London, for a start."

"Oh. I don't think I've got one. You see, I live here and..."

"I have one!" Said Bridget. "I put it in my handbag, in case we got lost." She rifled around in her bag. "Here it is!" She held it aloft with a triumphant look on her face.

"Spread it out on the table over there."

She laid the map on Sienna's glass-topped, marble-bottomed dining room table then looked at me:

"How do you know she's still in London?"

"I don't." If my voice was gruff before, it was even more gruff now.

"Can I have a candle, please, Sienna?"

"Yes, of course."

She scurried off to another room.

"Have you got the feather?"

Bridget handed it silently to me, then Sienna reappeared with a candle.

"Shall I light it?"

"Please."

Then I took off the quartz pendulum I was wearing on my neck.

"Now gather 'round. We need to join hands around the feather."

"Why is the feather so important? It's just a crow's feather."

"It's not, it belongs to The Morrigan."

"The Morrigan has feathers? I don't get it."

"It's from one of her wings."

I ignored Sienna's flabbergasted expression.

"Now, please join hands above the map."

We joined hands and I held the pendulum over the map of London, then I closed my eyes and began to recite words in Latin:

"Ostende mihi illum quem quaero."

"What?"

"Shush. Ostende mihi illum quem quaero."

I repeated the phrase one more time and the pendulum began to twirl. At the same time, Gran's emerald ring, which I always wore on my right hand, started to glow.

"Would you look at that!"

I was aware of Bridget elbowing Sienna in the ribs. I repeated the phrase three more times, this time with no interruption. The pendulum began to spin and jerk erratically as if moved by an invisible force. I followed its lead, guiding it gently in the direction in which it seemed to want to go. After a while, it became clear that it was hovering over one particular area.

"Do you see that?" I directed my words to Bridget.

"Yes, they're still in London alright. Pity it isn't more exact."

Without missing a beat, I set down the pendulum, took up the candle and set the map on fire. It ignited instantly, the flames leaping high.

"Jesus, Mary and Joseph!" Bridget exclaimed.

"Don't break the connection!" I shouted

"My table!" Sienna looked alarmed.

The flames danced for a full minute in a myriad of different colours, until all that was left was one tiny circular section of the map, everything else being reduced to ashes. We all peered down at the tiny section of paper.

"They're at Highgate Cemetery."

WE GATHERED AROUND THE KITCHEN ISLAND TO DISCUSS OUR NEXT move.

"You know," Bridget sounded thoughtful, "it might be a trap. The Morrigan might *want* us to find Molly."

“I nodded. I think you could be right, otherwise, why wouldn’t they be in Hades by now?”

Sienna nearly choked on her brandy. “Did you say Hades?”

“So you think she knows we’re here?” Bridget continued.

“I’d almost be sure of it.”

“Do you think she knows *I’m* with you?” Sienna questioned in a small voice.

“Probably.”

Her eyes widened. I imagined she was coming to terms with being on the radar of a highly dangerous mythological creature – with wings. I suddenly felt guilty for putting her in jeopardy.

“Sienna, you don’t have to come with us, in fact, I don’t think you should. You’ve already helped us enough. Loads.”

“No! I want to come! And what if you need the power of three again?”

I nodded at her and smiled.

“Those words you kept reciting...”

“Yes?”

“You weren’t... you weren’t conjuring the devil, were you?”

Despite everything, I laughed.

“No, they’re Latin for ‘show me whom I want’.”

“Oh.” She looked relieved. “And how did you know to say them?”

“The Dead Gran Scrolls.”

“The what?”

“Gran left me lots of written instructions when she passed – spells and the like.”

“Oh... And that pendulum. Do you wear it all the time?”

“Mostly.”

“Have you got a crystal ball too?”

“No, I’m a witch, not a fortune teller.”

Sienna took a sip of her drink. “Silly me.”

## CHAPTER 6



**T**he Morrigan's eyes snapped open. So, The O'Connor woman had located her. She smiled to herself – she'd been banking on this, because, let's face it, if she hadn't wanted to be found she would have ventured further afield than Highgate Cemetery. She did like it here though... appreciated the ambience.

It was nighttime now and pockets of fog permeated this great garden of death. A triumphant-looking angel loomed out of one such pocket but The Morrigan ignored it. She had no time for angels.

Currently, she was sitting at the top of an ancient yew tree, which afforded her an exceptional view. A colony of bats wheeled about her head, delighted and excited at her presence. The girl was lying on top of a sarcophagus, looking pleasingly like a sacrificial offering. She was muttering feverishly to herself and, every so often, she would make a jerky movement. The charm she was under hadn't worked as well as The Morrigan would have liked and she'd had to knock her out with a wooden plank just to be on the safe side. She didn't know why the spell hadn't been more effective – perhaps it was because the girl had magical blood. She frowned as she pondered this. Then her frown turned upside down when she considered that she had successfully lured the mother. How satisfying it would be if she could get two for

the price of one – finish off both the current and future O'Connor women in one fell swoop.

“WE NEED TO LEAVE RIGHT AWAY IN CASE THEY'RE ON THE MOVE.” I was jittery with impatience.

“Right you are, I'll get the coats.”

Sienna handed us our jackets and we bundled into her car. It took off with an electric purr.

“So,” Bridget sounded uncertain, “we're going to a cemetery. At night time.”

“Yes, it's quite a famous cemetery actually – something of a tourist attraction. Lots of famous people are buried there.” Said Sienna.

“Like who?” Bridget was sitting in the back, her face peering in between the driver and passenger seat.

“Oh, Karl Marx, George Michael...”

“George Michael! You're kidding! Can we see...?”

She caught me looking at her and trailed off, leaning back in her seat.

THE JOURNEY TOOK ABOUT THIRTY MINUTES, ALTHOUGH IT PROBABLY should have taken forty. Sienna was typically unphased by the frantic traffic, ignoring the cabbies that blasted their horns at her and the numerous vehicles that sped by with sirens blaring – an ambulance, a fire engine and a police car, which appeared to be involved in some kind of chase.

“Should we have told the police where we were going?” Sienna looked across at me.

“Why?”

“They might be able to help.”

“What can *they* do?”

“I don't know. Maybe they can shoot the bitch.”

I shook my head silently. I didn't even know if the bitch *could* be shot or, at least, if a bullet would have any detrimental impact on her.

“We’re here.” Sienna announced, pulling up outside an impressive and intimidating set of gates.

“They’re locked!” Bridget sounded dismayed.

“It *is* after hours.” Pointed out Sienna.

“But the dead people are hardly going to get out!”

“Maybe they’re trying to stop grave robbers from getting *in*.” She arched an artfully plucked eyebrow.

“Grave robbers! Stop it, you’re giving me the creeps!”

“So what do you think, ladies?” Sienna sounded as if she was having the greatest adventure of her life. “Are we climbing this thing?”

“No need,” I said, “unless you want to, of course.”

“Not particularly – not in these shoes, anyway.”

“Take my hand then. Bridget...”

We stood facing the gate, me in the centre, Bridget holding my right hand and Sienna, my left.

I closed my eyes and became immediately aware of that buzzy feeling in my finger that told me Gran’s ring was glowing.

“GUARDIANS OF THIS GATE,  
Help seal our fate,  
By invisible key,  
So mote it be.”

NOTHING HAPPENED AT FIRST. THEN I OPENED ONE OF MY EYES, just in time to see the massive padlock unfastening itself. The gate began to swing open, as if of its own accord, creaking ominously.

“Holy Mother of God!” Bridget stepped back and involuntarily blessed herself.

“This power of three thing is *well* impressive!” Said Sienna. “Can you use it to get VIP access?”

“I’ve never tried, come on.”

We tentatively entered the graveyard, Bridget and Sienna both activating the torches on their phones. I didn’t feel the need as my ring was still glowing brightly.

I had to hand it to The Morrigan – she knew how to choose a setting. I'd visited Highgate Cemetery in the daylight before, but at night time... that was a headless horse of a different colour. It was almost theatrical, what with the monuments and statues looming up out of the fog.

"I don't like it." Whispered Bridget, clinging on to my sleeve.

"We just need to stick together." I didn't know if I sounded reassuring and I didn't much care. I was entirely focused on finding my daughter.

"Do you think she knows we're here?" Sienna hissed in my ear.

"Probably."

"What...?"

"Ssshhh."

"Look, a piano!"

I turned in the direction that Bridget was pointing. Sure enough, a tombstone in the shape of a piano, rose out of the mist, looking for all the world as if it were floating. Then I nearly suffered a heart attack as music suddenly blared from the tombstone. Bridget screamed beside me and Sienna appeared to try to jump into my arms as if she was Shaggy and I was Scooby Doo.

"What are you doing!"

But I was petrified too. We all ran as fast as our legs and heels could carry us away from the haunted piano, coming to hide behind another tombstone, panting and clutching at each other.

"I don't like it here!" Said Bridget, stating the bleeding obvious.

The piano continued to play its eerie tune.

"I know that music – it's from the movie 'Fantasia'. I watched it with the twins a while back.

"It's Toccata and Fugue in D minor." Said Sienna.

"Oh shut up!" Bridget and I said at the same time.

"Sorry! Jeez..."

The music stopped as abruptly as it had started and an all too familiar cackle could be heard in the distance. I could have sworn I saw something move.

"That way!"

I began to run wildly in the direction of the movement, which

could merely have been the branch of a tree or a bird. Then the cackle could be heard coming from another direction.

“Over there!”

I collided with Bridget as I changed directions. Before I could make any progress, the cackle emanated from somewhere else.

I stopped running.

“The old hag is taking the piss,” I announced loudly.

“Who are you calling an old hag?!”

And suddenly The Morrigan was in the branches of a weeping willow right in front of us. I extended my right hand and blasted in fury, the bright blue light that zapped from my fingers connecting with the tree trunk, as The Morrigan spun into the air like a black whirling dervish, before hurling a red fireball in my direction, narrowly missing my right shoulder. I flung myself to the side to avoid it, and by the time I stood up again, she was gone.

“Come back here, you cowardly bitch!” I screamed after her but, unsurprisingly, she didn’t come back.

“Molly!” I began yelling at the top of my voice. “Molly!”

“Molly!” The others started calling too, until it seemed that the whole of Highgate cemetery was filled with our frantic calls. But none of us received a reply.

Suddenly there was a flurry of noise and movement from beside the catacombs, the sound of a thousand black wings, and all three of us saw the same sight at once – The Morrigan flying away with my daughter tucked under her arm, Molly’s familiar Nike runners dangling in the air. I screamed her name one more time but it just got lost in the fog.



## CHAPTER 7



**I**t soon became clear that they weren't coming back. My two friends linked me on either side and we made our excruciating way back to the car. I sat slumped in the back this time, Bridget having strapped me in as if I were a child, before getting into the passenger seat beside Sienna.

“So she doesn't have a broomstick then?” I heard Sienna ask Bridget in hushed tones, presumably clarifying why I couldn't follow The Morrigan and rescue my daughter mid-air. It made me think of my ancestors, some of whom were winged, Ana, in particular, the original O'Connor woman. *She* could have followed The Goddess of Death and Destruction, and it struck me then that maybe she had, as the goddess was surely around in her day. It was a strange thought – that The Morrigan knew all of my ancestors first-hand. My next thought was that she still hadn't succeeded in wiping out our bloodline. Well, it wouldn't happen on my watch either.

The city lights glittered as Sienna sped past them, back towards Kensington. Because what else was there to do but to go home and regroup?

. . .

THE NEXT MORNING, AFTER A RESTLESS NIGHT'S SLEEP PUNCTUATED by nightmares, I sat at Sienna's kitchen island, nursing my mug of tea, the other two doing the same opposite me. They didn't look like they'd got much rest either, although the spark of eagerness was still in Sienna's eyes.

"She's taunting us," I said, my voice sounding flat and matter-of-fact to my own ears.

Bridget nodded. "She knew we'd find her."

"And that we couldn't catch her," Sienna nodded, "on account of having, you know, no broomsticks."

"Or wings," I said and felt her staring at me.

We all sighed, almost in unison, and then I saw Bridget's eyes widen as she pointed at the TV that Sienna had tuned constantly to the BBC news channel. "Look!"

I turned and looked at the screen as Sienna reached for the remote control and raised the volume. A male reporter stood in front of The London Eye, speaking earnestly into a microphone.

"There were numerous sightings across the capital last night of a person fast becoming known as 'The Bird Woman'. Witnesses describe a female clad entirely in black leather sporting what can only be described as a set of – presumably prosthetic – feather wings. Eyewitnesses described their extraordinary encounter in this report:

The screen switched to a young couple who looked, above all, excited to be on the telly. The girl was the main spokesperson. She had one of those septum piercings.

"I hate those yokes, they make the young ones look like bulls!" Commented Bridget.

I shushed her.

"It was really cool. We were on The London Eye for Matthew's birthday when this woman just landed on our capsule, as if out of nowhere. Then she walked right across the top, all casual, like, as if she was walking along the street. Then she crouched down and peered into the capsule. She was really spooky looking – some of the passengers started screaming, like. Then she just flew off with the woman under her arm."

"Woman?" Questioned the unseen female reporter.

“Yeah. A young woman with reddish hair. I couldn’t see her face, but I noticed she was wearing the latest Nike trainers.”

“And was this woman struggling?”

“No, she was just sort of... limp.”

“Do you believe she was alive?”

“It was impossible to tell.”

The girl’s words cut through me, while the picture switched back to the male reporter, standing live beneath The London Eye.

“Many questions remain unanswered, such as: who is this mysterious winged figure? Is she some manner of modern-day superhero? Is it possible that she had just saved the life of the person she was carrying? Or, more worryingly,” here the reporter raised a sardonic eyebrow, “is she a super-villain? And what of this young woman that several other witnesses have also mentioned? Concern for her is growing – whether or not she is still alive and, indeed, if she’ll stay that way for much longer.”

Sienna’s phone went off causing all three of us to jump.

“Hello? Yes, officer. Yes, we’ve heard about the sightings. And the young woman, yes, we believe the young woman to be Molly O’Connor. Can we meet you at The London Eye in one hour?”

She looked at me and I nodded.

“We’ll see you in thirty minutes.”

Sienna ended the call and we all sprang into action.

I REALIZED I’D EXPECTED THE ENTIRE LONDON EYE TO BE cordoned off like a crime scene, but it was mostly just business as usual, the attraction still in operation, most of the capsules full of tourists as it made its slow rotation. Nothing had happened here after all, it was just a sighting. It wasn’t as if a murder had occurred... I craned my neck and imagined the scene from last night – wondered which capsule my daughter had been on.

Officer Kyle Rooney from the day before bounded over as we were getting out of the car. He bypassed me and made a beeline for Sienna, or should I say, the wife of the Minister for Defence. He took off his

hat and even appeared to bow a little, Officer Jean Brady trailing in his wake. She nodded at me, at least.

“Ma’am,” Kyle said, his eyes alight with ambition, “thank you for meeting us here. We believe we have a lead.”

“Don’t tell *me*,” Sienna gestured in my direction, “tell the girl’s mother.”

Officer Dibble turned to me, his excitement palpable.

“A tourist has just reported a sighting in the past five minutes.”

“Where?”

“Clapham South Tube Station.”

“Then what are we doing, standing here talking?”

THE MORRIGAN WAS IN A BAD MOOD. WELL, EVEN WORSE THAN usual. London was a good deal busier than she remembered - you couldn’t move without banging into a tourist - and she had banged into several of them on her visit, knocking them clean off her path.

“Out of my way!”

She had been on the receiving end of many colourful volleys of curses.

But that was before she’d found the girl, and now that she had the future O’Connor Woman in her possession, she had to be more discreet. Which is why she’d gone underground.

So, imagine her dismay when she found tourists down there too!

The last time she’d been here, World War Two had been in full swing and this space, eleven storeys beneath the underground, had been an air raid shelter. The Morrigan had enjoyed London during the war. She’d loved hanging out in the chaos of the air raids, inhaling all that fear, and she’d very much enjoyed the randy, young American soldiers who’d swarmed the capitals at intervals.

She had fully expected the air raid shelter to be abandoned, considering there was no foreign power dropping bombs on England at that time. Because if there *had* been a war or an interesting terrorist campaign going on, The Morrigan would have been all up in its business.

She heard the tour seconds before she saw it - a group of about

twenty people hanging on to the words of an earnest-looking, bespectacled young man.

“So there you have it. I hope that’s given you a taste of what life would have been like for a family in wartime London.”

The assembled people gave him a round of applause – foolish human custom – then the group began to disperse. The Morrigan hid behind a pillar, Molly’s inert body slung over her shoulder, hoping they would all vamoose and not be replaced by another gang of tourists any time soon. Most of them did and she finally deemed it safe to venture from behind her pillar and into the vast, space again. But her keen ears picked up on something – a female voice, about forty metres ahead. She flew in its direction, as she didn’t want to alert the owner of the voice to her presence with echoey footsteps.

The woman – well-rounded and in her late thirties – had hung back from the rest of the group, who had now disappeared, and was talking into one of those modern phone contraptions.

“Yes, it was definitely the lady from the London Eye video.” The woman was speaking in an excited whisper. “Yes, she had the girl with her.” Another pause while the person on the other end spoke. “If I had to guess, I’d say she was passed out.” The woman was nodding vigorously as she spoke.

The Morrigan moved up silently behind her, grabbed the phone out of her hand and hurled it down a handy shaft.

“That’s quite enough!” She declared.

The woman turned and let out a strangled scream.

“That was an iPhone Sixteen!” She said, looking dazed.

“If I were you, I’d be more worried about myself.”

The woman’s eyes widened in terror as The Morrigan lifted her by the throat until her legs were dangling in the void over the shaft. Then she closed her eyes tightly, clearly believing that these were her last moments on earth. The Morrigan believed this too, until she had a better idea. Why not leave a calling card? So, instead, she flew upwards and draped the woman over the highest beam she could find.

As soon as the tourist’s throat was released she began to sob hysterically.

“Quiet!” The Morrigan stuck her face just inches away from the

woman's, then she put a warning finger on her own lips. "If you make a sound before I'm out of here, you're going straight down that shaft. Capiche?"

The woman gulped back her tears and nodded.

Adjusting Molly O'Connor on her shoulder, The Morrigan swooped off dramatically. It would only be a matter of time before the PC Plods arrived and she could certainly do without the hassle. She would have to find an alternative hiding place. What a great shame it was that subterranean London didn't have its own portal into hell.

"SERIOUSLY? IS THE MORRIGAN TAKING THE TUBE NOW?"

I looked up incredulously at the sign for the entrance of Clapham South Tube Station.

"It's also the entrance to one of the abandoned air raid shelters from World War Two." Explained Officer Jean Brady.

"No way!" Said Bridget. Then she looked guiltily at me and wiped the look of excitement off her face. "I mean, I see."

WE TOOK AN ELEVATOR DOWN INTO WHAT SEEMED TO BE THE bowels of the earth. I shouldn't have been surprised – The Morrigan loved to dwell underground – it was where she went to recharge.

We eventually emerged into a recreated World War Two bunker, complete with posters encouraging children to eat their carrots and reminding their parents to save kitchen waste to feed the pigs. But I didn't have time for posters...

"Molly!" I immediately shouted.

Officer Jean grabbed me by the arm and shushed me. "We don't want to alert the suspect to our presence."

"She already knows we're here."

"How could she?"

"Trust me, she knows."

But I didn't call out again.

I'd never visited the abandoned shelters before. As a native of

London, I'd kind of neglected to do touristy things. It felt surreal, like entering an alternative reality.

"Did you hear that?"

Sienna who was standing alongside me suddenly spun around and stood stock still.

Then we all heard it – a cry for help.

"Molly!" I screamed. "I'm coming."

"Please keep back, Ma'am, you could be running into danger."

Officer Rooney used his arm as a barrier and ran ahead of me. I didn't bother telling him that I'd run into danger more times than he'd had hot dinners. We all followed, our footsteps echoing noisily. After a minute he stopped abruptly and we all collided with one another.

"Quiet." He instructed, and we all listened out for the noise again.

"Help!"

My heart sank to my feet – whoever that was, it wasn't Molly. I hung back as the others ran on ahead. By the time I'd caught up with them, they were all craning their necks, looking upward at a woman who was clinging onto a roof beam for dear life, in an impossibly high position.

"How did you get up there?" Officer Jean was astounded.

It wasn't that difficult for someone with wings.

THE FIRE BRIGADE HAD TO BE CALLED AND IT WASN'T LONG BEFORE the firemen arrived with their extra tall ladder and rescued the unfortunate woman. In the meantime, Officers Jean and Kyle went searching the tunnels for The Morrigan and Molly, but they were long gone, of course. I took advantage of their absence to question the woman myself.

"Was the girl still with her?"

The tourist nodded and shivered, even though someone had wrapped her in a blanket.

"Was she... do you think she was...?"

"Alive? Yes, I do think so. She was all floppy and her skin was pink."

My shoulders relaxed in relief.

"Are you her mother?"

“Yes.”

The woman looked at me with sympathy.

“Did she say anything to you? The woman who had Molly – my daughter. Like where she was going next?”

The tourist shook her head. “She just warned me not to make any noise till she’d gone or she’d kill me.” The woman began to shake more violently. “I honestly thought she was going to kill me. My God, what is she?”

I rubbed the woman on the shoulder and turned away. “You wouldn’t believe me if I told you,” I muttered to myself.

Sienna and Bridget were standing a couple of metres away, Sienna having finished flirting outrageously with the firemen. I walked over to them.

“What next?” Asked Bridget.

“I don’t know.”

“An army marches on its stomach.” Said Sienna. “We should eat.”

ONE THING YOU COULDN’T SAY ABOUT LONDON WAS THAT IT WAS short of stunning eateries. We sat in one now, looking at the brunch menu, which had been handed to us by an uber-cool, ultra-snooty waiter. I could see Bridget trying to hide her excitement as she perused all the options.

“I wonder if they make their own sourdough?” She said.

I suddenly felt very sorry for her. Here she was on her first trip to London, thinking she was getting a break from the madness of home, only to walk slap-bang into this situation.

“Why don’t you ask the chef?”

“I couldn’t do that?”

“Why not? Go tell him or her you have your own bakery in Ireland and compare notes.”

“Okay, I think I will.” She went off grinning.

I realised Sienna was looking at me thoughtfully.

“There’s a lot I don’t know, isn’t there?”

I shrugged. “I guess so.”

“At least I understand now why you didn’t want me coming to



Ireland. I was starting to get a bit paranoid – I thought you didn't like me anymore.”

“I was just trying to protect you, Sen.”

“I know that now.” She took a sip of her bucks fizz. “I can't believe I thought you were living this tame life in County Mayo. I pictured you taking long, country walks and, I don't know, picking flowers, or something.”

I smiled at her. “I do that kind of thing sometimes.”

“And I thought you came to London for relief from the quiet life – to stop yourself from getting bored. But the whole time you were coming here for a break!”

“Ironic isn't it.”

“Bloody right, it is.” She shook her head, then looked me in the eye.

“We're going to find Molly, you know. Get her back.”

I nodded.

“So she doesn't know about all... this?”

“No.”

“But how did you hide it from her when she stayed with you that time?”

“I didn't – couldn't. I had to perform a forgetfulness spell on her before she left.”

“You know how to do that?”

I nodded.

“How ... don't tell me, The Dead Gran Scrolls.”

“You see, you're getting the hang of this already.”

“I'm very bloody far from getting the hang of it.” She took a large gulp of her drink. “You'd better not do it to me before you go back.”

“What?”

“You *know* what, perform a forgetfulness spell. I'm not a kid like Molly, I want to remember everything.”

“Knowing this stuff puts you in danger.”

“I don't care. I don't want my memory wiped. Hey, you don't have one of those special sticks like in The Men in Black movies?”

“No!”

“How do you do it then?”

Just at that moment, Bridget arrived back.

“He doesn’t make his own sourdough, he doesn’t even know how! I wrote down my recipe for him plus a few tips on a napkin. He was delighted – nice guy.”

She sat down and looked from one to the other of us.

“You know, I never even found out how you two met each other.”

Sienna looked across at me and raised her eyebrows.

“It’s been such a long time I hardly remember.”

“Our kids were in playschool together.”

“Oh, I didn’t know you had a child, Sienna, boy or girl?”

“Boy. Well, man, I suppose. Hugo – he’s in Thailand at the moment, supposedly teaching English. But Rosaleen and I didn’t get to know each other until I was looking for an interior designer. I heard through the other mums in the playschool that she was good.”

“She heard that I was cheap, more like.”

“Cheap and good, on account of her not holding herself out as a professional designer.”

“I’m not a professional designer.”

“You should be.”

“I’m too busy fighting baddies these days.”

“Did you do any of the rooms I saw in Sienna’s house?”

“No, I designed the living room and bedrooms in her Cotswold’s home.”

“Which I’m *definitely* fighting for in the divorce.”

“Do me a favour and don’t start on that till we get Molly back.”

“Good thinking. But tell me a bit about *you*, Bridget. You’re married, right? What’s your husband like?”

Bridget and I locked eyes as we simultaneously sipped our drinks, neither one of us sure if Sienna was ready to hear that Bridget was married to a werewolf.

## CHAPTER 8



**A**fter our boozy lunch, Sienna discovered, unsurprisingly, that she was too drunk to drive.

“We’d better get a taxi.” Said Bridget.

“Don’t be ridiculous,” Sienna declared, “We’ll get that young policeman – whatshisname – to give us a lift.”

“We can’t do that! That’s misappropriation of police resources or something.”

“Bullshit. We have a crime to solve and he’s helping us.”

Sienna made a phone call and two minutes later, the squad car pulled up outside the restaurant.

“Told you,” Sienna whispered loudly into my ear, “that guy is so ambitious you can almost smell it off him. I bet he sprays himself all over with Lynx Ambition every morning.”

“Shush, he’ll hear you.”

But Sienna didn’t care.

THE IDEA WAS THAT THEY’D DROP US BACK TO HER HOUSE IN Kensington, where we could regroup and plan our next move. But events were about to take an unexpected turn.

I was staring blankly out of the back window of the cop car, looking upward at the tops of the buildings, which were often so much prettier than the shop fronts below, when a flurry of black caught my eye. At first, I thought I must be seeing things, due to my addled state. But no. There it was again.

“Stop the car!” I yelled.

The car came screeching to a halt, causing the driver of a red double-decker bus behind us to blast us with his horn.

“What is it?” Officer Jean turned to me, looking concerned.

“Up there! Look!”

Everyone contorted themselves to see where I was pointing.

“What?”

“Where?”

“Oh my God, I see her?”

Then everyone saw her. Balanced on the spire of St. Margaret’s Church, looking directly at us, was The Morrigan, with a human figure tucked under her arm.

Officer Rooney executed a highly dangerous U-turn and screeched in the direction of the church. Then he switched on the siren and we suddenly cut through the manic London traffic like a hot knife through butter. Not that The Morrigan made the chase easy for us, zig-zagging between tall buildings and changing directions frequently. At one point, we found ourselves tearing down a one-way street in the wrong direction. I covered my eyes and peeped through a cage made from my fingers, but what else could the other drivers do but make way for us, veering up on the pavements and almost colliding with one another?

At last, we had a clear sighting of The Morrigan, as she moved through open air, in the direction of The Houses of Parliament. We crossed Westminster Bridge, not taking our eyes off her until she flew into the top of Big Ben and disappeared.

“What the... can she do that?”

“She just did.”

“Can we follow her up there?”

“We can,” said Officer Rooney, “but it’ll cut through a lot of red tape if Mrs Campbell-Hamilton makes a phone call.”

Sienna was already on it.

“Hmm. Yes. We need it done ASAP, it’s an emergency.”

There was a protracted silence as The Minister for Defence negotiated on the other end of the phone.

“Okay,” Sienna said finally, “you can have the Bentley.”

Then she hung up abruptly and leaned forward in her seat.

“Go straight through to the private carpark, they’re expecting us.”

Officer Rooney suddenly changed direction and we were all flung to the left as the car screeched dramatically. The gates to the car park were already open and we were ushered through by security.

“Over there!” Sienna pointed to an empty space. It had a plaque reserving it for The Minister for Defence. Kyle drove in way too fast and screamed to a halt, centimetres away from the wall.

“Was that really necessary?!” Said Officer Brady.

But he was already halfway out of the car, as were the rest of us.

We ran to the base of Big Ben and, again, were ushered right in. Then we stopped running as we reached the bottom of a massive stairway.

“Jesus, Mary and Joseph,” said Bridget, “do we have to climb all the way up? How many steps are there?”

“Three hundred and thirty-four.” One of the guards answered behind us.

“She’ll be long gone by the time we get to the top.” I felt bitterly disappointed.

“Well, get in here then.”

I turned to see Sienna and the two policemen standing at the base of a metallic elevator. With renewed hope, I stepped inside and we were all transported to the top of Big Ben.

MOLLY WAS EXPERIENCING THE STRANGEST MIX OF SENSATIONS. SHE was waking up from what seemed like a very long, deep sleep, reminding her of the time she’d come around after an anaesthetic, on the occasion of having her appendix removed. But this was no hospital room she was in, instead an outdoor location. It was extremely cold and a breeze cut through her. Molly opened her eyes and almost fainted with fright again. She tried to scream but the noise was stunted

and strangled in her throat. She was outside alright and very high up – extremely, unbelievably high.

“Are we awake little bird?”

She gasped and looked across at the presence next to her, another shockwave rocking her being.

“Where am I?”

“At the best viewing point in the city of London.”

She knew this woman – how did she know this woman? She had a flashback of her sitting on the bed in her flat in Camden. But she’d already known her, she was sure of it. Gathering up her courage, Molly looked to her right, into the void.

“Oh, Jesus Christ!”

“Hah. He can’t help you now. You’d better hold on tight, little bird!”

And only in that moment, when The Morrigan flew away, did Molly realise that it had been this terrifying creature that had been supporting her all along. This time she really *did* scream and groped around wildly for something else to hold on to. She found a large metal bar and clung to it with her arms and legs, like a monkey. This must be a bad dream, although it felt so real. Then she saw her mother’s face looking into hers and she knew she must be dreaming. Terrifyingly, the bar began to move beneath her and a noise like thunder on steroids reverberated throughout her body.

I was sure the elevator only took a couple of minutes, so why did it feel like hours? I joggled on the spot, willing it to go faster. When it finally pinged and the door slid open, I flew out, nearly knocking over Bridget and Officer Jean. I was in a space I’d never thought I’d be, behind the clock face of a landmark I’d always taken for granted and looked up at thousands of times. But now I was on the far side, surreally anti-clockwise, looking at The Morrigan perched like a bat. She locked eyes with me and gave me a horrible grin then flung herself off the building. That’s when I saw Molly, clinging for dear life to the smaller hand of Big Ben. I screamed her name and she looked at me in wide-eyed fear and amazement.

“Oh my God, look at the time?” Officer Jean shouted behind me.

A few seconds later, her words made sense as we were deafened by

the most god-awful noise. But worse – much worse – the clock hands moved, and Molly lost her grip and plummeted to an inevitable death. In that terrible moment, I lost consciousness and collapsed onto the ground.

I HAD HIT MY HEAD WHILE FALLING AND WAS OUT FOR SEVERAL minutes. My eyelids flickered open and I saw three worried female faces looking down at me. Then I remembered.

“Molly,” I whispered, and instantly wanted to be unconscious again.

“She’s okay! She’s okay, Rosaleen, The Morrigan caught her and flew away.”

I rolled into a fetal position and started to cry. I lay there for ages, with Sienna rubbing my upper back, wondering how much more of this I could take. Eventually, I was eased into a sitting position and I walked on shaky legs back to the lift. I closed my eyes during the descent. Back in the car park, I turned to Officer Rooney.

“I’m not getting back in that car with you, you drive like a lunatic.”

“Rosaleen, we...”

“No – my nerves wouldn’t take it.” I didn’t care if I appeared rude or ungrateful.

“Okay, we’ll take a cab.”

Given our location, we accessed a cab in no time. Our Sri Lankan driver took us smoothly back to Sienna’s house in Kensington, where I climbed into bed and lay sobbing and dozing and sobbing some more until I finally fell into an exhausted sleep.

WHEN I WOKE UP, BRIDGET WAS SITTING ON THE EDGE OF MY BED looking at me.

“I brought you tea.” She said, holding a steaming mug out to me.

I shuffled myself up into a sitting position, the pillows propped up behind me, and accepted the mug, cradling it with both hands.

“How are you feeling?” She asked.

I shrugged.

“Sorry, that was a stupid question. I’m sure you feel like pure crap.”

“Something like that.”

She sipped from her cup and continued to regard me thoughtfully.

“The hotel!” The thought popped randomly into my head, “We should cancel the hotel!”

“Already done,” said Bridget, “we only got charged for the first night.”

I nodded. “It’s hard to think clearly in the, you know...”

“Circumstances?”

“Yes.”

“Rosaleen.”

“Yes?”

Whatever she’d been building up to was about to come out.

“Do you think it’s time we got help from home?”

“Like who?”

“Peggy, for a start. She has more experience with The Morrigan than anyone else. She knows her ways and her tricks...”

Bridget stopped talking as I shook my head.

“Peggy’s not able for trips these days. She’s completely crocked.”

“Brian then?”

“Doesn’t he have to look after the kids?”

“I could get my mother...”

I was shaking my head again. “No, Bridget, sure, what could he do? The Morrigan wouldn’t let herself get close enough for him to physically attack her, and I’m not going to let *both* of the twins’ parents be in danger at the same time.”

“You think we’re in danger?”

“Yes. Every last one of us. Especially poor Molly.”

“Well. Finn then, he...”

“Absolutely not?”

“But...”

“I said no! He wouldn’t come anyway.”

“You know he would, if he thought you and your daughter were in danger and there was something he could do about it.”

I rested my head back on the pillow, feeling overwhelmed with exhaustion.

“Look Bridget, there’s nothing anyone else can do. This is personal.



The Morrigan is going specifically after me and this is going to end one against one, me against her.”

“You really think so?”

“I know so.”

THE MORRIGAN WAS ENJOYING HERSELF THOROUGHLY. SHE'D especially relished the incident at Big Ben, syphoning off the fear of the girl on the front of the clock, together with the mute horror of her helpless mother on the other side. She felt positively energised by it all and gleefully planned her next encounter. What she wanted was to meet The O'Connor woman one-on-one, without any of her irritating sidekicks hanging out of her. And she was thoroughly fed up carting the girl around the whole time – she must think of somewhere safe to store her. She was still more valuable to The Morrigan alive – for the time being. She had knocked her out with yet another spell and for now, The O'Connor girl lay on the flat roof of a high rise in Shore-ditch, talking feverishly to herself and twitching frequently. The Morrigan dreamt up countless ghoulish scenarios, featuring both mother and daughter. It was her own, personalised version of Netflix.

## CHAPTER 9



**I**t was The King's birthday and the whole of London was invited to his party, in the shape of a massive parade, full of pomp and ceremony, horses and carriages, pipe and brass bands...

I knew Bridget was itching to go and view the celebration and who was I to stop her? The way I felt at that moment, I didn't have the energy to pursue The Morrigan – I was completely depleted, and fully aware that Officers Rooney and Brady were on the case. So we went to the parade.

“Do you think this is the kind of event that might, you know, lure her out?” Sienna looked intensely at me as we waited for Bridget in the hall and I was heartened to see how invested she was in finding Molly. It was clear she was referring to The Morrigan.

“I don't know, it could work both ways. It would be more sensible for her to stay out of the way when there are so many people around, but, knowing her, she might not be able to resist creating a ruckus.

Sienna nodded. “Alright then, let's go. Flag?”

“No thanks.”

She shrugged and opened the front door, Bridget and I following her. Bridget had also declined a union jack flag to wave – as proud Irish women we just couldn't bring ourselves to do it...

We caught a red double-decker bus into the centre, delighting Bridget by sitting on the front of the top deck, getting a bird's eye view of all the sights, the ordinary bus trip feeling more to her like a grand tour. Everyone in the city seemed to be heading in the same direction and the buzz was undeniable.

We got off on The Strand, bypassed Downing Street and fell in with the river of people flowing up The Mall towards the palace. We were just able to make out The Victoria Memorial in the distance.

"I can't believe it!" Bridget kept saying. "All my life I've seen it on the TV but now I'm actually here!"

Her enthusiasm was endearing and I liked seeing the city I was so familiar with through Bridget's fresh eyes. As we strolled up towards the palace on the St James's Park side, the royal guards, dressed in striking scarlet with tall, black busbies on their heads marched by, banging their drums and playing their brass instruments, while others followed in formation on horseback, the animal's flanks gleaming in the sunlight. Sienna waved her flag gleefully and I could see Bridget regretting that she didn't have one.

We were now drawing level with The Victoria Memorial, the assembled crowd a blend of tourists and patriotic locals.

An excited cheer rose up as The King, the birthday boy, rode by on his magnificent black mount, followed by his family in an open carriage. All the women oohed and aahed at how cute the kids were.

They disappeared through the gates of Buckingham Palace and we all waited for them to re-appear on the balcony. When they came out we waved and cheered like eejits, and anticipated along with everyone else, the red arrows arriving and flying in formation over the palace, as they always did on these occasions.

"Here they come!" The buzz grew and reached a crescendo as the planes screeched over our heads. We had to shield our eyes from the sun to get a good view of them.

"What's that black thing?" Said a woman behind me.

Then: "Rosaleen!"

"What?"

"It's her."

Then I saw her – The Morrigan – weaving in and out of the flight paths of the red arrows, gliding expertly.

“It’s some kind of giant bird of prey,” said the woman’s husband, “it must have escaped from London zoo.”

“That’s no bird of prey,” said the couple’s teenage daughter, “that’s The Bird Woman that everyone’s been talking about. It’s all over social media!”

What was she up to? And where was Molly? She looked to be flying unencumbered, arms and wings fully outstretched, which must mean she had hidden Molly somewhere. That’s if she wasn’t ...

“What’s she doing? She’d not going to land on the balcony is she?”

That was exactly what she was going to do. To the collective astonishment of the crowd, ‘The Bird Woman’ landed elegantly on the outer railing of the balcony, facing the royals, who all recoiled in fright - all except Princess Anne who lunged at her and did her best to push her off. But The Morrigan was too quick for that. She easily sidestepped The Princess Royal and began to walk around the outer perimeter of the balcony like a child playing a game. Security appeared in the shape of half a dozen men in black suits who rushed onto the balcony. Just as one was about to grab The Morrigan’s ankle, she spun into the air like a tornado. It was only when she’d reached the roof did anyone notice that she had whipped the Duchess of Cambridge’s emerald green hat clean off her head and placed it on her own. She proceeded to strike several poses, like something out of a ‘Vogue’ video, before swooping off dramatically. The hushed crowd watched her until she was just a small black dot, and then pandemonium broke out, people turning to one another to exclaim about the extraordinary occurrence. The Royal Family had already been bundled back inside the palace, the balcony doors firmly shut behind them. There was much activity at the gates, with multiple sirens going off and several cars zooming out in the same direction as The Morrigan.

“They’ll never catch her,” Bridget remarked.

Sienna turned to me. “What was the purpose of *that*? Was the show for us or the public at large?”

“I don’t know what’s going on inside her head. But did you notice Molly wasn’t with her?”

“Yes, I did.” Sienna nodded.

“Which means she’s unguarded – for now at least. Why don’t we do another scrying spell?” Said Bridget.

“It’s worth a shot. We need a map.”

“One map coming up!” Sienna scurried off, eventually finding a young couple, clearly tourists, scanning an open map. There followed an intense discussion – Sienna talking earnestly, the couple shaking their heads, Sienna handing them a crisp note, the couple nodding and handing her the map.

Trying, but failing, to avoid the crowds, we sat on the ground under a massive tree in St James Park. Bridget spread out the map and I removed my pendulum.

“We need matches,” I said.

“Here,” Sienna rummaged around inside her handbag, “use my lighter.”

“I thought you’d given up the fags.”

“I did. I only have the occasional spliff.”

I slipped off a silver ring belonging to Molly that I always wore and formed a fist around it.

“All join hands,” I instructed and the other two placed their palms on top of mine.

I held the pendulum over the map and recited the Latin words:

“OSTENDE MIHI ILLUM QUEM QUAERO.”

“Ostende mihi illum quem quaero.”

“Ostende mihi illum quem quaero.”

SURE ENOUGH, THE QUARTZ CRYSTAL BEGAN TO JERK AROUND crazily. We had drawn a little crowd of our own, several people curious about what we were doing.

“What are you looking at?” Sienna shouted at them aggressively and they all moved on. She wasn’t as posh as she seemed.

When the crystal had settled on a particular area, I took up the lighter and set the map on fire. There was an anxious moment when a

few of the fallen leaves began to smoulder but we soon stomped them out. All that was left was a tiny circle of the map. I picked it up and peered at it.

“She’s at St Paul’s Cathedral. Let’s go!”

Sienna immediately called Officers Rooney and Brady for a lift, but by the time they’d got through the parade traffic, the thronging tourists and the cordoned-off areas, almost half an hour had gone by.

“I told you we should have gone by tube!”

We almost got into a fight, but then the police arrived and stuck on their siren and off we went.

I leapt out of the car before it had stopped properly and ran to the steps of the cathedral. I could see them up on the dome, the Duchess of Cambridge’s emerald green hat standing out clearly. As soon as The Morrigan was satisfied that I had spotted her, she waved at me, tucked Molly under her arm and flew off again to God knew where.

BACK AT THE HOUSE, I SAT ON SIENNA’S VOLUMINOUS COUCH, MY legs tucked up under me, a cashmere shawl around my shoulders, feeling utterly devastated. I didn’t know how much more of this I could take, but I also knew I couldn’t stop until Molly was safe. I was aware of the other two moving around me but I preferred to keep my eyes closed.

Sienna’s phone rang and she picked up immediately.

“Hello?”

I felt her stand up from the couch and her tone – and accent – changed instantly.

“Your majesty!”

My eyes snapped open and I raised myself up. Bridget was also sitting to attention opposite me. We both hung onto every word of Sienna’s side of the conversation.

“Yes, we *have* met before, at a charity event in the palace last year.”

Sienna’s face was flushed.

“Yes, you heard right.”

Bridget was jumping up and down in front of her, mouthing ‘Put him on speaker!’.

Sienna nodded and we could suddenly hear the oddly familiar voice of the king.

“I didn’t enjoy having my birthday party crashed in that manner.”

“No, of course not, your highness.”

“So I’d appreciate it if you’d be good enough to come to the palace, at your earliest convenience, to discuss the matter.”

“Absolutely, Sir.”

“Nine o’clock tomorrow morning? We’ll send a car.”

“Thank you so much.”

“Excellent.”

Bridget was now practically in Sienna’s face.

“Oh, your majesty.”

“Yes?”

“I have two friends who are also very involved in the search. The Mor – this terrible woman has kidnapped one of their daughters. May I please bring them with me?”

“Good heavens, how awful, but of course! We must get her daughter back, and we can’t have this so-called ‘Bird Woman’ flying willy-nilly around the capital causing havoc. I’ll see you all then.”

As soon as The King ended the call, Sienna flung the phone on the couch and clamped her hands over her mouth.

“OMG!” She said. “What am I going to wear?!”

AS IT TURNED OUT, WE ALL ENDED UP WEARING CLOTHES FROM Sienna’s wardrobe. We’d only brought a small selection of practical holiday clothes with us. Who was I fooling? If I’d brought all my clothes, I still wouldn’t have had anything to wear to Buckingham Palace. When I went to The Hill of Tara, to carry out my royal duties, the second I struck The Stone of Destiny and got transported into the ancient realm of Royal Tara, I found myself magically dressed in a suitable robe. I had a new appreciation for just how handy that was now!

Bridget examined the contents of Sienna’s huge walk-in wardrobe like a child in a sweet shop.

“Can I really wear anything?”

“Yes, well apart from that navy suit on the bed because I’m wearing that.”

“Do you honestly think he’ll be able to help us?”

Sienna gripped me by the shoulders and looked me in the eye.

“Yes, I bloody well do! He’s the King of England and this is his turf. We’re going to have every resource at our disposal.”

I nodded, not convinced. They may be The British Royal Family, but they’d never dealt with The Goddess of Death and Destruction before.

Sienna sat down and smiled at us. “Did you ever think you’d be meeting a king?”

“Sure, Rosaleen is The High Queen of Ireland.” Bridget threw this piece of information casually over her shoulder while viewing her backside in a wrap dress in the full-length mirror.

Sienna looked from one of us to the other.

“She’s the what of what?”

Bridget’s reflection looked back frankly at her. “The High Queen of Ireland.”

Sienna gaped. “The... but there *is* no queen in Ireland... Rosaleen... what?”

“It’s an ancient title, it’s kind of hard to explain.”

“Well, try!”

Oh dear. I didn’t feel like getting into a discussion on time travel at that moment.

“How about if I promise to tell you everything when this is all over.”

She stared at me and I could tell she was torn between insisting I tell her everything this very second and concern for my fragile state. The latter eventually won.

“Okay, as soon as we’ve got Molly back. But you can’t leave *anything* out and you’ve got to promise not to put me under that forgetfulness spell.”

“Alright then.”

“You promise?”

“Yes.”

“Pinky swear?”



“God! Yes!”

“And I want to know all about your love life too, because I *know* you’ve been keeping stuff from me.”

“Fine.”

“Good. Now, this maroon would be *fabulous* on you.”

“IT’S A ROLLS ROYCE!”

Bridget jumped up and down from where she was peeping out behind the curtain in Sienna’s living room. She went to rush towards the front door.

“Hold your horses,” Sienna told her, “let him knock first.”

“Yes, okay.” Bridget stood behind the living room door, fixing her hair and fidgeting with her bag. She glanced over at me and caught my eye.

I smiled at her. “You look fab,” I said.

“So do you.”

There were three sharp knocks on the front door and Sienna went to answer it.

“Car for Mrs Campbell-Hamilton.”

“Yes, we’re ready.”

We followed her out the door and down the steps of the townhouse. I’d never seen such a shiny car in all my life. I thought of my humble little mud-spattered Renault Zoë. I could practically see my reflection in the door of the black Rolls.

The chauffeur held the doors open for us, and then he got in and drove off in the direction of the palace. Bridget and I tried not to look impressed. There were no sirens, of course, but it was as if the traffic magically parted to make way for the Rolls Royce and, in no time at all, we were driving through the central gates of Buckingham Palace. We were shown to a very fancy-looking room by a fancy-looking man.

“The King will be along shortly. Please make yourselves comfortable.”

The minute he walked out and closed the exquisite oak doors behind him, a torrent of words poured out of Bridget’s mouth.

“Holy Mother of God, would you look at that ceiling – and the wallpaper! And the carpet – Rosaleen, have you seen the carpet?”

“I have.”

“I’ve never felt carpet so soft and – springy in all my life. Did you feel it?”

Then Bridget lay face down on the carpet.

“Crikey, woman, what are you doing?” Sienna hauled her up by the arm, just in the nick of time as it happened, because the door opened and a man who looked like a butler entered.

“His Majesty, The King.” He announced.

We all stood awkwardly in a line as King Charles the Third walked into the room, wearing a pin-striped suit and holding the cuff of his sleeve in a way I’d seen him do in numerous television appearances. We curtsied awkwardly, one at a time as we were introduced, and then we were ushered to a blue satin chaise longue where we all sat stiffly. Bridget, the staunch Irish Republican, grinned from ear to ear and looked like she might explode with excitement.

“Are you all residents of London?”

Bridget and I appeared to be dumbstruck, so Sienna answered on our behalf.

“I’m based in Kensington, Your Highness, but these two ladies live in Ireland.”

“Really? What part?”

“Mayo.” Bridget found her voice.

The King looked at us with interest. “Oh, I adore the West of Ireland. I spent wonderful holidays in Sligo as a child.”

We all nodded and smiled and agreed on how charming the wild Atlantic West was.

“So, tell me, how are we going to catch this awful creature and stop her from marauding about the city, terrorising people?”

This is where things got tricky. What to tell...? How to explain...?

“I mean,” he continued, “did she intend physical harm to my family and me yesterday on the balcony?”

“I don’t think so, sir. I think she was just after some... notoriety.” I said, beginning to feel more at ease.

“But how can you be sure?”

“Because if she meant to harm you, you’d be dead.”

I heard Sienna’s sharp intake of breath beside me.

“I’m sorry if my words are harsh, Sir, but we don’t have time to beat about the bush. She’s extremely dangerous and she has my daughter.”

“I see, you are the lady whose daughter has been kidnapped?”

“Yes.”

“How dreadful for you, you must be beside yourself with worry.”

I nodded.

“So, you know who she is, then?”

“Unfortunately, yes.”

“Who?”

I took a large intake of breath and let it out again.

“I wonder, Your Majesty if you are the type of person who is willing to suspend his disbelief.”

“Why... yes. I have always thoroughly enjoyed fantasy books and the like... I love to read Harry Potter to my grandchildren. But why would I need to suspend my disbelief?” The King frowned.

“Let me put it this way,” I was struggling for a way to put it! “When you were a young boy in Ireland, did you ever hear stories about Irish folklore and mythology?”

“Yes, indeed. A local storyteller... a seanchaí, is that what you call them?”

“That’s right.”

“A seanchaí would come to the house on winter nights and we would sit around the fire and he would tell us stories about faeries and the pooka...”

“And The Tuatha Dé Danann? Do you remember hearing about them?”

“Of course – the Gaelic Gods and Goddesses.”

“And The Morrigan?”

“That rings a bell. Wasn’t she some kind of evil figure connected with warfare?”

I nodded my head and stayed silent.

The King stared at me. “You’re not trying to tell me...”

“I am, Sir.”

“But that’s preposterous.” His expression darkened. “I don’t appreciate time wasters. Kindly leave the palace directly.”

King Charles got up, re-fastened the button on his jacket and made to leave the room.

“Rosaleen! Do something!” Sienna hissed at me.

But what? I looked around frantically for an object that wasn’t priceless. Finding nothing, I opted for a candlestick which was most probably solid gold. Just as Charles was about to walk past it, I held out my palm and focussed. The candlestick lifted into the air, then floated into The King’s eyeline before landing on a nearby side table.

He swivelled around to look at us.

“What kind of trickery is this?”

I stood up. “It’s not trickery. You said you learned about The Fae.”

“You’re not trying to tell me you’re Fae?”

“I have Fae blood in me, Your Majesty. Me and my cousin here.”

I gestured to Bridget, who gave The King a little smile and a wave.

Then Sienna stood up. “I can vouch for these women, sir. I’ve known Rosaleen O’Connor for twenty years and she’s no liar. And I’ve seen things that I would never have believed before this week... And you know my husband Sir, we move in similar circles, the prime minister’s wife is a good friend of mine...”

“How did you do that thing with the candlestick?” The King was looking at me.

“I’m not sure, exactly. I just kind of know how to do it – it’s in me, I suppose. I didn’t *know* I could do it until I moved to Mayo a few years ago. Apparently, I’m the latest in the long line of ... well, women who can do that sort of thing.” I wasn’t ready to tell The King of England I was a witch.

“Do something else.” He said.

“Yeah, zap something, Rosaleen!” Said Bridget.

“The thing is, Sir, I don’t want to damage any of your valuables.”

“Let’s go outside, then.”

The room we were in had French doors leading out to the garden. King Charles opened them and we followed him outside. He looked at me expectantly.

“Are you attached to that tree stump over there?” I asked him.

He shook his head and I directed my hand at the stump. Blue beams fizzled out of my fingertips and scorched the wood.

“Good Lord. How in the blazes did you do that?”

“As I said, I don’t really...”

“Would you mind if I...?”

“Not at all.”

King Charles came to stand beside me and began to examine my right hand, turning it over and peering at my fingers. Then he looked at Sienna.

“And you say you can vouch for this woman?”

“One hundred per cent, your majesty.”

Charles nodded and paced around the garden for a little bit, hands behind his back in trademark pose. Then he turned to us.

“Ladies, tell me how I can help you.”

“Most of all, we need eyes,” I said, “lots of people looking for The Morrigan, trying to pin her down, especially finding out if she has a permanent lair.”

King Charles nodded. “It is done.”

## CHAPTER 10



**T**he Morrigan was posing in front of a free-standing mirror. She was in the bedroom of an abandoned Victorian terraced house in Kilburn. A homeless man had been squatting on the ground floor but she had soon run him off.

She had taken a strong liking to the duchess's hat and she tried it on now in various positions, tilting it this way and that and pouting at her reflection, the way she'd seen young girls doing into their phones.

She had much enjoyed people-watching on this trip. She would head out after dark in semi-disguise, wearing Doc Martins and a black hoody. She found that nobody took any heed of her and this suited her purposes. One time she had walked past an electronics shop and had seen herself on multiple TV screens all at once, balancing on the balcony at Buckingham Palace. How she had laughed at the expressions on the faces of The Royal Family – wallowing in their fear and distress. She'd especially enjoyed the look of shock on the duchess's face when she'd whipped off her hat.

She laughed again now at the memory and thought about how it had felt seeing her image on screen. She was surprised at how much she liked it, as she usually dwelled in the shadows. She thought she

might be experiencing her fifteen minutes of fame, as referred to by that odd little artist man in the sixties.

The Morrigan was just deciding that she should wear green more often -black was all very well and it was kind of her signature colour, but it got a bit samey after a while – when she felt somebody’s eyes on her.

She swung around.

“Ah, so it’s awake.”

The girl was staring at her, with wide, red-rimmed eyes.

“Who *are* you?” She said, in a voice which sounded as if it hadn’t been used in a while.

“I am your worst nightmare. Pleased to meet you.” The Morrigan executed an ironic bow.

“I’ve seen you before.”

“Indeed you have, for we’ve spent many hours in each other’s company.”

The O’Connor girl looked all about her.

“What *is* this place?”

“Merely your accommodation for the night.”

The girl looked hard at her, then tried to scramble to her feet. Her legs buckled beneath her.

“What’s wrong with my legs?”

“I surmise it’s because you haven’t used them for a while.”

“What am I doing here?”

“So many questions! Why don’t you just relax.”

The girl’s face became mutinous. “You have no right to keep me here.”

The Morrigan laughed like a peal of bells. “Then why don’t you leave?”

She watched as the girl half-crawled, half dragged herself to the bedroom door, her eyes fixed on her jailor the entire time. The Morrigan stood casually with her arms folded, as the girl made her way out to the landing and the top of the stairs. She was halfway down and getting a little too close to the front door when Morrigan decided she’d had enough. With the power of her mind alone, she hoisted the

girl up in the air and drew her backwards up the stairs. She was probably trying to scream but she could not. Then The Goddess of Death and Destruction placed her fingertips on either side of the girl's head until she flopped on the ground, locked in feverish unconsciousness once more.



## CHAPTER II



**I**t was only a matter of time, I thought to myself before The Morrigan was found and surrounded, the danger being, of course, that Molly would be injured, or worse, in the process.

It was now all over the British news, no longer the anecdote at the end of the bulletin but receiving prime billing. A substantial reward had been offered for The Bird Woman's capture and lesser amounts for information as to her whereabouts. Unfortunately, this led to many false eyewitness reports and Officers Brady and Rooney and their colleagues were kept madly busy, zig-zagging around the city, following them all up. We had it on good authority that the money for the reward came directly from The King's pocket and I felt profoundly grateful.

"I'm lucky to have such a well-connected friend," I said to Sienna, as we sat in her living room, sipping our morning coffees, waiting for a call about a credible sighting.

"Well connected! You can talk – High Queen of bloody Ireland!"

I smiled. "That's no help to me here, is it? It's through *your* connections that we're making progress."

Sienna shrugged. "Perhaps it was worth marrying the old sod after all."

“That’s something else I’ve been meaning to say – you’ve already given away the Bentley and the house in Florida. I don’t want you ending up at a disadvantage in your divorce negotiations because of me.”

“Don’t worry, I know what I’m doing. I’m not conceding anything I care about. As long as I get this place and the ski lodge in Salzburg, I’m happy. Oh, and the cottage in The Cotswolds.”

My phone rang and we both jumped. It was the police.

“Something’s happened.”

THE MORRIGAN COULD SENSE THE NET CLOSING IN ON HER. SHE didn’t care for this feeling of being trapped, it made her very angry indeed. Curses on Rosaleen O’Connor!

She thought of leaving London but that didn’t fit in with her plans. She wanted to finish what she’d started – teach that O’Connor woman a lesson once and for all – take away what was most precious to her and make her feel helpless in the process. Yes, that was her aim and she was damned if anyone was going to get in her way.

She chose a stretch of the Metropolitan line that extended out into the countryside, away from houses and prying eyes. She flew in the dark of the early morning, making sure to stay very high, because this time she didn’t want to be spotted. This time, she meant business.

The sun was just starting its ascent as The Morrigan reached her desired destination. She jumped down from the platform and selected her spot, then she lay Molly’s body across the tracks. There was no need to strap her down as the girl was still unconscious. Morrigan propelled herself back onto the platform and looked down admiringly at her handiwork. That should do the trick! Just in time for rush hour.

But she wasn’t alone. An old man was out walking his dog on the other side of the tracks. He hid behind a bush as he saw The Bird Woman who’d been all over the news. He stayed absolutely quiet and still and luckily his dog, who was as old as him in dog years, was quiet too. As soon as she started to walk away, he took out the phone his daughter had bought him, insisting he carried it at all times and called 999.

. . .

OFFICER JEAN BRADY HAD JUST COME ON DUTY. SHE HAD TURNED left out of the estate and was on her way to pick up her partner, Kyle, on her way to the station. They'd only been working together for a short time. She hadn't liked him at first, thinking he was too much of a Try Hard, but she was beginning to get used to him. The call came in on the radio, for patrol cars in her area. She picked up immediately.

"I'm less than five minutes away, I'm on it."

She turned on the siren and put her foot down, torn between fear and excitement. Was she finally going to come face to face with the woman who had been haunting her dreams?

Jean knew she was driving into danger, but wasn't that one of the reasons she'd wanted to be a policewoman? This is what it was all about. She skidded to a halt at the station and ran full tilt to the platform. She saw the body immediately. She also saw that the light had turned green and heard the whistle of the oncoming train. She swore and jumped off the platform, running to the section of track where Molly lay. The train was almost upon them now, the driver sounding his whistle frantically, seeing what was up ahead and being in no position to stop on time. With a strength and speed she didn't know she possessed, Officer Jean hauled Molly up and off the tracks a whisker before the train sped by. She lay there panting with Molly's inert body beside her, hearing police sirens in the distance. That was close! But she'd done it! She'd saved the girl's life and now she could reunite her with her mother.

But someone else had another plan.

THE MORRIGAN HAD SETTLED INTO A BEECH TREE OVERLOOKING the tracks, to ensure she had a good view of the spectacle: to watch the end of the O'Connor line come to the end of the line on a train line – she cackled at her joke.

The light turned green and she was filled with glee. Then a siren sounded close by and a car skidded to a halt on the other side of the platform. She saw the figure running in the early morning light and felt

secure in the knowledge that the policewoman could never get to the girl on time – the train was almost upon them. Maybe she'd even get two for the price of one and the policewoman would be made mince-meat of too.

The train thundered by and The Morrigan put her hands over her ears, to protect them from the shrill, protracted whistle. Then it was gone and she looked down eagerly.

“No!” Her cry of rage filled the air and drove all the birds in the vicinity out of the trees.

JEAN HEARD THE CRY BUT DIDN'T KNOW WHAT IT WAS. SHE SAT UP and hoisted the girl into a seated position too, having her lean up against her. She was a dead weight and it would be very difficult to get her on top of the platform – luckily some of her colleagues would be arriving any minute now. But then something wholly unexpected, and quite frankly, terrifying, happened. Jean heard a whooshing sound, and then a shadow fell over her, as The Bird Woman attempted to snatch the girl away from her.

“No!” She grabbed onto Molly tightly, determined not to let her go.

The Bird Woman screeched in frustration and suddenly her claw-like hands were on Jean's shoulders. To her complete shock, the officer found herself lifted clean off the ground, still hanging on to the girl for dear life. They rose incredibly high at incredible speed and she could see two other officers running onto the platform and looking up at them in open-mouthed astonishment. The entire time, The Bird Woman was trying to wrestle her grip from around the girl's waist. Jean gritted her teeth and held on even tighter. Then, there was a searing pain in the side of her neck and she squealed and let go involuntarily. In the split second that followed, The Bird Woman let go of *her*, grabbed onto the girl and flew away with a triumphant 'yessss'. Jean felt herself falling and that was the last thing she remembered.

## CHAPTER 12



**B**y the time we got to the station, The Morrigan and Molly were long gone. Yes, I was bitterly disappointed, but not all that surprised. The place was abuzz with activity: an ambulance, several police cars and two camera crews. I rushed past anyone who was silly enough to try to stop me and found Officer Jean sitting in the open ambulance, being treated for a wound on her neck.

“Jean! What happened here?”

“You haven’t heard?”

“Just something about a train.’

She nodded and exhaled deeply. “The Bird Woman put Molly on the railway track.”

“You mean...?”

“For her to be run over by a train, yes.”

I sat down on the step of the ambulance before my legs could buckle beneath me.

“And she... she didn’t...”

“I managed to remove her on time.”

“Oh thank God.”

“This woman’s a hero.”

I turned to find a very old man standing behind me. He was accompanied by a shaggy, overweight dog.

“She risked her life to get the girl off the track. The train missed them both by a whisker.” He said. “I would have gone down to get the girl myself if it wasn’t for my hips.”

“I looked at Jean, tears forming in my eyes.”

“Thank you so much.”

“And she got a love bite for her trouble.” The paramedic in the ambulance chimed in cheerily.

“A hate bite, more like.” Said Jean.

“The Morrigan bit you?!” I asked.

Jean nodded. I’m so sorry I couldn’t hold on to your daughter.”

“Oh my God, you saved her life, don’t dare apologise.”

We were joined by Sienna, Bridget, Officer Rooney and one other policeman. As they discussed what had just occurred, I walked off and peered down onto the tracks. Less than twenty minutes ago, my Molly had been down there. Mercifully she’d managed to escape with her life, thanks to Officer Jean. Bridget came and stood silently beside me.

“She really means business now, Bridge.”

“I think you might be right. What’ll we do?”

“It’s what *I’m* going to do. I’m going to have to meet her alone, come to some sort of deal.”

“What kind of deal?”

“I don’t know, maybe swap myself for Molly.”

“You can’t do that!”

“I don’t see that I have much of a choice. It’s me she wants to hurt.”

BUT HOW TO GET A MESSAGE TO THE MORRIGAN? SHE DIDN’T HAVE a phone. It was Sienna who had the idea of a television appeal.

“You know the kind of thing I mean. The family, often the mother, appeals to the abductor to give up the abductee.”

I nodded uncertainly. “But we don’t know if she has access to a TV.”

“We don’t know that she doesn’t. If it gets plastered all over the airways, the message might get through to her somehow.”

“It’s worth a try.” Bridget agreed, her face a picture of worry.

Sienna had connections at The BBC – of course she did! So between ourselves, the TV people and Scotland Yard, an appeal was arranged.

I’d never been on the telly before, but it couldn’t be any scarier than facing the likes of Lord Hades or The Dagda. The make-up woman did her best with me, but she couldn’t hide the red blotchiness around my eyes.

It was set up in a press room off the main news area. I was seated at the centre of a long table, with Bridget to my right and Sienna to my left. Officer Jean Brady sat at Bridget’s right and several senior officers filled the other seats. A bank of journalists mingled in front of us. The cameras flashed relentlessly in our faces and the room sounded like a hive of bees. Then it was time for the broadcast and everything went silent.

“Try to appeal to the kidnapper’s conscience.”

The expert negotiator had advised me. I’d just nodded my head, not bothering to explain that The Morrigan had no conscience.

“My daughter has been missing for days now. I’m beside myself with worry and there’s nothing in the world I want more than to have her back safe and sound.” Here, I stared directly at the camera. “If you’re watching, Bird Woman, I’m willing to do anything – and I mean absolutely anything – to get my daughter back.”

When it was clear that I’d finished saying what I had to say, the buzz broke out again and the cameras began to flash. One of the journalists in the front row – he looked vaguely familiar – raised his hand. The Chief Inspector of Scotland Yard indicated that he should speak.

“Firstly, I’d like to say that I’m very sorry you’re going through such an ordeal, Mrs O’Connor. I’m sure we’d all agree that it’s every parent’s worst nightmare.”

I nodded in acknowledgement.

“Just to clarify, by absolutely anything, do you mean you’d be willing to pay a ransom?”

“Like I said before, I’d be willing to do anything to get her back. Alive and well.”

A female journalist raised her hand and was given the go-ahead.

“Mrs O’Connor, in the event your daughter gets to see this appeal, do you have anything you’d like to say to her?”

Again, I looked directly into the camera.

“Yes. I’d say, hold tight Molly, I’m coming to get you.”

THE MORRIGAN *DID* HAVE ACCESS TO A TV. TO TWENTY-SEVEN OF them, to be exact, in her friendly neighbourhood electrical store. She went inside the shop this time, needing to hear what The O’Connor Woman was saying. She drew the string on her hoody as tightly as it would go, so as little of her face was showing as possible.

The sound was turned down on all the devices.

“Turn it up.” She ordered a teenage boy who was working in the section.

“Do you want to check out the sound quality? Is there a particular brand you’re interested in?”

She brought her face close to his and gave him a fierce look. “Turn it up!” She shouted.

The boy drew back in shock and turned the sound up on the closest TV.

The Morrigan listened intently, especially to the part when Rosaleen O’Connor said she’d be willing to do absolutely anything to get her daughter back.

She walked out of the shop, glancing at the boy as she went. He was staring at her wide-eyed. She guessed he’d recognised her as the so-called Bird Woman – what a preposterous name! He’d probably call and report her as soon as she left the shop, but what did she care? She’d be long gone by the time any of those bozos got here. She knew now what she was going to do.

I SPENT ANOTHER NIGHT TOSSING AND TURNING. MOLLY’S DAD, Bill, had rang me in a panic, having seen the television appeal. I’d tried



to talk him out of coming up to London from his parents' caravan in Eastbourne, where he was still hiding from his debtors, but my arguments had been unsuccessful and he was on his way - which was the last thing I needed. I'd barely slept at all since I'd got to London, in spite of Sienna's state-of-the-art mattress, but I finally managed to drift off...

It was as if I was speeding down a tunnel - a sort of vortex - with light and colours rushing past my ears. Just as I thought I was never going to come to the end, my dream body landed in an open space. Where was I? I knew this place, I had been here many times before. It was the playground I used to take Molly to when she was a little girl. Had The Morrigan infiltrated my memories? Or Molly's? Either way, I knew where they were.

I elected to sneak out of the house before it was fully light. As I walked through the kitchen I nearly jumped out of my skin.

"Hi."

"Jesus, who's that?"

"It's me, who did you think it was?"

Sienna was sitting at the kitchen table in semi-darkness, nursing a glass of something.

"What are you doing sitting in the dark?"

"What are you doing sneaking around the house?"

"Why aren't you asleep?"

"Who can sleep at a time like this?"

"Not me."

"You're going to meet her, aren't you?"

"I was just going for a walk?"

"Come off it, Rosaleen, I wasn't born yesterday."

I sighed. "I know where they are."

She immediately stood up. "I'm coming with you."

"No, you can't!"

"I'm not letting you go on your own."

"You don't understand, it has to be just me and her."

"What's going on?" Bridget walked into the kitchen wearing a white robe, her arms folded across her chest.

"Don't tell me *you're* awake too..."

“Who can sleep at a time like this.”

“Rosaleen is going to meet The Morrigan.”

“Seriously? Just give me two minutes to get dressed.”

“No! Neither of you can come. She’s expecting me to be on my own. If I bring someone with me, she might hurt Molly.”

“But what if you need the power of three?” Sienna looked at me beseechingly.

“This is the way it’s got to be, no argument.” I sounded as firm as I possibly could.

The two women looked at me, then at each other.

“Alright then,” said Bridget, “but you have to tell us where you’re going.”

“A playground in Notting Hill. Sienna, you remember it. We used to bring Moll and Hugo there together when they were small.”

“The one in the park?”

I nodded.

“What a weird location to choose,” Bridget commented.

“Not so weird,” I said quietly.

It was a place where the mother-child connection was strong. And Molly and I both had memories of it.

“I still think you’d be better off if you had your own broomstick.” Muttered Sienna.

## CHAPTER 13



**M**olly was starting to wake up. She felt vile. It was like the hangover she'd had at the end of second year when she'd thrown up so much that black stuff had come out. Only ten times worse. And her limbs wouldn't work properly. What was up with that?

A feeling of dread crept over her. And cold... she was so very cold. The last she remembered it was November. Was it still November? And where on God's good earth was she? An outdoor location. High up with lots of trees, but she could hear traffic close by. She thought it was London. It felt like London. And who was that over there...?

A tall woman dressed entirely in black stalked towards her. She had something on her back... It looked like a set of wings but it couldn't be... As the woman came closer, Molly's feeling of dread grew exponentially. Pieces of memory struggled to come together in her mind.

"So, the future O'Connor woman is awake."

Was she having some kind of nightmare? Because it was as if this woman was from another world.

"Your mother is on her way. She thinks she's going to save you."

The woman in black threw back her head and laughed like a cartoon villain. Molly shuffled herself as far away from her as she

could, but there wasn't anywhere for her to go. She realised she was in a little enclosure on top of a... zip wire. Was she in a playground...? She knew this place! It was five minutes from the house in Notting Hill she'd grown up in. Mum used to bring her here all the time... Mum... was her mother really on the way? But surely this woman in black was dangerous.

A cab pulled up at the entrance to the playground.

I EASILY HAILED A BLACK CAB AT THE END OF SIENNA'S ROAD.

"Going anywhere nice?" My cabbie was in a talkative mood.

I wasn't. "Just shopping."

I let my mind drift as the cabbie told me all about the birthday party they'd held for his eight-year-old daughter the previous evening. As we drew closer to Notting Hill, the streets becoming more and more familiar, I noticed that Gran's ring was starting to glow, as if it was lit internally. I took some comfort from this because, quite frankly, I was terrified.

"Isn't the sunrise beautiful?" The cabbie commented as I got out of the car.

"Yes, it is." I closed the door.

"You have a good day now."

As he drove off, I spotted a familiar figure on a swing. She was swinging high and... singing. As I entered the playground, I recognised it as the old children's nursery rhyme:

'RING A RING OF ROSES,  
A pocket full of posies,  
A-ti shoo, a-ti shoo,  
We all fall down!'

BUT WHERE WAS MOLLY?

"Mum!"

I heard a weak, kind of strangled cry and looked towards it. My

daughter was in the wooden construction at the top end of the zip wire. I was hugely relieved to see her, although she did look wretched. As I moved towards Molly, The Morrigan jumped off the swing and came to stand between us.

She was doing nothing to hide or disguise herself this morning, which I suppose meant that all bets were off. Her wings were exposed and fully outstretched, perhaps to emphasise this advantage she had over me.

“I take it that you are alone, O’Connor Woman.”

“You take it right.”

“Have you come to negotiate?”

“I’ve come to get my daughter back.”

She laughed her horrible laugh. “As easy as that!”

“That’s my intention, yes.”

The Morrigan began to circle me, in that horrible way she had. I felt the fear gripping my chest and asked my ancestors for support. The ring glowed brighter and I saw The Morrigan noticing it.

“You think you’re great, you O’Connor women. You’ve always had it so easy – you’ve never had to suffer as I have.”

“I’m sorry for your suffering, Morrigan, but there’s no need to take it out on my daughter.”

“There’s every need,” her face contorted into a horrible scowl, “when her mother thwarts me at every turn.”

She continued to walk around me, in ever-decreasing circles and I felt the hairs on the back of my neck rise.

“If you had joined forces with me, when I asked you to, none of this would have been necessary.”

“You know I can’t do that.”

“I know nothing of the sort.”

Her voice rose to a roar and a wind whipped up around the playground. I heard Molly whimper.

“Let my daughter go and we’ll put all this behind us.”

“Hah! But I don’t want to put this behind us, and I certainly don’t want to release your daughter.”

“Then take me instead.”

Suddenly The Morrigan was all up in my face.

“What do you mean by that? Will you merge your powers with mine?”

“No, I already told you I can’t do that. Put me in a cage or something.”

“What use is that to me?” She boomed. “Your daughter dies!”

Then she turned abruptly towards Molly and directed her palm at her. At that point, I roared myself, held up my hand and, using the full force of everything that was inside of me and the combined strength of my ancestors, I blasted The Morrigan to the side, where she collided with a wooden fence and lay panting, a surprised look on her face. Then I saw her rage return and she was on her feet again, this time, directing all her venom at me. She blasted me with a red fireball and missed, destroying one side of the see-saw. Then I blasted her with a white beam and missed, creating a massive hole in the roundabout. Then we blasted each other at the same time and our beams connected mid-air, fizzing and comingling, causing my arm to tremble and my finger to grow hot. She was furious but, then again, so was I. We kept this up as long as we both could, but after a minute or more, both our beams began to falter and I stumbled and fell. The Morrigan took her advantage immediately, coming towards me and starting to zap. I desperately moved backwards on my behind, evading two of her laser-like blasts by hiding behind a hammock. But now she was almost on top of me. Was this it? Was this the end...?

There was a whirring noise behind us that we both heard at the same time. The Morrigan turned just in time to see Molly coming right at her on the zip-wire.

“Take that you bitch!” She yelled, before kicking the Morrigan right in the face with her two feet.

The Morrigan made a kind of ‘ooff’ sound and fell backwards onto the ground.

I scrambled to my own feet and as I did so, the light from the ring grew almost blinding.

I directed my hand – my everything – at The Morrigan as she scabbled to her own feet.

“Be gone!” I hollered, blasting her halfway across the playground.

“Be gone!” I bellowed, knocking her high into the air and causing her to spin.

“Be gone!!” I screamed and fired her like a rocket far away from the playground, right over the trees, until we could no longer see her.

I looked at Molly, she looked at me and we fell into each other’s arms.

“Is she gone?”

Molly’s voice was muffled in my jumper.

“Yes, she is.”

Because, somehow, I knew she wasn’t coming back.

We stayed that way until I felt something tugging on my coat.

A little boy was looking up at us.

“Are you filming a new Marvel movie?”

Molly and I looked at each other and started to laugh hysterically.

## CHAPTER 14



**T**he Morrigan didn't come back.

Molly and I got a taxi home to Sienna's. Both she and Bridget burst into tears at the sight of us, and Molly was treated like a princess until she couldn't take it anymore, collapsing into bed and sleeping for nineteen hours straight.

As soon as she'd dropped off, I collapsed onto the couch in the living room and rang her Dad.

"Hi, Bill."

"Has something happened?" He sounded panicked.

"Only something good. Molly's back."

"Oh, thank God! Is she okay?"

"She seems fine."

"You mean she hasn't been checked by a doctor?! Rosaleen, you have to..."

"I promise I'll bring her when she wakes up. Right now I think she needs to sleep."

"Alright then."

"Where are you?"

"Just a few stops from the city centre on the train."



“Well, why don’t you get off at the next station and go back to Eastbourne? You can’t do anything here and I promise you, she’s fine.”

“I want to see my daughter.”

“Fair enough.”

It had been worth a try.

BRIDGET HAD ALREADY CALLED THE POLICE, LETTING THEM KNOW they could end their search. Sienna’s phone rang from the other room.

She groaned as she got up to answer it. “It’s probably another journalist.”

But it wasn’t a journalist. She handed me the phone.

“It’s for you.” She said, an enigmatic smile on her face.

“Hello?”

“Ah, hello, is that Rosaleen?”

I recognised the voice immediately and sat up straight.

“Yes, Your Majesty. This *is* a surprise.”

“I just *had* to call when I heard the *marvellous* news that you’d got your daughter back safe and sound.”

“Oh, thank you, Sir.”

“No, thank *you!* For running that *dreadful* creature out of the capital.”

“Well, you certainly helped us find her, using your influence with the media and the police...”

“Oh, I have no control over the police. I’ve merely found, over the years, that making the right suggestion in the right ear can be wonderfully effective.”

“I see.” I smiled down the phone.

“So, I wish your daughter all the best. And I thank you for bringing my beloved Gaelic mythology to life for me.”

“You’re welcome.”

“Perhaps I might pay you a visit the next time I’m in Mayo.”

“I’d love that, sir.”

“Maybe we could have a cup of Lyons tea together. Isn’t that what one drinks when one is in Ireland?”

. . .

MOLLY FINALLY WOKE UP. SHE LOOKED ALMOST BACK TO HER OLD self, apart from the prominent dark circles under her eyes. She sat up in bed with a tray on her lap, which held a stack of fluffy pancakes and a jug of warm maple syrup.

“This is the life!” She said.

Then she took her first mouthful. “Oh my God, this is *so* nice, I was totally starving!”

Of *course*, I didn’t tell her off for speaking with her mouth full. At that moment in time, the girl could do no wrong in my eyes. I watched her fondly as she made her way through the first pancake, then she put down her cutlery and looked at me, her expression serious.

“Mum, we have to talk.”

I’d been expecting this.

“Yes, we do, Moll.”

“I mean, Mum, what the heck?”

I knew I couldn’t keep it a secret from her any more – her lineage – her destiny. By going on TV that time, I’d revealed her identity. Everyone would know now that she was the girl who’d been taken by ‘The Bird Woman’. It would all have to come out sooner or later so it might as well be now.

“I don’t know how to start, Molly. Why don’t you ask me a question.”

“Who are you?”

“I’m Rosaleen O’Connor, the reigning O’Connor Woman, latest in a long line of powerful witches, starting with the first O’Connor woman, Ana, a faery who was married to Conchobar, High King of Ireland.”

My daughter stared at me, open-mouthed.

“Oh,” I added, “I’m also The High Queen of Ireland.”

“You’re shitting me.”

“Molly!”

“Sorry, but Jesus, Mum! It’s kind of a lot to take in! What does that make *me* then.”

“You’re the O’Connor woman in waiting. You’ll take over from me when I... go. That’s if you want to.”

I could see her struggling to take it all in, the pancakes long forgotten.

“Who was that... bird woman then?”

“That was The Morrigan, aka The Goddess of Death and Destruction.”

“Did you say, goddess?” Her voice was quiet.

“Yes.”

Molly was silent for a while.

“Do you have any more questions, Moll?”

“I probably do but not just now. I need to... take it all in for a bit.”

“I understand.”

There was a knock at the door.

“Come in.”

Bridget and Sienna walked into the room and sat on either side of the double bed.

“How are you feeling?” Said Bridget, automatically placing her hand on Molly’s forehead. “You don’t have a temperature, anyway.”

Molly looked at her strangely. “Bridget O’Connor... are you... one of us?”

“One of us, one of us!” Sienna chanted, holding her arms out in front of her like a zombie.

I started to giggle but stopped when I saw that Molly wasn’t laughing. I composed myself.

“I’ve just told Molly about, you know, everything.”

The two women looked at her.

“What do you think, Moll?” Sienna peered at her.

“I don’t know what to think, only that it all sounds weirdly familiar. Like I used to know it but I somehow forgot.”

Molly saw Sienna looking accusingly at me.

“Mum! What did you do?”

“I didn’t do... I had no choice.”

“No choice over what?”

“You did know it before, Moll. We had some... adventures the last time you were in Ireland. But I had to make you forget for your safety.”

“You made me forget?! How?”

“With a forgetfulness spell.”

“You can do spells?!”

“Duh! I *am* a witch.”

Molly stared at me in astonishment. Then her expression altered.

“Can you teach *me* spells?”

“If you like.”

“I even know a spell now!” Said Sienna. “It’s called a scrying spell – we used it to locate you and The Morrigan. And hey!” She wagged a finger at me. “You’re not to use that forgetfulness spell on me either, missy, you promised, remember?”

“No more forgetfulness spells for either of you, scout’s honour.”

“Are you going to eat those pancakes?” Said Bridget.

As the four of us sat on the bed together, talking and laughing, I felt myself relax for the first time since I’d discovered that Molly had been taken.

Soon it would be time to go back to Ireland. Back to being ignored by Finn. Perhaps I could perform a forgetfulness spell on *him* – make him forget that I’d got engaged to another man while he’d been missing...

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