

Liberty University

Shaping Character: The Role of Mythology in Society

Master's Thesis

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For my family. Thank you for always believing in me.

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Artist Statement

The written word has fascinated me from the time I learned to read. Myths and legends were exciting, and I lived off them, coming up with my own stories that I'd tell my friends. In school, we learned the tales of Paul Bunyan, Johnny Appleseed, and John Henry as we studied those who moved westward, and their stories fueled my love of stories. I would take several books at a time from the town library during the summer and the school library at other times of the year. My imagination grew, I could visualize dragons overhead, fairies in the mushrooms below, and fairy tales that could take me away from reality.

It's not that our city wasn't full of its own mysteries. We had many legends in the surrounding areas from buried gold to black creatures that would follow people home. The "Hairy Man from Birch Creek" is one of the most famous stories, and like many other legends, no one can agree on the actual story. We even had our very own outlaw, Diamondfield Jack, as well as the tragic story of Gobo Fango.

These stories all taught me that while there are many legends out there, most were based on an actual person. The man from Birch Creek was most likely a miner who just wanted to be left alone. Diamondfield Jack was not guilty of what he was accused of, despite the stories that were passed down. Poor Gobo Fango's true story was still as tragic as the story I'd heard since I was a small child. Still, most people choose to continue the tales of excitement and intrigue rather than the actual stories that have faded into history.

Friends who knew how much I loved to read began introducing me to new series of books. *Lord of the Rings* by J.R.R. Tolkien and the *Dragonlance* series by Tracy Hickman and Margaret Weiss were two of my favorites. These stories brought me new worlds and mythologies as I turned the pages. Creatures that I'd never heard of before came to life in my

imagination, and I wanted to learn more about them. Throughout both series, the characters gain favor, become heroes, and then almost fail before finally becoming the men or women they were destined to be.

It wasn't just the characters' stories that made me love these books so much. It was the way the story was told, giving each character faults and redeeming qualities. In the *Dragonlance* series, Caramon Majere was as good as his twin brother, Raistlin, was bad. They lived off legends, doing what they could to find a way to end the wars that plagued the land. In *Lord of the Rings*, the entire series is built around the One Ring. Those legends didn't affect the hobbits living in little Hobbiton until it was revealed that Bilbo had that ring.

In college, my love of myths and legends grew as I took classes in Greek Mythology. The professor noted how much I loved it and gave me several ideas for books to buy so I could feed my obsession. The local bookstore became my friend, though my bank account didn't appreciate it. Armed with more stories, I read through them, getting to know the Greek gods and all the mischief they got into through their dealings with humans.

I read many other fantasy books and books on myths during college. While each played a part in my love of reading, it wasn't until years later when I discovered Brandon Sanderson that I truly began to see what makes a book so magical. It was his *Mistborn* series that drove me to want to become a better writer. All his stories are rich with history, legends, and strong characters, but it's the way he ties a story together so perfectly at the end that took my breath away. In Sanderson's *The Hero of Ages*, a man loses faith in his religion and decides he must find a new one. He spends much of the book talking about one religion after another from other cultures in the story, and why he likes or doesn't like it. Those small parts that were dropped throughout the trilogy became the puzzle pieces that brought the story around full circle. I knew

that if I could ever call myself a good writer, I would need to find a way to write my endings in such a spectacular way.

It was shortly after I discovered Sanderson's books that I fully immersed myself in studying other mythology. It started with a story prompt where a girl opens her door to find a leprechaun. While that little green man wreaked havoc in *her* life, I became obsessed with learning everything I could about Irish, Scottish, and other Celtic mythology. As I wrote the series, if I needed a creature to do a specific thing to move the story along, all I had to do was look through Irish myths and I would find one or two that would suit my purposes.

While I learned about the Scottish and Irish cultures and their myths, I began to see how those stories shaped their culture. *Every* culture has stories that were made as warnings or explanations for the unknown. Most of these myths were written ages ago, but they still have validity as people try to find a reason why something happens.

After a few years of working as a student advocate at our local high school, I had the chance to teach English to students from several different countries. While teaching them to read and write, I would give them story prompts about where they came from and traditions from their home countries. I enjoyed the stories they told, and learned about what they celebrated compared to what we celebrate here in the US. It was an amazing feeling to watch as their four or five words of English slowly became sentences and then paragraphs and then pages. Their history and culture, things they were excited to tell me about, made their writing come alive.

The more I learned about their cultures, the more I wanted to teach a class that focuses on world mythology and not just the usual Greek and Roman mythology. They're a great place to start, but by forgetting to focus on other cultures and their stories, we miss out on legends and myths that have lasted generations. According to the TV show, *Supernatural*, every culture as a

belief in a devil or higher power, or woman in white, or creatures that lure children away in the night. Sam and Dean Winchester came across creatures from legends all over the world, and they had to do their research to figure out what they were and how to defeat them. It was this line of thought that gave me the idea for this project.

I want to show that a person's culture, its myths, legends, and beliefs will shape who they are. Character development isn't just about learning through a character arc, but also by those outside influences that act upon them.

If you take a specific situation, it will be seen differently depending on a person's beliefs or lifestyle. Take death, for example. One who is agnostic may believe that there is nothing after death, so they may fear what they perceive to be the end. In Christianity, we believe we can see our loved ones again, so even in death, we can still feel hope. Other cultures put up shrines for those who have gone before them, asking them for guidance along the way. And still others don't have an explanation and look for alternative reasons, whether through their own faith or through supernatural means.

This same belief goes within our stories and the worlds we create. Tracy Hickman, Brandon Sanderson, JRR Tolkien, JK Rowling, and so many others didn't just write stories. They created entire worlds where a person can escape. They have complete histories, new or old and broken religions, legends, and conflicts that were unique to that series. Their stories are so vivid that fans will write their own fan fiction within that world.

Each piece plays a vital role in making a story great—into making the *character* great. A story arc can't happen if the characters don't have something acting upon them. They'd stay stagnant and never grow. It's those old broken religions, or wars that have happened for centuries, or a single ring that must be destroyed that gives a character its purpose.

Learning these backstories behind the strong characters can help us understand other people and what they've been through. During my time as a student advocate, I met young men and women who had come from war torn parts of Venezuela. They'd had family killed right in front of them and dealt with things that those here in America would never have to see. Instead of seeing the strength that it took to even get out of bed in the morning, other students in the school saw someone who didn't speak well enough to be comfortable to talk in front of others.

The school has worked hard to change that opinion. They hosted cultural events where each country had a chance to show off dances from their own country and some even told the story behind those dances. Generally, in a high school assembly, students are ready to leave as soon as they sit down. During these particular assemblies, however, they sat transfixed until the very last song. They were even taught a few dance moves so they could use them at future dances. For that short moment in time, those students were given a chance to broaden their horizons. They were taught that they weren't the only culture out there, and that others were beautiful and had their own stories to tell.

As I go through this project, I will provide evidence that helps explain the importance of literature in several different ways. These include cultural identity, morals, religion, how they explain natural phenomena, heroes and villains for different cultures and how they play a role, the importance of art and literature in their culture, rituals, and how their stories have adapted over the years. By using these different examples, we'll see how different cultures can shape a person's character to be the person they're meant to be.

Many of these categories combine into one depending on the culture. As Christians, our religion dictates our cultural identity, morals, and rituals. Praying for every meal, thanking God

for everything we're given, even the term "What Would Jesus Do?" all come together. The same could be said for other religions throughout the world.

When something bad happens in the world like earthquakes or hurricanes, people wonder why God would let it happen or say that it's proof there is no God. Some would say it was simple science and God had nothing to do with it. Others would say those people were being punished for something they did.

Natural phenomena don't have to be big to have many reasons behind why it happens. A banshee's cry sounds in the wind, warning of death. The stars in the sky make images that have stories of bravery or treachery. Something goes missing in the house, so it must be elves or leprechauns or fairies.

Heroes and villains play important roles in any story. If you ask any villain, they will tell you that *they* are the hero in the story because they do what they believe to be right, even if it's not. Every person's story is told where they are the hero. It's what they choose to do with their life that determines if they'll be good or if they'll make life miserable for themselves and all those around them. Will they seek world domination, or will they do good? That is usually dependent on how they react to outside forces. Will they break under pressure? Or will they rise to the occasion and make themselves better?

Art and literature are important in every culture because it's how their stories are passed down. It can either be by word of mouth, through art, or through books. Many of today's epic stories involve their heroes reading and poring over books trying to find how those before them solved a problem. Hermione loved nothing more than reading books and she got Harry and Ron out of trouble because of it. Legends were told through oral and written histories on how the One Ring was created, and when Gandalf saw the ring Bilbo handed down to Frodo, he went in

search of those books. After several months, he appeared back in the Shire and threw the ring in the fire to determine if it really was the One Ring. Because of these books that had been passed down, Gandalf knew how to destroy it, and the quest for Frodo began.

In Irish mythology, the Liannon Sidh inspired artists, poets, and musicians while also pulling their life force from them. She fed off their creativity, and they didn't mind because they were willing to do anything for her. Her legends could explain how intense people are about their work to the point that they no longer care for their health.

It is this story that also shows how legends and myths can change and adapt over the years. There are several stories that describe this dark fairy. Besides this interpretation, others believed she could kill someone simply by looking at them, or she would demand that someone serve her, or they would lose their lives. Each story suited the teller as they warned others to avoid going out at night.

One of the most important things I hope that I can show in this project is that there are central themes in every culture that are the same. Years ago, I was on a panel at a conference where we discussed the importance of mythology in cultures. Each person on the panel specialized in a different culture, but through our discussion, we came to agree that each culture has a few things in common. There's a Creator, a Trickster, and a Destroyer of sorts in each one. While I joked that the Irish legends were made up of mostly tricksters, it was clear that this theory is correct.

Christianity is set around eternal principles. God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost are there to help us as Creators, while also warning us of the Destroyer. The same way that myths and legends shape the cultures, our religious beliefs shape our lives. We see our beliefs in the way we talk, the way we live, the way we raise our families.

The Irish still swear they can hear a banshee's cry, other cultures pray to their ancestors for guidance, while Christians use their beliefs to find their way in the world. We look for a divine purpose to the things that happen to us—good or bad. We ask for guidance when we feel lost or scared. We pray to know if something is right. Should I marry this man? Should I take this job? What should I study in school? We know that if we ask for those things, we can receive answers.

Christ said many times that we should love our neighbors, that there are other sheep that are not of this fold that will come unto him (John 10:16). He wanted us to love everyone regardless of religious beliefs, backgrounds, and what we've done with our lives. He also said:

"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30)

He would never push anyone away. Instead, He asked us to let go of our cares and follow Him. When someone reads about another world and characters going through hard times, they can make a connection to their own hardships and personally grow the same way a character experiences growth through their character arc.

Studying the legends and myths of each culture can help us find the similarities between the Christian religion and other beliefs. Even though we may not have to fight balrogs or demons or go on impossible quests like those we read in books, we'll be better off for having read them, knowing we aren't alone in fighting our own battles. We can do the same in our daily lives as we strive to improve our lives in following the example of Christ.

Shaping Character: The Role of Mythology in Society

Throughout history, man has told stories. Some stories were written on walls, tablets, or bits of parchment. Others have been passed down to posterity through oral tradition. Every culture worldwide has a rich tapestry of legends and myths. It is my intent to demonstrate that these stories use the tools of character development within their various plot lines to both express and shape beliefs, superstitions, and life lessons. Whether they are religious in nature or simply trying to make sense of the world, these stories, myths, and legends have played a part in shaping society into what it is today.

Myths, legends, and folklore make up each culture's history and affect every aspect of life. Each carries a different meaning, but they're all equally important. Myths deal with gods within a culture. In Greek mythology, there are Zeus, Athena, and others. Romans have Mercury, Pluto, and Jupiter. "Myths are a part of every culture in the world and are used to explain natural phenomena, where a people came from and how their civilization developed, and why things happen as they do. (Mark 2018)"

Legends are about heroes who fought large battles to come out triumphant. They're armies, like the Vikings, Romans, or Amazons on their conquests. They can also be heroes on a smaller scale, like Jason, Odysseus, or even Robin Hood. Heroes fight for justice, go on quests to find their true selves or a combination of the two. They come out triumphant using their intelligence, cunning, or strength, but may not always survive the journey. "Myths and legends have the remarkable property of often being rooted in particular places, and yet their general outlines tend to be surprisingly universal. Similar stories occur all over the world, varying only in particular details. (Larrington 2019)"

Here in the United States, the legends tell stories of the journey out west. Paul Bunyan, Johnny Appleseed, and John Henry are just a few examples. Each of these men were heroes in their own right. They performed simple tasks, but their work helped hundreds of thousands of people as they moved west.

John Henry is based on the story of a man caught stealing and sentenced to work on the railroad. “It is also the story of work songs, songs that not only turned Henry into a folk hero but also, in reminding workers to slow down or die, were a tool of resistance and protest.” (Scott) Parts of the story were true, while other parts were exaggerated along the way. For example, the story starts by saying he was born with a hammer in his hands.

Johnny Chapman became Johnny Appleseed, a man who walked across the US, planting orchards of apples along the way. Some of it was to create apple cider to sell, but it was also to share with others as they passed through the area. “Though he may not have traveled down the Allegheny River on a block of ice like his folk-hero persona, Chapman paved the way for countless frontiersmen to settle new land around his orchards.” (Synan 2013)

According to legend, Paul Bunyan was a giant, and he cleared the land as a lumberjack. Fabian Fournier is thought to be the person he was modeled after, but sources are still unsure. “Historians believe Bunyan was based in large part on an actual lumberjack: Fabian Fournier, a French-Canadian timberman who moved south and got a job as foreman of a logging crew in Michigan after the Civil War.” (Pruitt 2015) His story was combined with Bon Jean, another lumberjack, and made into a story in 1906.

Folklore focuses more on magical elements than myths or legends. Fairies, unicorns, and the Loch Ness Monster are all examples of creatures in folklore. They were usually used as

precautions or lessons for children to stay safe. “What one calls “mythology” in the present day, it should be remembered, was the religion of the ancient past.” (Mark, 2018)

Each culture has a creation story as part of its history, though many legends begin just after the great flood. Some cultures use nature to explain what happened, while others use their gods as the Creators of the world. From there, stories change and vary depending on the part of the world they’re in, political and social conflicts, and how they have had to fight to survive. “Inasmuch as myths deal with the origin of the world, the end of the world, or a paradisiacal state, they are capable of describing what people can never “see for themselves” however rational and observant they are.” (*Functions of myth and mythology* n.d.)

Native Americans had their own stories that fit the same rules of mythology but had their own twists from their experiences. This creation story tells of two brothers at the beginning. The earth was covered in water, and the two boys rose to the surface. One went above, and the other stayed below because it was too bright. The one above learned that the bright stars, or insects, helped things grow, and he began cultivating. Legends also told of a serpent who was to be cremated. They were to eat of the cremated flesh, and then they would gain his knowledge. (Lopez & Squier) “Creation myths play a significant role in healing the sick; they are recited (e.g., among the Navajo people of North America) when an individual’s world—that is to say, the person’s life—is in jeopardy. (Creation Of Human Beings from Plants or Animals)

As told in the Bible, the story of the Creation was passed down through writings and oral stories. Adam and Eve were created and given the Garden of Eden to tend. Lucifer, as a serpent, explains to Eve that eating the fruit would allow her to know good from evil and learn to know the difference between pleasure and pain. She believes the serpent is correct and eats the fruit. She is tricked again by being coerced into sharing the fruit with Adam.

In this story, we see the Creator, God, and Jesus Christ create the world, the animals, and humans to give them a place to be tested. However, we also see the Trickster manipulating Eve into doing something that must be done. By doing so, Adam and Eve were required to leave the garden and make their own way. As Adam and Eve have their family, they move on to different parts of the world, and while some do as they are commanded, others go out on their own and make choices that are contrary to what they're taught. They spread throughout the world, sharing stories, legends, and cultures as they went.

The stories were passed down through family lines until Moses wrote them into what became the first five books of the Bible. Those same books are used by Christians, Jews, and Muslims—to an extent. While they each have their separate beliefs, Jews and Islamic people believe Jesus Christ was a prophet, and Christians believe he is the Messiah.

The Irish have their own version of the Creation, and many myths were borne of those stories. In *Do Ghabhálaibh Érend*, we see the Creation happen as it does in the Christian Bible, and then it moves into the actual founding of Ireland forty-two days before the flood. The first person to discover Ireland was Cesair, the daughter of Bith, the son of Noah. Cesair and her followers were told they couldn't be on the ship because God didn't allow them. Her people asked what they should do, and Cesair told them to turn on Noah's god and worship someone else. Then they left. It was the first time other idols were brought in for the Irish to worship.

It is then said that they split up, each taking several women with them. Ladhra went with his women to Ard Ladrann, and he was the first to die in Ireland. There are rumors that he was buried near Ardamine in Wexford, Ireland. There is a large round mound near the same location that can't be found in most histories, and it has never been excavated. Ladhra supposedly died of too many women. Many other stories came from this same area that were magical in nature.

Bith went to Northern Ireland and was buried there. “Cesair goes to Cul Cesrach in Connacht, and her women with her; and there her heart burst in the girl for the absence of her husband and the death of her father.” (Cléirigh 2016) Many of the stories have split off from there, depending on the region telling the story. Spellings, and even the stories themselves, changed along the way. Ireland has been conquered many times over the years by countries all around the world. The victors settled different parts of the country and plundered others, and their myths and legends morphed into new stories that became part of Ireland’s history.

The Nemed were the third group of inhabitants of Ireland. They built forts and became the rulers of the country. Some of the group migrated to Greece before escaping back to Ireland. During this time, the stories of the Tuatha Dé Danann and Ireland’s stories of fairies came to be. Their mother, Danu, is the Celtic goddess of nature and fertility. Elements of their stories were like other legends throughout Europe. Each of the stories was influenced by the lands and the conquests happening in the area at the time, either the Norse gods, the Olympian gods, or even the Celtic gods in Scotland and Wales.

Cú Chulainn was one of the most famous of the legends that came out of Ireland. Many stories are told of his bravery, and he is best known for defeating Ulster, who came from Queen Maeve’s army. At one point, she wants to buy a bull from Cú Chulainn and he is about to sell it to her until he finds out that they planned to take it by force if it wasn’t given. “Maeve’s army would go up against just one boy. And that boy killed hundreds of them. (O’Hara 2023)”

Those stories spread to other types of fairies that developed into the rich culture of Ireland today. The banshee, leprechauns, lianan sidhe, brownies, and many more are still a rich part of their culture. These fairies were often used to explain things that didn’t quite make sense.

The banshee came around the 8th century, and historians believe it originated from when women would sing a song for the dead. The stories morphed into stories of a woman there to protect certain families, and her cry was there to mourn those who had passed on. In other stories, she was the one who did the killing, and the only one who heard the cry was the person who was about to die. “All banshees are female, but beyond that detail, there is a great deal of variation in how they can appear. And while the banshee is often heard but not seen, there is still a range of descriptions to choose from.” (Morris 2023)

Leprechauns came from the Irish-Celtic god, Lugh. He was the god of light and sun and a great warrior. However, as Christianity grew throughout Ireland, his popularity began to shrink, and his name morphed until he became a small man who hid among the Sidhe. (Cartwright 2021) Other stories of the leprechaun were meant to be fairies, but when they were created, they were not quite right and became leprechauns instead. There are no female leprechauns in the mythology because of the way they were created. They are mischievous creatures that guard gold. It is said that if a leprechaun is caught, they must give three wishes. While they were not found much in literature until the 19th century, there are many places in Ireland that have leprechaun as part of their name, like Poulalupperadaun, which means “pool of the leprechaun.” (Cartwright 2021)

Creatures in Irish lore can be found in other cultures like Scotland, India, England, China, and many others. Mermaids, selkies, elves, dwarves, and others have different origins, and their personas differ depending on who tells the story. These creatures played their parts in Celtic histories but have found their way into today’s literature.

The Epic of Gilgamesh is one of the oldest stories recorded, and it comes from Mesopotamia. The story speaks of how great Gilgamesh is, how strong he is, and the many feats

of strength he performed. He created the world, and he's perfect. Aruru hears of his greatness, and she creates Enkidu, hoping he will tame Gilgamesh. A trapper runs into Enkidu at a watering hole. His father tells him to go and tell Gilgamesh about him, and he'll send a harlot with him to help woo Enkidu. After he does so, Enkidu is so in love with the woman that he no longer finds joy in running with the wild animals. (George 1999)

Enkidu moves into Uruk and finds Gilgamesh, causing problems among the people. Gilgamesh would insist that he could sleep with the wives before the men did on their wedding night. Enkidu stops him, and they fight, learning that they are a match for each other. Gilgamesh and Enkidu become friends and they go on one conquest after another, each other on. When Enkidu is killed by the hands of the gods, Gilgamesh falls into a downward spiral. His mortality is suddenly something he worries about, and he decides he wants to overcome death. He spent so much time trying to find immortality that he turned away his family and friends until he had nothing. Ultimately, Gilgamesh learns that the people in his life are important, not fame or immortality. "Strange things have been spoken, why does your heart speak strangely? The dream was marvellous but the terror was great; we must treasure the dream whatever the terror." (George 1999)

Beowulf is another epic poem that has been around for centuries. Many fantasy writers took their inspiration from this poem, and it has gone through many changes over the years. There is debate over whether the Christian ties were originally in the story. There's a mix of Christian beliefs, where Grendel is a descendant of Cain. These religious beliefs are mixed with pagan practices throughout the story.

Beowulf plays the hero who helps to defeat a troll, Grendel, who has been terrifying Hrothgar's people. When Grendel is caught, he loses his arm and escapes to his cave. Beowulf

goes after him and must fight Grendel's mother. His sword, Hrunting, isn't enough to defeat her, but he finds a magic sword and finally defeats her by beheading her.

The hero goes back home to the Danes and becomes the king, where he rules until the day a dragon starts terrorizing the land. Beowulf and Wiglaf must fight them between the two, and the dragon is finally defeated. Unfortunately, Beowulf gets poisoned by a wound in his leg, and he knows he will die. He asks Wiglaf to bring some of the gold so Beowulf can see it before he passes, and the companion brings what he can. Beowulf asks to have a pyre built for those who pass by and that the pile of gold from the dragon be buried below him.

Then the valiant warrior took from his neck

The golden torque, and gave it to the thane,

Telling the young spearman, to use it well,

And the shirt of mail, and his gilded helm.

'You are the last of us, last of all our race,

The Waegmundings. Fate has swept away

All my kin sent the earls in their strength,

To their destined end, I must follow them.'

That was the old king's final word of all

Those in his breast, before the funeral fire,

The pyre's hot seething.

(Beowulf 2809-2819)

The poem finishes with Beowulf's funeral and his people mourning. This poem has been retold and translated many times over the centuries as people celebrate this story and the hero's journey. There were other lessons to be taught from it that carried into other legends and

mythologies worldwide. These lessons include good vs. evil, loyalty, and greed. This hero's journey, first discussed by Joseph Campbell in 1949, is used in many stories throughout history.

Greek lore still plays its part in history as well. The influence of the Greeks was spread far for many years, and their myths and legends influenced the stories in other countries.

“Knowledge of Greek mythology has long influenced society in subtle ways. It has shaped culture and tradition, directed political systems, and encouraged problem-solving. It would be fair to say that the whole basic concept of modern thinking can be traced back to Greek stories and the valuable lessons they taught.” (Why Greek Mythology is Still Relevant 2023)

Their stories aren't the only things that continue today. The Olympics were started in ancient Greece, and they continue today. Even popular names for children come from Greek origins—Jason, Troy, Damon, Helena, Phoebe, and many others. Brands of clothing, shoes, and other items are named from Greek myths. Amazon, Pandora, and Nike are all well-known brands, but they are all derived from Greek mythology. “Thinkers from Ancient Greece also laid the foundations for many areas of study, including astrology, mathematics, biology, engineering, medicine, or linguistics. (Hetherington 2019)

While many stories go back centuries, new mythologies are still created today through the written word. Each story not only creates its own world but also reflects what was happening during that period.

When J.R.R. Tolkien grew up and went to school, his world was filled with tragedy, but instead of letting it get him down, he used it to build his worlds, even creating his own elvish language. He lost his father and mother at an early age and was raised by a father of the church.

He attended a school where he learned one language after another, further feeding his love of language.

By this time Ronald was already showing remarkable linguistic gifts. He had mastered the Latin and Greek which was the staple fare of an arts education at that time and was becoming more than competent in a number of other languages, both modern and ancient, notably Gothic, and later Finnish. He was already busy making up his own languages, purely for fun. (Doughan 2021)

Tolkien's experiences during the war became part of the stories of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, a series of books that have inspired many stories in the years since. His use of dragons, trolls, dwarves, and elves was joined with other creatures of his own making such as orcs, ents, and hobbits. Along with them came fearsome stories of how they were created and how Sauron wanted the ring back that had been lost. He hadn't realized that a small hobbit carried the ring, and since the hobbits kept to themselves, they were easy enough to ignore—until the moment Frodo put it on his finger outside the Shire.

This small hobbit who wanted nothing more than to have a peaceful life in the Shire was suddenly thrust into a world where everyone was after him—or the ring—and he had to go and destroy the ring because no one else could. With the help of three other hobbits—Samwise Gamgee, Peregrin Took, and Meriadoc Brandybuck—he started on his path to find Bilbo and be rid of the ring. Unfortunately, that didn't happen, and while others fought over who would go, Frodo knew it had to be him who would go to destroy the ring. Frodo remained kind and trusting, even when he was out of food and there seemed to be no hope. His strength of character was the one thing Sauron had not planned on. After all, what could one small hobbit do? Thanks to Sam

and Gollum, Frodo finally makes it to the mountain, where Gollum's own greed finally destroys the ring.

When the world is saved and Frodo can finally go home, he realizes he cannot go back and live the life he once wanted. He had changed too much, and the wounds he had received would never fully heal. It was time for him to move with the elves.

Like many other myths and legends, some characters play specific roles we see in religions worldwide—particularly in Christianity. The Creation of Middle Earth had happened long before the hobbits, but it is the strength of these particular characters in this story that is important. There are a few different Christ figures in *The Lord of the Rings*. Each character embodies Christ in different aspects of his life as they do everything they can to save Middle Earth from the evil of Saruman and Sauron.

Sam and Frodo work together to save the world, and when Frodo can no longer make it, Sam carries his friend up the hill, taking on his burden to help his friend fulfill his destiny, just as Simon of Cyrene was ordered to carry the cross of Jesus toward his crucifixion. Sam was completely loyal from the time he was caught outside Frodo's house when Gandalf and Frodo were making plans to destroy the ring. He took care of Frodo and made sure he had food and water, even if he had none for himself.

Gandalf was a mentor to Frodo and was determined to see the ring destroyed. When they entered the mines and disturbed the darkness beneath, Gandalf knew there was only one possible way to help his companions escape and save the world. He had to sacrifice himself. He fought with the balrog, knocking him into the abyss. However, as the monster fell, his whip came up and snagged Gandalf around the knees. "He staggered, and fell, grasped vainly at the stone, and slid into the abyss. 'Fly you fools!' he cried, and was gone." (Tolkien 393) He comes back in

The Two Towers as Gandalf the White, unrecognized at first by his people, just as Christ did after he was resurrected. Finally, they know him, and he lets them know the tide has turned.

His story is somewhat similar to that of Théoden's. The king had Grima Wormtongue speaking in his ear, whispering poison to the point that he was near death. Once Wormtongue is away from Théoden, the king awakens as if he is raised from the dead and can rule the kingdom once more. Wormtongue, like Saruman and Sauron, plays the part of the trickster or the destroyer that is found in other cultures and mythologies.

Aragorn plays one of the most significant roles throughout the books. Throughout the story, he shows justice and mercy, even allowing Wormtongue to go free rather than be killed. He treats the hobbits with the utmost respect, which is an attitude most people did not share during that time. He is only known as Strider, but he's a king, unknown by his own people. It is not until he's ready to take up his name that those around him treat him as the king he truly is. Just as Christ showed himself to his people in Luke 4:14-21, Aragorn finally shows who he is and becomes the rightful king of Gondor.

Each character has a strong character arc created and strengthened by the trials and conflicts thrown at them. While some, like the hobbits, came from humble homes away from everyone, others were raised as royalty. Yet, each of them struggled and had to learn who they were before they could take on the mantle meant for them.

In the podcast, "Writing Excuses: "15.16: Balancing Plot and Character, Brandon Sanderson, Dan Wells, Howard Tayler, and Victoria Schwab discuss the importance of plot vs character. The consensus was that it is the character that drives the story and the thing that brings readers back time and time again to read or watch again. Readers love Gilgamesh, the banshee, or Frodo, not the plot or the setting. This is the reason people love myths and legends. They

teach stories but tend to show human weakness that one can relate to as they read. The plot, on the other hand, can move the story along. It's what happens in the plot that makes the characters grow from the trials thrown at them, or in the case of Celtic mythology, and it's what makes the characters different depending on the story.

The Dragonlance series told by Tracy Hickman and Margaret Weiss has some of the same elements as Lord of the Rings, but the characters were quite different. The initial plan for these stories was to base them off a game, sort of like Dungeons and Dragons. When Tracy Hickman stepped in to help with the writing, the world took on a life of its own. This series has many different sequels, and each builds off different characters within the world. Regardless of their origin, the stories still became real enough that many fans still loved the books without caring about the backstory.

The legends in Dragonlance told stories of when the world was young, and heroes could defeat dragons and other dark forces. The story, however, starts many years later, with a group of misfits—a half-elf, Tanis, a kender, Tasslehoff Burrfoot, and their human companions. Caramon was simple but completely devoted to Raistlin, his twin brother. They were opposite in many ways. Caramon was kind while Raistlin was rude and bitter. Caramon was large and muscular, and Raistlin had been sickly since birth.

As they head off on their quest, each character has their own battle. Caramon is willing to do pretty much anything for his twin, but when he sees Raistlin kill a magical version of him to pass his test, it strains their relationship. Raistlin's goal is to become the best sorcerer in the world, and, at some point, hopefully become a god. He was given golden skin and hourglass eyes to see how time affects everything, hoping it would humble him—which it didn't.

Tanis had to learn to accept himself for who he was, even though he hated his family line for causing so many problems in his life. Being half-elf with a thief and elven princess made Tanis the target of persecution. He was loyal to his friends and made the decisions for the group a lot of the time. It is his status that gives him strength as he fights for the little guys around him.

Tasslehoff Burrfoot, the kender, was the comedic outlet of the story or the trickster according to the rules of mythology. He wanted nothing more than to travel as he suffered from wanderlust like most of his kind. Items of value tended to show up in his pouch mysteriously, and he was often found going through everything he “found.”

These weren’t just stories that were told. Each character brought understanding for those who were left out, bullied, different, unappreciated, and even those who were sure they were right when everyone else thought they were wrong. They were loved enough that many other writers wanted to take part in growing and sharing more of the Dragonlance world with its readers. The thing that remains the same is the canon of the story. The legends of old, the battles fought by men, dwarves, and other creatures, continue because they mean something to both the readers and the writers.

It is the same love for the characters made readers love Harry Potter so much. JK Rowling created the world around a boy who didn’t know he was a wizard. It was a simple story about an orphan who was unloved by his aunt and uncle, but the day he turned eleven, his whole world changed. He learns he is a wizard, and not only that, but he is the first wizard to have ever survived a killing curse that ricocheted off him and hit his mother.

While the writing starts out simple, it is the world that JK created that pulled readers in. Harry meets friends along the way who have his back—something he’s never had before. Ron is awkward, and while he can be a fiercely loyal friend, sometimes jealousy can get in the way, and

he acts rashly. Hermione loves learning, and reading is her favorite. She knows more about Hogwarts and magic than most wizards combined, even though her parents are both non-magical. Neville Longbottom is awkward, clumsy, shy, and tends to give himself into trouble. He's also determined to make something of himself.

Many other characters within the story bring flaws or quirks that readers can relate to—and not just those who are alive, either. Hogwarts, the school of witchcraft and wizardry, is also home to centuries-old ghosts and other ancient hidden secrets. Four wizards came together to build the school, each with distinct qualities that set them apart. Together, they put together the houses and provided a home where new wizards and witches could live. Slytherin took the most cunning wizards. Ravenclaw took those who were intelligent. Hufflepuff took those who were patient and hardworking, and Gryffindor took those who were brave.

As the students learn about the different types of magic, they're also exposed to a world of creatures that many of them have never seen or heard of before. Hippogriffs, grindylows, unicorns, centaurs, dementors, and giants were all supposed to be fairy tales, but they learn these creatures are real. Many were borrowed from Celtic, Greek, and other lore, with others created by JK herself. These creatures also played a part in the stories, helping Ron, Hermione, and Harry out of—and sometimes into—trouble.

Dobby, the house elf, for example, adored Harry. He did a poor job of showing it most of the time, which put Harry in harm's way, but he did it out of love. When Harry sets Dobby free by tricking the sinister Lucius Malfoy into giving Dobby a sock, it cements the love Dobby has for Harry. He's always there for him and ultimately loses his life to save Harry's. Most characters in the books think nothing of the house elves, but Hermione takes it upon herself to try to save them—even though they don't want to be saved.

The phoenix is another creature that plays a significant role in Harry's life. Fawkes belongs to Dumbledore, and when Harry first sees him, the bird bursts into flame, only to emerge again. The phoenix appears a few times when Harry needs him the most, but in the most critical moment, he brings the sorting hat that holds Gryffindor's sword to save Harry from Voldemort's ghost self—Tom Riddle.

The fascinating thing about the phoenix is that it will forever reincarnate as it bursts into flames and then returns. Dumbledore had once been obsessed with gaining the Deathly Hallows as a way to become immortal. The ideas came from a child's fairy tale, *The Tale of the Three Brothers*, that most wizard children knew from childhood. It tells of three brothers who try to cheat Death. Each of them gets a part of the Deathly Hallows, the stone, the wand, and the cloak. Together, they make one invisible. If Dumbledore were to have all three, he could be the master of death—just as his phoenix was.

Instead of keeping the glory for himself, Dumbledore finally realizes his folly and slowly passes each item on to Harry. He'd had the cloak since his first year at Hogwarts when Dumbledore gave it to him. The wand was won by disarming Draco Malfoy in a fight. The stone is given to Harry just as he goes to die by Voldemort's hand. By dying, Harry weakens Voldemort and returns as the master of death.

Harry's biggest strength seems to have come from how the Dursleys treated him as a child. He had nothing, but he still found his worth. He was brilliant, and he knew it, even when he was told otherwise by his aunt and uncle. Above all, he knew right from wrong and wanted unjust things to be righted. When he's given the most powerful objects and becomes immortal, Harry knows that holding onto them gave him too much power, and he hides them away. His choices prove to himself why he belongs in the Gryffindor house instead of Slytherin.

While Ron, Hermione, and Harry play the most significant parts in the stories, it is Neville who has the strongest and most remarkable story arc. In book five, *Order of the Phoenix*, Neville joins the group where Harry teaches them spells they can't learn under Dolores Umbridge's teachings. Neville struggles with learning but soon begins to catch on and excel. In the final book, he is the one who destroys the last Horcrux and essentially makes the prophecy come true for both he and Harry. It had been said that someone born at the end of the summer would be Voldemort's undoing. Harry destroyed Voldemort, but it's Neville who makes that possible. His character development shows children and adults alike, that working hard, being brave even when he doesn't feel it, and never giving up will pay off in the end.

Each of these stories throughout history has not only told the story of their ancestors but also shown parts of what happened during that time period. JRR Tolkien wrote of World War I and many other personal experiences into his worlds. The Irish, Greeks, Native Americans, and so many cultures took what they knew to help explain those things they did not understand.

Some stories that have been around for centuries still get retold differently today. Hundreds of fairy tale retellings of Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, Snow White, and many others exist. Some authors take the stories of lesser-known tales from Norse, Polynesian, Irish, or other histories and make the stories their own, twisting them to fit the storyline they like.

“So, versions of Cinderella or the Three Men who went to Search for Death can be found in places as far apart as China, India, Britain, and North America.

Sometimes it's clear that these stories spread through migration, and were then passed down by word of mouth across the generations – thus, quite a few English folktales and ballads made it to North America and are still in circulation to this day.”

(Larrington 2019)

Mythology has affected human culture throughout history, and rather than dying off, it continues to influence new stories. Rather than forget the past, it's important to continue telling those stories so they can continue to help society grow by the lesson the myths and legends taught.

Hannah – Irish Warrior

Chapter One

The mall food court was chaotic with teens and college students celebrating their freedom from school. I had wanted to stay home to pack for Ireland since we were leaving first thing in the morning, but Amy and Kaitlyn had insisted that I come.

“Why not get a new wardrobe before our internship? It could be fun,” they said.

The bags of clothes and shoes next to me proved they were right, but that didn’t mean I had to like it. At least now I could just shove the new outfits into my suitcase and call it good.

Nineties music played over the speaker just loud enough to hear it, but not enough to drown out the conversations. I sighed and swirled my smoothie around in my cup, waiting for Amy and Kaitlyn to finish flirting with the cashiers instead of ordering their Chinese food. My corn dog and fries were already gone, and I debated going back to get another smoothie. I’d probably have it finished by the time they got back.

Laughter burst out at one of the tables to the side of me as a few high school boys ran for napkins. Milkshake and soda dripped slowly to the ground as they tried to clean it up. Okay, so maybe instead of having to weave around the tables of dripping milkshakes and loud teens to get a smoothie, I could drown it all out with my book.

I pushed my shopping bags to the side and pulled my book on Celtic mythology out of my purse. It had been read so many times by past students that the cover had been taped on, and the pages were folded. It didn’t matter, though. Some of my favorite Irish legends were in here. Whoever had it before me may have sold it back, but I would keep it until it fell apart. Everyone else going on this trip was going for fun, but I couldn’t wait to get my hands on the books in the

Trinity College Library in Dublin. I'd perused all the books in the bookstore here and in the library often enough that I needed something new.

A look at my watch told me they'd been there for a good ten minutes. It wasn't quite their record of twenty minutes, but I wasn't going to stick around that long. Five more minutes and I'd go over and start snort laughing at whatever they were saying. That usually got the flirting to stop pretty quickly.

I found my spot and propped my elbows on the table, then leaned back in my chair to get comfortable, and started on the legend of Cú Chulainn. I'd already read it, but that was for a class. This time, I wanted to actually enjoy it.

"Seriously, you're the only one I know who can read with all this noise." Kaitlyn set her rice bowl and drink on the table and dropped into the seat across from me. "You could at least wait until you're on the plane before you check out. There are people here. Cute guys. You're single. Do something about it."

"I figured you would be another half an hour or so with how things were going. I didn't want to just sit here like a loner while I waited." I put my bookmark into the book, hoping she'd let me get back to reading. "At least tell me he asked for your number."

"No, Amy gave him hers, though. I'm holding out for Gavin to finally ask me out on our trip, but it was nice to flirt with someone who flirts back." Kaitlyn laughed and closed my book, sliding it toward her. "Come on. Surely there's someone here. Or . . . maybe Austin? I've seen the way he looks at you."

"Yeah, right." I rolled my eyes. "Please give me my book."

Kaitlyn was as much of a bookworm as I was, unless there were boys around. "Not until you admit you have feelings for Austin."

“I can’t admit what’s not true.” I reached forward to grab the book from her, and suddenly froze as I noticed the couple just a few feet away. Ephraim. With *that girl*. My fist clenched, trying to control my anger.

Kaitlyn followed my gaze and grabbed my arm. Her voice was low and pleading. “Hannah, let it go. He was a jerk anyway.”

“I know.” But it was too late. I could feel the rage within me, awakening from the anger and panic that hit. It was too quick for me to grab on before it grew, screaming to get out. If I didn’t get out of the mall quickly, there would be casualties.

“Gotta go.” I ignored Amy as I darted past her because stopping wasn’t an option. I knew going to the mall was a bad idea. Who goes to malls anymore anyway? Amy and Kaitlyn should have known better than to force me into social situations. Cries of outrage followed in my wake, but it was better than what they would have gotten if I’d stayed. I pushed through the front doors, only vaguely hearing the shattering glass as my hands went through.

Sweet, cold air met me as I yanked the doors open and ran for my car. My hands were on fire from the glass, but I couldn’t stop and take care of them. They’d be healed by the time I got home anyway. I tried to veer away from cars so I wouldn’t add more damage to whatever I did inside. This was already probably going to cost me a fortune.

I climbed into my car and slammed the door shut, then squeezed my eyes closed, trying to will the rage away. I don’t know why it had suddenly shown up months ago—on my twenty-first birthday of all days—but I really wished it would go back to wherever it came from.

Stupid boys. Stupid Ephraim with his perfect hair, perfect smile, and perfect kisses.

This rage seemed to show up when I had strong emotions—happy, sad, angry, heartbroken—and apparently just seeing Ephraim was enough to set it off now. But then finding

him at the mall with the girl he'd cheated on me with made it that much worse. I wouldn't have agreed to set foot in the mall if I knew he was still in town. His plan had been to head off to France the second he graduated. I growled. Thinking about him was only making it worse.

Breathe in, breathe out, breathe in, breathe out, I chanted in my head, slowly easing my hands off the steering wheel. This time the rage tried fighting back. It didn't want to let go of the control it had over me. It wanted to go after Ephraim and whatever-her-name-was and show them what happened when someone messed with me.

The rational side of me knew it was just the rage talking. Before it showed up, I didn't threaten to punch people or lose my temper. I liked reading mythology in my room while eating ice cream or staying up late playing D&D with my other nerdy friends.

Until now.

A knock on the window was followed by the door opening, and I fought to control the rage. I needed to be okay before I turned to see who it was.

"Hannah?" It was Kaitlyn.

"Go." My pleading whisper came out as more of a growl. "Leave, please."

But I knew she wouldn't. She'd seen this too many times in the last few weeks to leave me alone with it. And finally, the rage seemed to know it couldn't win this time and began to dissipate, crawling back into its cave where I wished it would stay.

Kaitlyn climbed into the passenger seat and leaned over the gear shift to wrap her arms around me. She would never leave. Not until I felt better.

"Hannah, make sure you breathe." She patted my arm once and then drew back quickly. "Sorry. I forgot."

A hug was okay. Everything else just made it feel like taunting or something. I did what Kaitlyn said. It had worked last time. Breathe in, breathe out. The rage rumbled, but I pushed it back down. Finally, my breathing slowed, and I became more aware of my surroundings. I was me again. For now.

I just hoped it wouldn't return in my dreams tonight. Or that I wouldn't fight whoever came close once it did kick in. I'd had to finish the last of my college classes online or have my friends turn in my assignments just to avoid being in public.

I finally pulled away from Kaitlyn and opened my eyes. "How bad was it? Besides this, I mean."

Kaitlyn grimaced. "Your steering wheel should explain. And the blood on the window. *And* the shattered front door of the mall."

"Wha—?" I swore when I saw the handprints etched into the steering wheel. "Did I hurt anyone?"

"I don't know. I was right behind you, so I had to shout apologies and keep going. Amy will tell us when she gets here." Kaitlyn bit her lip. "It's getting worse, Hannah. Maybe you need to see a doctor."

I snorted. "What are they going to tell me? That I need therapy? That I need meds to calm me down? I've already heard it from our professors and everyone else."

Kaitlyn sighed. "I wish you'd been there the last couple of weeks. It was so boring. I could have used your rage monster to liven things up a bit."

"Rage monster? That's what we're calling it now?" I raised an eyebrow and leaned against my seat. All my energy was gone. I stared down at the glass shards that slowly dropped from my

hands as the wounds healed. On top of everything else, I'd still have to throw my pants and shirt out. They were torn from the glass and covered in my blood.

Kaitlyn shrugged. "What else would you call it?"

Good question.

"I don't know. Sounds about right, I guess. I just know I'm tired of it. I hope it doesn't mess with our vacation or I'm going to be ticked." I stopped when I saw the look on her face. "What?"

Kaitlyn was silent for a moment. When she finally spoke, her voice was quiet. "You're sure you still want to go?"

I nodded, anger flared. Not *that* anger. The regular kind that most girls have. Like I *had* until this whatever-it-was made its appearance. "I'm not missing my chance to travel to Ireland for anything. Rage monster or not."

Great, the name had stuck.

"Yes, but what happens if you lose it on the plane?" Kaitlyn scooted closer to the door when I looked over at her.

"It's not like this thing shows up every day. I just have to find a way to stay chill."

Kaitlyn stared at me. "You're right. It doesn't show up every day, but this time it was much worse than I've seen it before."

"Yeah, but at least I calmed myself down . . . with your help. That has to mean something right?" I tried to sound hopeful, but by the look on Kaitlyn's face it was clear she didn't believe me.

"Next, you're going to tell me how you're drawn there, and you have to go, or the world will end." Kaitlyn smirked.

“I wasn’t going to say that even though it’s true. Look, maybe I can just sleep the whole way.” Not that it would help. My dreams were just as bad as the rage. My dreams were filled with battles, and I was right in the middle of it, fighting. Mom had already told me she wouldn’t be buying any more furniture after replacing pretty much every piece in my bedroom.

“I guess, but I’m still not sure it’s smart.” Kaitlyn sighed. “Unlock the door. Amy finally escaped the mall.”

“I didn’t . . .” I followed Kaitlyn’s gaze. At some point I’d locked the door and couldn’t remember doing it. I unlocked the door and ducked my head as two police cars came flying into the mall parking lot with their lights flashing. Oh, man.

Amy knocked on the window and climbed in the backseat, holding her bags and mine. “You have your school record beat. Don’t plan on going to that mall for a while.”

“It’s a good thing we’re leaving for Ireland tomorrow or I’m going to run out of places I’m allowed to go.” I started the car and pulled out of the parking lot, turning up the volume so we didn’t have to talk. The last couple of weeks of last semester had been bad. I’d sent desks flying more than once.

Amy leaned forward so she could be heard over the radio. “So, we’re just going to ignore what happened back there?”

She really didn’t get the hint when I wanted to change the subject. I turned the corner before answering. “I flipped and took off. End of story.”

“Yeah. Tell that to the people you attacked with your chair on the way out. A couple of them might have to go to the hospital. They were trying to keep everyone inside the mall to question them. I barely escaped.”

I slammed on my brakes and pulled over to the side of the road. “Wait, what? I ran straight out. I didn’t pick up any chair or anything else.”

Amy shook her head. “You did run out, but if anyone got in the way, you used your chair to move them. It was awful. I stayed to apologize to people and make sure everyone was okay.”

How did I not remember any of that? All I remembered was the doors. “This is so bad. I was hoping I could get out of there before anyone noticed.”

Amy rolled her eyes. “Most of the mall noticed. What’s going on? It’s like you were fighting some battle or something. You even let out a war cry. I mean, I knew you had the rage thing and that you’d done some damage, but this . . . this was worse than I’d expected.”

“Hey, knock it off. She already feels bad enough as it is.” Kaitlyn shot a glare back at Amy. “I think that tells us we shouldn’t go tomorrow. We can just change our tickets to go with the rest of the group later.”

I gripped the steering wheel. “I have to go. We just talked about this. I *need* to go. I’m being drawn there, and who knows? Maybe that’s why it came out so strong today. It’s getting restless or something.”

Kaitlyn sighed. “Does it promise that you’ll be good on the plane? Or in Dublin?”

“Oddly enough, I think it does.” The low boiling rage that had been there since the mall was gone. Almost like it was happily snoozing in its little lair. I pulled into the driveway and climbed out, taking my bags from Amy. “Thanks for grabbing these.”

“You’re welcome.”

Kaitlyn and Amy followed me in, whispering quietly behind me. I knew what it was about, but I was just going to ignore it for now. I had to keep my annoyance levels to a minimum.

Mom and Dad were still gone when we went inside, but that didn't surprise me. They were always at one conference or another trying to find where they went wrong as a parent. Something had to have happened to cause my horrid behavior. They usually came home for weekends and then took off again. Sometimes together, sometimes on two different trips, bringing me back souvenirs. When they were home, they'd take me out to fancy dinners as a way of making up for being gone.

I could have stayed at Amy or Kaitlyn's apartment, but I liked being at my house when it was quiet and had fewer distractions. They both seemed to have impromptu parties, almost every night and I preferred my Irish books.

The house echoed as we walked into the living room where I set down my bag before heading to the kitchen, turning on lights as I went. Everything was spotless, as usual, which meant the cleaning lady had come while we were at the mall.

"You two want something to eat? I'm dying for some ice cream. Mom and Dad stocked up before they left." I dug through the freezer until I found my favorite chocolate caramel ice cream, and then found a spoon.

Amy and Kaitlyn raided the freezer to find their usual chicken nuggets and pot pies. Just because we'd grown up didn't mean our appetites had. Once their food was cooking in the oven, we went back to the living room. Amy curled up on one couch, and Kaitlyn sprawled out on the floor, just like they'd done all through high school. I needed to pack, but my room was at the other end of the house.

Amy sent a quick text to someone and set her phone on the coffee table. "Where are your parents this time?"

“Phoenix, I think. Nothing around here satisfied their questions, so they moved on to other states.” I sighed. “I miss the days when they were busy trying to set me up on dates or encouraging me to try out for a sports team.”

Kaitlyn raised an eyebrow. “Really?”

I shrugged. “At least they were around then.”

“True. I wish they *were* here. They could give us a ride in the morning. Now we’re stuck with my brother.” Amy shuddered. “He barely gets his license and suddenly he’s the family taxi. Last time he took me somewhere, he had to pay for our neighbor’s mailbox.”

“Why don’t you just drive there, then?” I asked.

Amy sighed. “I tried that, but he made a big deal about having to switch places once we got there and blah, blah, blah. So, he won, and we all have to hold on for dear life.”

My doorbell rang, and I froze, glancing between the two girls. “Who is that?”

“Relax. It’s just Gavin and Austin. I borrowed Gavin’s headphones, and I told him they could come here to get them.” Amy jumped up and went to the answer the door.

It was Amy who’d insisted on letting them come with us. They were part of the internship in Ireland. Amy, Kaitlyn, and I wanted to do some touring before the program started, so we decided to go early, and Gavin and Austin begged to go with us. They were actually the reason my parents finally let me go early. Something about having two guys to take care of us was better than sending the three of us off alone.

“It’ll be fine.” Kaitlyn patted my hand as she got up and went to the kitchen to check on the food.

Sure, it would be. I only had a restless monster hanging out inside, ready to pop at any time . . . maybe my friends were right. Maybe I did need to stay home and figure this out.

The rage stirred, grumbling like a mastiff at the thought of staying here. I bit my lip, and pushed it back down, assuring it that we would be going.

“Hey, Hannah.” Austin’s voice broke through the grumbles, and I blinked several times before seeing his smiling face just a few feet from mine. “You okay? You looked a little upset there.”

I shook my head and laughed. “I was just thinking of everything that needs to be done before tomorrow.” I cleared my throat. “Are you packed?”

“Pretty much. I was going to grab a hoodie from the mall, but it was closed for some reason. They said something about an attack which is messed up.” He tipped his head, his eyebrows drawing together. “Are you sure you’re okay?”

“Positive. But I do need to go finish packing. “I hate to disappear when you just got here but our flight leaves in ten hours and I need to finish packing.” I stood, doing my best to pretend like I had nothing to do with why the mall was closed.

Austin jumped up. “Right. Yeah. Sorry, Gavin needed to get his ear buds back from Amy, and I figured we could hurry and stop by.”

I wanted to point out that they could have just waited till morning but pushed it away. “See you in the morning.”

Austin waved and went to find Gavin while I retreated to my room. The girls would find me after the boys left. I pushed away all the worries about tomorrow and went down my packing list, throwing things into the suitcase on my bed as I went.

Amy and Kaitlyn wandered in a few minutes later and glared at me with their arms folded.

“What?” I dropped a toothbrush in the bag. “Look, I need to pack, and so do you guys. I knew if they stayed any longer, we’d probably end up watching a movie or having another party.”

Amy shook her head. “It’s not that. We just can’t believe you brushed Austin off like you did.”

I rolled my eyes. “Austin doesn’t like me. He’s just nice to everyone. Besides, I’ll be staying in Ireland when he goes home, so it’s not like anything could happen.”

“You’re so blind.” Amy leaned into my dresser and checked her complexion in the mirror before turning back to me. “Maybe miracles will happen in Ireland, and you’ll finally believe us.”

“Sure, but I doubt it. I’m not there to meet guys. I’m there to study.” I pointed to my suitcase that was only half-filled. “Seriously though, you two should probably get packing too. Our flight is early.”

Kaitlyn groaned and pulled her keys out of her pocket. “I was really hoping to put it off for a little longer, but you’re right. Especially because I need to do another load of laundry before I can pack. Why do you always have to be so responsible?”

“Because otherwise we’d be a mess.” I grinned and grabbed my deodorant to put into the bag with my toothbrush. “Don’t forget your passports, your tickets, chargers—”

“Yeah, yeah, we have your list.” Kaitlyn waved and backed out of the room, pulling a protesting Amy with her.

I left my room a moment later so I could grab a few things from the pantry and lock the door behind them. I couldn’t help being the one to remind them of things. Maybe it was the fact that I’d basically had to parent myself over the last few months, but I didn’t want anything to

mess up our trip, and a forgotten passport would do just that. We all had our roles. Amy was the caring one, Kaitlyn was the boy-crazy one, and I was often called “Mom” because I was the one who reminded the others to do their homework or what to pack. Mine was definitely not as glamorous as their roles, but it was just . . . me.

The alarm system clicked on, and I finally relaxed. Not only would it keep intruders out, but it also helped keep me inside. With my dreams, I could end up walking outside—I had tried a few times before—so when the alarm triggered, it helped pull me from sleep.

Once my bag was packed and I’d checked it several times, I made sure all the lights were off and that the security system was actually on. I knew I wasn’t going to sleep for a while because I never did when something exciting was happening the next day, so I grabbed my Celtic mythology book from my book bag and turned off all my lights except for the lamp. It was time to dive deep into Cú Chulainn’s legend so I could be ready for my next course.

Chapter Two

It was way too early to be awake after staying up so late with my book. It turned out that I actually did need sleep after what had happened at the mall, and it had taken hitting snooze three times to finally pull me out of bed.

I needed to hurry and get ready because Amy would be here in a few minutes, and her brother wasn't very patient. After checking once more that I had everything, I set my bags by the front door and flopped onto a couch and pulled out my phone.

Several texts had come in while I'd been getting ready. I clicked on one from Amy and bolted upright on the couch. It was a news link to an article about what had happened at the mall the night before.

Girl at Large After Trashing Mall Food Court

Great. If anything kept me from going to Ireland it would be this. At least they didn't have a picture of me. The food court on the other hand . . . it was a mess. Surely that couldn't have been *all* me. Maybe people were pushing tables aside to get away from me. I checked the other texts, and most were the same article.

A kid I barely knew sent me a video of what had happened with the caption, "Is this you there with Amy and Kaitlyn?"

I hesitated for a moment before hitting play. It was like something from a movie. Amy wasn't kidding when she said I let out a battle cry. It was like I was a completely different person. I even held myself different as I stood in a fighting stance, using my corn dog stick as

dagger before dropping it to grab a chair. Not only that, but I also spoke in Gaelic, a language I barely knew.

That wasn't the crazy thing, though. The video showed me, but not my face. It was blurred somehow. It was kind of a miracle I hadn't been arrested yet. Especially since you *could* see Amy and Kaitlyn just fine.

The doorbell rang, so I slid off my chair, and opened the door. I'd expected Amy or Kaitlyn, but Austin stood there, grinning sheepishly.

"Oh. Hey." I wasn't sure what else to say. This was Kaitlyn's territory.

"Amy asked me to grab you since you're on the way to her house. Can I help you take your stuff out?" Austin gestured toward the bags in the doorway.

I backed up so he could come inside. "Thanks. But I thought you lived near campus."

Austin took the two bigger suitcases. "Not for the summer. I moved home so I wouldn't have to pay rent while I'm gone. Is this everything? Do you have your ticket and passport?"

I smiled at his back as he headed out the door. Maybe we had a little more in common than I thought. "Got them. You have yours?"

"Yup. Gavin had to go back and get his, though. He's meeting us at the airport." He chuckled. "I'll be out here if you want to say bye to your parents."

"Um, okay." I went through the house to make sure the lights were off, then wrote a quick note to my parents, a twinge of sadness hitting me. I wouldn't see them again until I got back at the end of the summer, and they weren't home to say goodbye. I'd send a text from the airport to remind them I needed the international line on my phone turned on and hoped it would remind them to call me. "Love you, guys. I'll figure this out. I hope."

I left the house and climbed down the steps to his SUV. He'd piled everything up in the back seat and waited in the driver's seat. Rock music played on the stereo, and his dark brown hair fell, covering his hazel eyes. He grinned sheepishly and turned down the music.

After a short pause, I climbed in next to him, my stomach mess of nerves and excitement. "Ready for this?"

"Mostly. Leaving home for a few weeks is kinda crazy to me." Austin pulled away from the curb. "I mean, there's a reason I took classes here instead of going to New York or Arizona."

"Those were choices for you?" I used my phone to turn on the house alarm and forced myself to relax. Oddly enough, the monster remained quiet. I was sure it'd show up with how fast my heart was beating. In fact, it seemed more chill than usual.

Austin nodded and turned the corner toward Amy's apartment. "Scholarships to both. But Tulsa had the program I wanted."

"Which is why I never left either." I gripped the handle of the door as we pulled into Amy's complex. She stood out by an old Suburban directing someone—most likely her brother—on how to pack the car. "Looks like we arrived just in time."

Austin pulled into a spot nearby. "It's okay. I've got mad Tetris skills. We can make everything fit."

"I'll sit back and watch. It's just me and my parents, so not a lot of Tetris is needed for trips." When we actually went on one. "What are you going to do with your truck while we're gone? It can't just sit here, can it?"

"Nah, my parents are coming to get it after Dad gets off work. Come on. I think Amy's about to strangle her brother." Austin climbed out of the SUV and went to stand next to Amy.

I shook my head and opened my door. He was always the peacemaker. While everyone else discussed where things would get put, I pulled my own bags out of the SUV. I tried to stay away from contention for the sake of the monster. I set them down next to Amy, then went to get Austin's.

The low rumble told me that it was stirring. Not now. I shot Amy a look and she nodded before turning back to the back of the Suburban. I climbed in the middle seat, found my headphones, and blasted my music, hoping it would drown everything out. A few minutes later, the others climbed in and put on their seatbelts. Kaitlyn made sure to sit in the back with Gavin, which left Austin and me together. Not awkward at all. He didn't try talking to me, considering I had my headphones on, so the twenty-minute drive to the airport was fairly peaceful. If you count blasting Celtic music in your ears peaceful—which I do.

Amy's brother came screeching to a halt, and we all bailed out, grabbing whatever bags we could from the back. While fighting tended to get the monster fired up, being busy and frazzled seemed to calm it. I couldn't explain it, but that's just how it was.

We all walked inside and set our stuff down. Once we had our correct bags, we each took a different line for checking them. My music was working, but I could tell the people around me weren't super impressed. I just shot them a smile, then continued waiting in line.

When it was finally my turn, I walked up with my bags and set them on the scale, then turned off my music. This was what worried me, right here. If they had video of me from the mall that was actually clear, I could be sent home.

The woman smiled at me and took my ID, then scanned the ticket on my phone. "Off to Ireland, huh?"

“Yep.” There was a fine line between polite and rude, and I hoped my answer hit right there in the middle.

She weighed each bag before turning back to me. “That’s it. You can go back to your music. It’s a favorite of mine as well.”

It wasn’t until that moment I caught the slightest Irish lilt to her voice. I looked up and met her eyes. “You’re from there?”

“A long time ago. I’ve been here since I went to school.” She nodded and looked past me at the next customer, and I hurried to catch up to my group.

The next hurdle was the security line. It was shorter than I was expecting, but then it was also earlier than most people like to wake up. The guard looked at me for a moment, studying my face, before passing on. Maybe I was going to luck out after all.

I put my shoes, headphones, and phone in one basket, then my jacket and laptop in the other. The monster stirred, and I prayed we could get through the metal detectors without fully waking him. We were so close.

Amy shot me a smile and a thumbs-up, while Kaitlyn flirted with Gavin through the whole line one over from us. Austin had already made it through when it was my turn. I checked and double checked to make sure there was nothing metal in my pockets, then stepped through.

No alarm sounded, but the whirs and the beeps were enough to wake it up.

Crap.

I smiled at the security guards, grabbed my headphones, laptop, and bag, then took off running for the nearest bathroom. We were too close to the flight leaving for this to happen now. I needed to get it calmed down before the mall incident happened all over again.

There was a line in the restroom, so I tapped the nearest person on the shoulder. “Hi, excuse. I’m gonna barf. Can I go first?”

I don’t know if it was the worry of getting vomited on, or if the monster showed in my face, but people backed away, very quickly. The back stall was open, and I dove in and slammed the door shut just as I began to throw up. A lot. I managed to stop long enough to put my headphones and hit play before another wave hit.

Whatever had set the monster off, being violently ill was enough to make it back off. Not the best solution, but it was good to know. I flushed the toilet and leaned against the stall, taking in deep breaths. A few minutes later, there was a knock at the door, and I half expected security to come and tell me I was too sick to fly. But I recognized the bright green Converse and the sandals anywhere.

“Hey, Hannah. You okay in there? Do we need to take you home?” Amy’s voice was muffled, but I could hear the fear in her voice.

“Nah, I’m good. I’m going to need to brush my teeth and get some gum, though.” I took a deep breath and stood, feeling better than I expected, then opened the stall.

Kaitlyn’s eyes filled with relief. “Oh, they’re not black. Thank heavens.”

Amy threw her arms around me before backing up quickly. “You weren’t kidding about that toothbrush. Here, I have an extra one in my bag. Just . . . throw it away when you’re done.”

“Fair enough.” I brushed my teeth while Amy and Kaitlyn stayed close just in case something else happened.

“Okay, we’re about to board. This is your last chance to back out.” Kaitlyn put her hands on my shoulders. “You’re sure you want to do this?”

My friends had been by my side this whole time. They were the ones encouraging me to go out and do things. They were going on this trip specifically for me. If Kaitlyn was worried . . . I paused, listening for the rumble, but I must have scared it back to sleep.

“Don’t let anyone take off my music, and we should be good. It was the scanner that set it off—I didn’t hurt anyone, right?” I took my backpack from Kaitlyn.

Kaitlyn shook her head. “We didn’t see it, but as there is no one lying on the ground or bleeding, I’d say you were safe this time.”

I breathed a sigh of relief. “Let’s go find the boys. And if anything happens on the plane... make me throw up. That seems to shut it up.”

Kaitlyn grimaced and nudged me toward the door. “Thanks for the visual. Amy was going to make sure you and Austin sat together, but I’m thinking we need to have the three of us together and the boys on the other row.”

“Good thinking.” I left the bathroom with my friends on each side of me as we made our way to our gate. Austin and Gavin sat there playing on their phones when we walked up. Austin’s smile dropped.

“You okay? You look pale.” He jumped up and held out a bottled water.

I smiled and nodded. “Yeah, just some pre-flight jitters. Besides, that’s your water. I don’t want to take it.”

“It’s okay, really. I bought two.” He held it out, waiting for me to take it from him.

“Thanks.” I opened the lid and took a sip, then guzzled the rest. I tossed it in the garbage as the announcer called for us to board.

The plane was huge, with a longer middle aisle and three chairs on each side of the row. We took our seats and while they wanted to give me the outside seat so I could bolt to the bathroom, I preferred the window. I wanted to see where I was going.

While everyone else listened to the pre-flight announcements and warnings, I listened to Celtic instrumental music while chewing gum and playing a game on my phone. Anything to keep my mind busy. And it worked.

Mostly.

We were about halfway over the Atlantic when my music playlist ran out. It wasn't too bad at first. We'd just finished eating, and the plane was relatively quiet, and I'd even managed to doze off a few times.

"Excuse me, ladies, and gentlemen. It looks like we'll be landing a little early tonight due to a favorable tailwind. However, there are some thunderstorms that may give us trouble as we begin our descent. We'll prepare for landing in about an hour, but the seatbelt sign will be on before that. Enjoy the rest of your flight!"

Of course there would be turbulence. The monster seemed to sense the worry in me, and its fight or flight mode switched on. I quickly started my playlist over, grabbed another piece of gum, and started a different game. Anything to keep this thing silenced.

I tried the meditation thing that my parents had been so insistent that I learn, and this time it actually worked. It seemed to fall asleep, and I was much calmer for the moment.

The first bump hit, and it felt like we were on a roller coaster. The pilot wasn't kidding when he said we might have turbulence. It bounced Amy and Kaitlyn out of their sleep, and I would have laughed at their expressions if I wasn't trying so hard to keep dinner down.

"You okay?" Amy asked, holding onto the armrests as if her life depended on it.

“I’m fine. What about you, Kaitlyn?” I cringed as the plane dropped again.

Kaitlyn didn’t say anything, but by the look on her face, she wasn’t having any better luck with dinner than I was.

I had to keep talking, keep pretending like everything was normal. But with every bump, I was losing more and more control. I suddenly jumped up and hit my head, and the world went black.

The battle was intense, but I wasn’t going to let it stop me. I had to get to that next ridge before the enemy did.

I turned to the rest of my soldiers. “Now’s our chance! To the castle!”

Several others called out the battle cry and joined my side. I wiped the blood from my sword and stepped around the fallen soldiers, keeping the ridge in sight. As one, we marched as our enemy did their best to keep us back.

These people had taken the castle of my queen, and I would not stand for it.

“Ar son na héireann!!” I screamed as I raced up the hill, straight for the woman who had killed my family.

Chapter Three

I woke to find my mouth covered by Amy and Kaitlyn as they held tight to my shoulders with their other hands. I blinked several times before waving them off. The bumping of the tires below me told me we'd just landed, which was good because I'd need to find a bathroom as soon as possible.

Amy rubbed my back as I leaned against the table in front of me. She leaned close. "Man, that was scary for a second. You okay?"

I nodded but didn't lift my head. If I did, I'd vomit. "Anyone hurt?"

"Not this time. Just a bunch of stuff in Gaelic. Shoot." Amy shifted to look at the flight attendant who was glaring at us. "Sorry, she's sick. I don't think she can move yet. Can we have a moment?"

The nausea had passed, so I sat up, smiling up at the rather annoyed stewardess. "I'm okay. For now."

"I appreciate your excitement for being in Ireland, but your outburst upset many of the other passengers. There are authorities who will need to speak with you when you get to the gate."

Of course there are. "I'm sorry again. Can we please go?"

The flight attendant nodded and moved out of the way. The rest of the passengers had already left the plane, which was probably a good thing. Amy handed me my bag and we made our way out of the plane. I tried to ignore the glares of the other flight attendants, but really, I couldn't blame them.

Austin and Gavin stood outside the plane, talking to two officials. They turned as we walked out, and I didn't like the look on their faces.

“You’re Hannah Beaumont?” One of the officials spoke, and I couldn’t help smiling at his accent.

I cleared my throat when I realized he was staring at me. “Yes, sir. I’m sorry for what happened. I tend to . . . sleep talk . . . and yell . . . in my sleep.”

The man studied my face. “Do you have medical records that can show that?”

“I do. I have them in my backpack if you’d like to see them.” I pulled my bag off my shoulder and searched through the papers I had until I found the right one. When I said I was going to be prepared for this trip, I meant it, and that included having doctor’s notes. “Here.”

The two men read through the paper before finally handing it back. “Your friends vouched for you. And since you didn’t do any damage, we’ll let you go. Just be more careful from now on.”

“Thank you, sir . . . and sir.” I slipped the paper back into my bag and zipped it up. “Anything else?”

“Enjoy your stay in Ireland.” They walked away, and I turned to my friends.

Austin stared at me with a mixture of betrayal and curiosity, but he didn’t say anything before heading toward customs. I wanted to cry. We’d finally started talking and now he’d never talk to me again. Amy caught my expression and shrugged, slipping her arm through mine.

“This is the first time he’s seen that . . . monster. Give him some time. And if he turns on you, well, he wasn’t the right one anyway.” Amy stopped in the customs line and sighed. “And now we wait.”

I grinned. “And then I get my stamp for Ireland. I’ve waited so long for this.”

“We know.” Amy laughed and leaned closer. “And the Rage Monster?”

“Totally chill. I’m not even nauseated anymore.” I frowned. “Maybe that’s not such a great thing. That’s weird, right?”

Amy shrugged her shoulders. “From what I can see, having it gone is a good thing.”

She had a point. I rifled through my backpack to find my passport, then zipped it back up. As I stood I came face-to-face with Austin. His eyes seemed troubled as he looked in mine before glancing away.

Maybe it was nothing. After all, I’d told Amy and Kaitlyn that there was nothing between me and Austin. But then why did it hurt so much? It was like I’d betrayed him or something.

Kaitlyn took my other arm and leaned in close. “It’s just shock. Don’t worry about it. He’ll soon realize it’s just one of your quirky personality things and move on.”

“Maybe so. Although, I wouldn’t call screaming in Gaelic in the middle of a flight a personality quirk.” I smiled at her and moved up in the line. I pushed away my confusion, unwilling to let him ruin the fact that I was in Ireland. I was here to study, not be wooed by some boy. The woman who took my passport stared at it for a moment, then stamped it.

“Welcome to Ireland.” The woman smiled at me and waved Austin forward.

The sea air rolled over me, and it was almost as if the monster inside me purred. We were home. Memories of my dream came back to me, and it was like I could feel the sword in my hand . . .

“Earth to Hannah.” Kaitlyn had a look of panic in her eyes. “You with us?”

I shook my head to clear it. “Yeah, sorry. Are we ready to go?”

Kaitlyn studied my face for a moment before nodding. “There’s a bus that’s about to leave. Hopefully it’s not too full.”

I grabbed my bags and followed her to the bus. Amy was talking to Gavin, and Austin was busy looking at his phone. Hopefully he hadn't just seen me space out again.

The bus was pretty full, so we all had to squish in. After setting my bags on the rack, I turned and came face-to-chest with Austin. I moved to the side so he could get past me, but the bus started forward. I grabbed for one of the bars and gulped when I felt Austin's arm around my waist.

"Whoa, there." Austin let go and moved just enough for me to hold to the bar right behind him. "Gotta keep your balance. These can be tricky."

"Thanks." My stomach was in my throat, so the word came out as more of a grunt. The good news was that he was still willing to talk to me. The bad news was that I was floundering over words and looked like a complete idiot in front of him.

The drive to the hotel was long, and the jet lag was brutal. I yawned once and then couldn't stop. I hoped Austin wouldn't notice, but then I looked up to see him hiding a yawn as well. He caught my glance and bent closer.

"You gave me your yawns." He chuckled.

"Yeah, sorry about that." And, of course, now I needed to yawn again.

Austin laughed and held tight to the bar as we went around a corner. I almost fell into him again, but managed to stop myself this time.

"So, what are you most excited about?" Austin asked right in my ear so I could hear over the chaos in the bus.

"The library. I know that sounds lame, but the library is massive, and it's filled with so much history." My geekiness was apparently stronger than my nerves around Austin. It didn't

matter how many times I told myself I didn't like him, having him so close to me definitely had my heart fluttering.

Austin nodded. "It does look pretty cool. I have to say though, I'm hoping to see as many castles as possible."

That was a much better answer than bars or whatever that I would have expected from, say, Gavin, but it still surprised me. It shouldn't have. I mean, after all, he was on this trip, *and* he came with us instead of going with the rest of the group. Something had to pull him here, and as much as Amy insisted, I highly doubted it was because of me.

I blinked when I realized he was looking at me expectantly. "What? Sorry, I'm so spacey. I could fall asleep standing up."

"I was just asking you which castle is your favorite." He chuckled. "Good thing we're almost at the hotel. You need a nap. Which is too bad because I'd hoped to go swimming when we drop our stuff off, and I hoped we could all go together."

"No way. It's too cold still. It's barely June." I shivered just thinking about it. "But while I may be tired, I can't afford to go to sleep right now, or my jet lag will get even worse. I'm waiting to go to bed until tonight."

Austin frowned. "You sure? After everything that's happened today ... So do you and the others want to go swimming with Gavin and me?"

"Swim? No. But I'll go with to the beach with you guys if Amy and Kaitlyn are in."

"Sweet. That works too."

When we finally got to our bus stop, I almost ran everyone else over to get out of the bus. I wanted to try to get at least *some* sightseeing done before bedtime, and if that meant going to the beach with Austin, then I was willing to go.

I stepped off the bus and waited for the others. The streets were busy with tourist shops on every corner with all sorts of four-leaf clover and shamrock items. I'd definitely have to check those out so I could send some souvenirs home to my parents. The weather was cooler here than what we'd left in Tulsa, but it was still nice.

Amy climbed down from the bus, holding her phone. "Okay, I think we need to head to the left and then go down a few blocks. So that means . . ." She turned and pointed. "That way. Over that bridge."

I held in a squeal and followed the others, taking in the sights as we walked. That included a stop on one of the bridges to get a few pictures of the sights and a few selfies for our friends and family back home. Snatches of conversation floated past, and I drank it all in. I could have stayed there forever. Several other bridges lined the river, with buildings on each side. Tourists stood around, taking pictures, and I was more than happy to be one of them.

"Coming, Hannah?" Kaitlyn tugged on my coat. "It'll be here later. I promise."

"Oh, right." I sighed and left the bridge, dragging my suitcases behind me. We passed a couple of grocery stores and more tourist shops as we walked toward the apartments that ran along one side of the street.

I recognized the small hotel sign that sat in front of the apartments, and took the steps two at a time, almost falling back from the weight of my bags. I just hoped the hotel was as good as their reviews had said.

The main hall was loud with music, laughing, and singing as we walked past the small bar and found the reservation desk. The bright pinks and blues of the hall and reception area were accented with dark stained wood finishing.

“Hi, we’re checking in. It should be two rooms, both under Beaumont.” I pulled up the information on my phone to show the lady just in case.

She typed a few things into her computer. “Ah, yes. Here you are. Party of five, correct?”

“Yes, that’s right.” I read the paper she set in front of me, checking the prices and other parts of the contract before signing. It was a habit I’d picked up from Dad.

“All right, you’re going to go down that hall there, take the lift down one, walk along the hall to the left and then take a right. Your rooms are next to each other. Breakfast is served from six to ten each morning. If you need anything, including ideas for tours, you can ask me.” The woman beamed and handed me the keys.

I blinked, trying to remember all the directions she’d just given me. “Thank you. We have a couple of tours already scheduled, but I’ll let you know if we have any other questions.”

She nodded and turned to another customer.

I handed one of the keys to Austin. “Here you go. And I hope one of you paid attention to what she said, because I don’t want to get lost.”

“I wrote it down, but I might have missed a turn.” Amy held her phone up. “I guess we’ll find out.”

Kaitlyn shot me an uneasy look as we walked around the first corner. “Don’t you think it’s weird she’s having us go through all these hallways and floors? This place is small. There shouldn’t be that many turns.”

“They’re probably just adding on. Taking the apartments to the side of them or something.” Amy shifted her backpack on her shoulder. “But if we end up in a haunted part of the hotel, I’m going to beg for a different room.”

I laughed, trying to act like I wasn't thinking the exact same thing. "Like that could happen."

Our lift was slow to arrive and smelled a little musty inside. I stepped in and pushed the button to go down one floor.

The dark hallway that met us when the doors opened didn't do much to help me feel better. The wallpaper was flowered and pink, but it was old and there were a few sections that had come off, hanging down. Off to the left, it did look like they were doing some sort of construction.

"Maybe we should find another hotel." Kaitlyn bit her lip as she walked next to me. "It's not too late, right?"

"For today? Probably is, but we can look for something else for tomorrow if the creep factor doesn't go away." I opened the door to our room and stared at the small beds. They were barely twins, and there were only two. I poked my head into the guy's room. "Wanna trade? You have one more bed than we do."

Austin shrugged and grabbed his bags. "Sure."

"Thank you." I switched keys with him and took the bed farthest from the door. "Austin wants to go swimming. I told him I wouldn't swim, but that I'd go. You two want to come?"

Amy yawned and pulled her shoes off. "Yeah, I told Gavin we'd go, but I refuse to get in."

Kaitlyn dropped her swimsuit on the bed. "I was *going* to swim, but if you two aren't, I'll sit out with you."

"Good idea. It's gotta be freezing right now." I changed into running shoes and put my book and thin blanket into my backpack.

Amy and Kaitlyn stood at the door, waiting as I looked for my headphones. When Austin and Gavin joined them, I sighed.

“You guys go. I’ll catch up. I have one more place to look.” Not that I really wanted to walk the halls by myself, but I also didn’t like having people wait for me.

“You sure?” Amy waited for a moment.

“I’ll be fine. They’re here somewhere.”

Amy hesitated before heading down the hallway. I dropped everything in my bag onto the bed and sorted through things until I found the headphones tucked into the blanket. I kept everything but my wallet, book, and blanket on the bed and shoved the headphones in the pocket of my hoodie before leaving the room.

I stopped to make sure the door was locked and froze as the scent of berries rushed past me. Strange. It wasn’t the perfume Amy or Kaitlyn wore, and no one else was down here. I wiggled the doorknob and turned to catch up to my friends.

A woman stood just a few feet away, smiling at me. She didn’t say anything, just stared. She looked to be in her thirties, but her clothes weren’t from this time. She wore a fitted bodice and full skirts that brushed the ground.

“Hey, do you have a room down here too?” My voice shook, and I could feel the rage stirring. That’s the last thing I needed right then.

When she continued to stare, I backed up quickly, almost knocking over a table. I grabbed the vase that started to topple and put it back.

“So, uh, gotta go.” I turned and ran, hitting the elevator button repeatedly. Maybe letting everyone go ahead of me wasn’t the best idea. I jumped in as soon as the door opened and pushed the second-floor button repeatedly, my heart racing. I couldn’t bring myself to see if she was still there when the doors closed.

The elevator couldn't move fast enough, and I burst out of it as soon as the door opened, almost running into Kaitlyn.

She turned around to find me gasping for breath. "Uh, you okay? You look like you've seen a ghost."

I laughed, but it came as more of a wheeze and waved for them to start walking. The others were too busy talking about what we would do after swimming to notice anything, leaving me to catch my breath and try to calm my heart down before the rage realized something was going on.

"The receptionist lady had a brochure of buses, so we can look through here." Amy kept one for herself and handed the other to Austin.

"Okay, cool. I found a place where we—er, Gavin and I—can swim. We just have to hop a bus that should get here . . ." Austin paused while he looked through the book. "Ah. Here we are. Looks like we better get going because the bus will get here in a couple of minutes."

Gavin took the brochure from Austin as we left the hotel. "How do you know it's the right one?"

"Because I can read maps." Austin snatched it back from Gavin and turned left toward the bus station. He was dressed in a T-shirt and shorts, with his baseball cap on backwards. He had a towel over his shoulder, and a few of the locals gave him a confused look as we walked past.

We walked straight to the ticket counter and bought a ticket, then had to run straight for the bus. I was the first to get on and went to the middle of the bus. I kept looking over my shoulder in the bus, half-expecting the woman to show up again, but all I got was other tourists shooting me dirty looks for looking at them. I scooted down in my seat, put my headphones in, closed my eyes, and blasted my music. My hunger for seeing everything the night before was drowned out by what had just happened in the hotel.

“Hey. Earth to Hannah. We’re here.” Kaitlyn shook my shoulder, then had to keep walking so others could climb out.

It was a good thing we’d arrived when we did. The soothing Celtic music almost put me to sleep. I put my headphones in my bag and waited for my turn to climb off.

Kaitlyn waited for me outside the bus and leaned close when I got to her. “Hey, you doing okay? You’ve been a little off since the hotel. It’s not ... you know ...”

“No, thankfully it’s still quiet. I’m sure it was just my imagination playing tricks on me being alone downstairs.” I pulled the backpack up on my shoulder.

“Wait, *did* you see a ghost?” Her eyes widened.

I wanted to say no because of how scared she’d been earlier, but I had no other explanation. “I don’t know what I saw, but I just want to ignore it and enjoy the sun. And the light. And the water in front of us.”

“Fine. But I want details later.” Kaitlyn set her bag on the ground and laid out a towel to sit on. “There’s not much sun, but that doesn’t stop me from trying to tan.”

Amy handed her some sunscreen. “Just don’t fry. You don’t want to be as red as your hair when we go on our tour tomorrow.”

“Good point.” Kaitlyn took the sunscreen and poured some into her hand.

The beach was small, but it was pretty, sitting there in the middle of Dublin. The sand started by the road, and there were only a few other families there. No one else was in the water, but that didn’t stop Austin or Gavin from still wanting to go. The sounds of the city behind us seemed to fade as I stared out at the water. It was a nice place to relax and read for a bit. Maybe forget about the woman who wouldn’t leave my mind. There was something about her that seemed familiar, but I couldn’t put my finger on it.

I set my bag down and sat next to them, then pulled out my book. Amy and Kaitlyn could tan all they wanted, but I was going to stay wrapped in my hoodie and sweats. I just hoped I wouldn't be washing sand out of them for days.

Austin ran for the water and dove in with Gavin close behind. They came up yelping at the cold water, but kept swimming.. I shook my head and opened my book of mythology. Maybe I could find a story about the woman.

We'd been out there for a while when the wind changed. My head jerked up at the scent of berries. I cleared my throat but kept my eyes down, praying it was just a coincidence.

"Hey, uh, Amy? Kaitlyn?"

"Yeah?" Amy moved her hand from her eyes so she could see me.

I paused. "Do you smell berries?"

Kaitlyn sat up and sniffed. "Yeah, there are probably bushes around somewhere."

"Yeah, maybe." I tried to concentrate on my book, pretending like I didn't recognize the smell or that I was sure someone was watching me.

The smell only grew stronger.

Amy frowned. "Now I smell it. Maybe there's a smoothie cart or something. I could use one."

Kaitlyn turned and froze. "You—you guys see her, right?"

I grimaced and looked where Kaitlyn was pointing. It was the same woman, standing on a rock not too far from us. "How in the world? How'd she get here?"

Amy lifted an eyebrow. "You've seen her before?"

"Yeah, at the hotel . . . I'm glad I'm not the only one who can see her at least." My nerves didn't agree. This was the second time I'd seen her within the last couple of hours.

“So, you *did* actually see one.” Kaitlyn grinned. “This is so cool.”

“See one what?” Amy’s eyes widened. “You think she is a *ghost*? *Ugh*. I knew we should have switched hotels.”

Kaitlyn rolled her eyes. “Of course she’s a ghost. Look at her clothes. And her hair is blowing in the wind, but ours isn’t.”

“What are you three looking at?” Austin called as he walked up, clearly shivering. He grabbed his towel and dried off his hair.

“We thought we saw something. How was the water?” I shoved the fear down, hoping the rage would listen too. It seemed to stir, most likely because of my fear. The last thing we needed right then was for it to take over.

“It was so nice. Cold at first, but I’m definitely coming back later.” Austin put on his shirt and shoved the towel in his bag. His grin faded as he stared behind us. “Who is that? She’s going to fall.”

I shook my head. “I don’t know, but I saw her at the hotel and then just now.”

Austin picked up his bag. “That’s our signal to leave. Oi, Gavin! Let’s go!”

Gavin pulled himself out of the water and toweled off while the rest of us stared out at the sea so we wouldn’t have to look at the woman. Maybe Amy was right about changing hotels.

Except . . . we weren’t at the hotel now, and the ghost was still here.

“Hey, can we drop our stuff off? I don’t want to carry it all over Dublin.” Gavin’s hair stuck out everywhere as he shoved his towel.

Kaitlyn reached up to try to tame it and finally gave up.

I didn't really want to take our bags either, but it was starting to get late, and I didn't want to go back to the hotel. Especially if the ghost followed us again. "Let's just go. They're not heavy, and we won't be out super late anyway."

Everyone agreed quickly, and Gavin raised his eyebrows. "You guys are acting weird. Fine, let's go find some food and then maybe hit a pub or two."

I turned and breathed a sigh of relief when I noticed the woman was gone. We walked to the bus stop and waited for a few minutes for the next one to show. Amy and Kaitlyn held back with Gavin, making sure that I got on right after Austin. I was too distracted by a ghost I'd already seen twice to care about their matchmaking. Of course, that could have been because he smelled of ocean, and his hair fell into his eyes just right . . .

"I'm impressed you haven't fallen asleep yet." Austin grinned as he shoved his towel into his backpack.

"Me too, actually." I patted my backpack. "Thankfully, I had a book and headphones to keep me awake."

Austin chuckled. "Most people would say books put them to sleep faster. Not that I would, just other people."

"Yeah, my friends used to mock me in high school." I shrugged. "But hey, I'm here doing an internship, and they're back working in fast food or at the local movie theater."

"I have to say, I prefer being here instead." He nodded toward my bag. "So, what are you reading, anyway?"

I pulled my tattered copy of Irish myths out and handed it to him. "Figured I'd get ahead before everyone else shows up. Plus, I've been taking notes on which myths I want to find books

on when we go to Trinity College tomorrow. Yeah, I could go just to drool over the books, but I really want to check a few out.” I paused. “I’m sounding like a total nerd right now, aren’t I?”

Austin laughed. “Maybe to some people, but I think it’s pretty cool. The history of Ireland is fascinating, and I must admit that while I said I’m excited for the castles, I’m almost as excited to go see the library tomorrow as you are.”

“Seriously?” I mean, the library was going to be amazing. So many books, so little time to see them all. It’s just that I didn’t know many guys who liked to read. Ephraim, being the jerk that he was, used to love to yank the book out of my hands when I’d choose reading over watching TV.

“Seriously.” Austin stood as the bus stopped and held out a hand for me as we walked out of the bus. “I’m starving. How about you?”

I forced my mind away from the fact that I could still feel his hand in mine. “Considering I haven’t eaten since the plane, yeah, I’m starving too.”

The pub was dimly lit and loud as we walked inside. We were seen to a table and the boys positioned themselves so they could watch the TV where a Gaelic football game played. We ordered drinks, and then studied the menu. Everything looked amazing, but I decided on the lamb stew when we ordered.

“So, what are the plans for after dinner?” Kaitlyn asked. “Are we heading back to the hotel?”

“I’d like to tour the city, but I’m not sure anything is still open now.” Amy rested her chin on her elbow. “Although, bed sounds kinda nice too.”

Austin pulled himself away from the game. “I’m up for a tour tonight if we can find one. I want to stay up longer.”

I was torn between the two. I really needed to sleep soon, but I also wanted to see more of Dublin. Our food came, saving me from having to decide. The stew was rich in flavor, and I realized just how hungry I was. Everyone else must have been as well because our table went silent as we ate.

On our way out of the pub, we stopped by the small shelf of brochures to look for ideas on possible tours.

“Looks like everything is closed for the night.” I held up one about Kilkenny and a few other places I’d been wanting to see. “How about we just plan for something tomorrow instead?”

“What about this one?” Austin picked up a ghost tour brochure. “It’s not the library or the leprechaun museum, but it could be fun.”

I hesitated. I’d already had enough of ghosts today, but this would give me a chance to get into buildings that I wouldn’t otherwise. “Let’s do it.”

Austin grinned. “Awesome. I’ll call. You guys in?”

Gavin shook his head. “I’m heading back to the hotel. I can’t keep my eyes open any longer. Plus, I really want to wash this saltwater off me.”

“Good point.” Austin checked the brochure again. “Looks like we have time to walk back to the hotel if you want. The bus station isn’t too far from there and we can walk with the others. Maybe we can see a few of the sites along the way.”

I glanced over at Amy and Kaitlyn who gave me a thumbs up. “Okay, that works. I want to drop off my bag anyway.”

Austin grinned. “Awesome. I’ll book our tickets while we walk.”

We left the pub and kept close together to stay warm and wandered back toward the hotel. We were able to get a few good pictures of cathedrals and the outside of Trinity College, which was great, but it made me want to go inside even more.

I stopped on the bridge again as we headed back to the bed and breakfast. The green of the lights was mesmerizing, and the breeze was cool against my face as I breathed it in.

“There you are, Hannah. We were talking about the statue up ahead and the next thing we knew, you were missing.” Austin leaned against the ledge next to me and nudged my shoulder.

“Oh, sorry. I just can’t get enough of this spot. It just feels so peaceful. But then, sitting here won’t get us to the ghost tour.” I pushed off the railing and turned. “What were you saying about the statue?”

Austin shrugged. “Not much. We were just trying to figure out who he is.”

“Ok, let’s go see this statue.” I shoved my hands in my pockets as we left the bridge. We met the others in front of the statue.

“Pretty sure he’s the guy this street is named after.” I nodded toward the sign below the sign. “O’Connell. Daniel, I think. He was heavily involved in politics.”

“Wow. We just figured it was a guy the city was named after or something.” Austin stared up at the statue. “How’d you know all that?”

I raised an eyebrow. “What did you think I learned about in my major? It wasn’t all about leprechauns, clurichauns, and banshees, you know.”

“Wait, what’s a clurichaun?”

“It doesn’t matter. I mean, it does. But that’s not all I learned about.” I sighed. I’d probably have to explain that for the rest of my life.

Austin raised an eyebrow. “I get that. I still want to know what a clurichaun is. It doesn’t show up in any of the stories I’ve read.”

I looked up at him, wondering if he was serious. “They’re like leprechauns, but their lore is a little different. You can usually find them in your wine cellar protecting your wine—at least according to some legends.”

Gavin grinned. “I’ll have to get me one of those while we’re there then.”

Kaitlyn rolled her eyes. “Why? Do you think you’re going to have a bunch of wine here? I don’t think Professor Stone is going to like that.”

“Not for here. I figured I’d just take it back with me.” Gavin stopped at the steps of our hotel so Kaitlyn could go first.

“Sure. Good luck with that.” Kaitlyn hid a smile as she went up the stairs.

I went next, hoping that I wouldn’t see anything out of the ordinary if I wasn’t the last one to our room. The boys argued over whether Gavin would find a clurichaun while we walked through the reception area. A few of the other guests glanced over as we walked past, then went back to their conversations.

Our hallway was nice, quiet, and ghostless as we went to our rooms. I grabbed an extra jacket and made sure I had the portable charger for my phone. I turned to ask the others if they were ready, but they’d already changed into their pajamas.

“You’re not coming?”

Amy yawned and shook her head. “I’m dead tired and coming back to see my bed all ready for me to snuggle was enough to make me want to stay here.”

Kaitlyn didn’t bother to open her eyes. “We’ll see you in the morning.”

There was a knock at the door, which meant Austin was probably ready to go. I bit my lip, trying to decide if I should stay or go.

Amy sat up. "Don't even think about it. Austin already bought the tickets and you've been dying to see the city."

"But what if...?" I didn't finish the sentence.

"You said it's calmed down since you got here, right?"

I paused, waiting for any signs, but the rage seemed to be sleeping. "Yeah, but what if something sets it off while I'm gone?"

Kaitlyn rolled over to look at me. "It won't. You'll be with Austin, and he'll keep you safe. Now, go, and please turn off the light when you go."

"Fine. See you when I get back." I opened the door to find Austin leaning against the doorframe. "Sorry, I was trying to get these two sleepyheads to come, their beds won."

"Yeah, Gavin didn't make it to the shower before falling asleep." Austin laughed and straightened. "We need to get going if we're going to make the bus."

I pulled my jacket tighter as we went up the elevator. "Do you think we'll actually see ghosts and stuff?"

Austin shrugged. "We already have, right? So maybe we'll find more."

"True."

The bus stop was just a few blocks from our hotel, so we got there with a few minutes to spare. We gave our receipt to the driver, then stepped through a curtain into the back of the bus. What I *wasn't* expecting was that we had to walk through a creepy hallway filled with dolls and mirrors. Normally, I was fine with stuff like this, but the butterflies from the *thought* of seeing ghosts seemed to be awakening the rage. Not now. I was doing so well.

Austin caught the look on my face and took my hand as we walked through and climbed up to the next floor. The bus was crowded with tourists laughing over some joke the guide had told them. Austin waited for me to take a seat before sliding in next to me. He pulled out the brochure and looked through it.

“There’s only three stops, but it should still be pretty cool.”

“Not bad.” I gripped the seat with both hands, trying to stay calm. Amy and I had been on ghost tours before, so I knew what to expect. I just had to convince the rage that it was fine too.

Austin leaned closer. “Are you okay?”

I nodded, then paused and shook my head.

“Are you going to do the same thing you did on the plane earlier?” His voice wasn’t accusing or angry. It was more worried.

“I hope not.” I breathed deeply, doing my best to listen to the tour guide as he told stories of death and betrayal.

Our first stop was in front of the Dublin castle, and I waited for everyone else to leave before I stood.

“Are you going to be okay? We can leave if you want too.”

“I’m okay for now. The cold seems to be helping.” Mostly. I was still doing my best to keep the rage down, but that meant that I couldn’t concentrate as well on walking.

Austin put an arm around me, and oddly enough, that seemed to help. I was able to relax, and in turn, the rage seemed to take notice. It was there on the edge, ready to pounce, but the urgency was gone.

“Thank you,” I whispered as we walked into the castle.

“Of course.” Austin moved behind me as we went downstairs but kept a hand on my shoulder.

It was the same through each of the stops. As long as he was close, I was fine. If we got separated for whatever reason, I’d get nervous, and the rage would start up again. And the more I thought about it, the more I realized that it really only happened when he wasn’t near me. Sure, he’d seen me in the airplane, but they’d been a few seats away.

That was something I was going to have to think about.

As we climbed off the bus at the end of the tour, Austin took my hand, then dropped it. “Sorry, I’m just used to doing that when we leave the bus.”

“It’s okay. And thanks for that, by the way. It helped.” I smiled up at him.

He was silent for a moment as we walked toward the hotel. “Can I ask you what’s going on? Why you . . . did what you did on the plane?”

I’d really hoped this would wait a bit, but after what he’d done for me . . . “If I’m being honest, I don’t really know. It’s just this . . . rage . . . thing that comes out when my emotions get away from me. And when it does, I have no control over anything. I become this rage monster, as Amy calls it.”

“Dang.” Austin looked over at me. “Have you always had this . . . rage thing?”

“Nope. It’s just been since my last birthday. Some people become wizards, I become a monster.” I pulled my phone out of my pocket and found the image of the news clip about the mall. “Remember this from a few days ago?”

Austin’s eyes widened. “That was you?”

I nodded. “Not my best day. It was by far the worst one. Usually, it’s just minor explosions in my room or a classroom or two. This . . . this was enough to make the news.”

“That’s crazy.” He stopped and held up his hands. “Not you. You’re not crazy. I meant whatever is happening. Do you know what’s going on?”

“No, but it’s been pretty calm all day. Ireland has been good for me. I guess I just got spooked enough tonight that it decided to try to have fun.”

Austin opened the door to the hotel. “Not sleeping for almost twenty-four hours probably doesn’t help. Hopefully you can get some good sleep tonight and it’ll get better.”

“I sure hope so.”

The lobby was quiet as we walked through, making the hotel seem even more eerie. I was tempted to grab onto Austin’s hand again, but I didn’t want to push it. Plus, the rage was now a simmering sleepy thing. I really was tired.

Austin put a hand on my shoulder as we stopped at our rooms. “Thanks for a fun night. Hopefully we can do more of these while we’re here.”

“We’ll have to check and see if there are more. Thanks again for your help. I’m going to go sleep for the next ten years or so.”

I walked in my room and smiled as Amy snorted in her sleep. I closed the door quietly and tiptoed over to my bed, using my phone as a flashlight. I dropped onto my bed to pull off my shoes, and exhaustion hit me in waves.

The waves of the sea crashed against the rocks as I stared out at the sunset. It had been too long since I’d been able to rest long enough to enjoy it, and I wasn’t going to let anything take this quiet away from me.

I pulled the heavy armor off my shoulders and dropped it to the ground, then took off the rest. I ran for the waves, diving in, the salt stinging my wounds from the battle earlier in the day. I couldn't go out far, as the barrier kept us in, but it didn't matter. I needed this.

The moon was up when I finally turned toward the shore and climbed out, dropping to the sand next to my armor. Today had been a victory of a war that been going on for as long as I could remember.

"Hannah!"

I froze at the voice. She wasn't supposed to be here. I grabbed my sword and jumped up, moving into a fighting stance. There was no one there.

Strange.

"Hannah!"

I jerked awake, gasping for air, and sat up, trying to find the woman. Amy and Kaitlyn were still asleep, and the sky was still dark outside. I drew in several deep breaths, trying to calm myself down before the rage took over. Except that it seemed quite happy and content to stay asleep.

If it was going to leave me alone, I was going to take advantage of it. I rolled over and stared up at the ceiling, wondering who it was that called my name in the dream. Whoever it was had been bad news.

Chapter Four

Our private tour was supposed to start bright and early that morning, and I was more than excited to go. We'd spent the whole last day sleeping and trying to get used to the time zone here, so it was time to get out and do some exploring.

Amy came out of the bathroom brushing her teeth and leaned against the wall. "I think we should have more days like yesterday. That was awesome."

Kaitlyn groaned. "I think I'm more tired than I was before. I hate it when I sleep too much."

"I'm just glad I slept. I had some messed up dreams." I added sunscreen to my bag just in case and cinched it shut. "We better get going, though. The bus is going to leave us."

"Yeah, yeah. I'm going already." Amy grabbed her bag and walked past, taking the apple from my hand. "Thanks for breakfast."

Kaitlyn took a granola bar I'd thrown on her bed. "When did you have time to actually get food?"

"I woke up two hours ago and didn't want to hear you two snore anymore so I went to get food." I grabbed my donut off the table and followed the other two out.

"Hey, why'd you get the donut?" Kaitlyn asked, her mouth full of granola.

I shrugged. "I was the one who went shopping. Next time it's your turn."

Kaitlyn tossed her wrapper in the garbage and pushed the button to the elevator. "If I have to choose between sleep and a donut, I'll take sleep."

"Fair enough."

Austin and Gavin showed up just as the elevator doors opened. Austin's hair was wet and combed back while Gavin had just shoved a baseball cap on.

"Next time let's plan a tour that starts after noon, okay?" Gavin yawned and leaned against the elevator.

"What's with him?" Amy asked.

"While we rested, he decided to go pub-hopping and got in around four this morning." Austin shook his head.

I frowned. "So, you're the reason I woke up this morning. I could have sworn I'd heard some banging out in the hallway."

Gavin opened one eye. "Sorry about that. The lamp table jumped out at me."

"Sure, it did." I snickered and turned as the elevator doors opened.

The smells of the Irish breakfast tempted us as we walked past. If we didn't have five minutes to get to our bus, I would have stopped quick to grab a plate of food.

We left the hotel and headed toward the train station. I was glad we'd picked the hotel we did because it made it a lot easier to go on tours. The dark clouds above threatened to dump on us at any moment, so I picked up the pace, hoping the others would follow.

Austin pointed toward a small ATM not too far from the bus station. "Hey, I want to get some cash just in case we find some souvenirs. I'll catch up in a sec."

He had a point.

"I need some too, so I'll stay with him if you guys want to go find our tour. Get us some good seats." I checked my pockets for my wallet and found it in my hoodie.

Amy, Kaitlyn, and Gavin disappeared around the corner, but not before Amy shot me a triumphant grin. Yeah, sure, I stayed with Austin to get cash. It wasn't because it was *him*, I just needed cash.

Austin pushed his card into the ATM, and I looked away while he put in his PIN. He took his cash and moved out of the way so I could get mine. As I typed the numbers, I froze. The sound of weeping came from behind me, and it was definitely not from Austin.

"Um, Hannah?" Austin's voice was quiet.

"Yeah?" I punched in the amount I wanted, trying to stay calm. The last thing I needed was to have the rage showing up when I was on a bus again.

He coughed. "She's back."

I grabbed the cash and my card, then whipped around. Her smile was welcoming, but there was a darkness to her eyes that we hadn't seen before. "Shall we run?"

"Yes, we probably should."

We turned and ran for the bus station, only stopping when we caught up to the other three. Amy turned from the bus and looked between us.

"You okay? You both look pale." Kaitlyn handed us our tickets.

"Fine. Everything's great." I'd tell her about it later, but for now, I wanted pretend like everything was fine.

Kaitlyn raised an eyebrow. "Sure. You two are up front so you don't get carsick. We're in the next row. If that works for you two."

I climbed in first and took a seat, glad to see there were seatbelts. The van looked ancient, and the driver somehow seemed even older. Both gave off a weird vibe, but it could have just been from me still being paranoid after seeing the ghost lady again. She seemed to be following

us, and I didn't like that one bit. By the way Austin sat stiffly next to me, it seemed he felt the same way.

The moment Amy climbed in and found a seat, the driver slammed his foot on the gas, and we took off. Austin had to grab tight to his seatbelt that wasn't quite on, and I held onto the armrest.

The driver didn't seem to pay attention to any of the traffic laws. He'd whip around cars to get through stoplights, pass when there was very little room, and honk if anyone got in his way. I did my best to stay calm, really not wanting the rage to show its face right then. It was already going to be hard enough to survive this trip without adding the rage monster into the mix.

I pulled my headphones out of my bag and turned on some music, sliding back and forth in my chair with each turn.

Austin leaned forward in his chair. "Could you slow down, please? As much as we'd like to get to the first part of our tour, we'd prefer to actually get there alive." Austin grumbled when the man sped up again. "Seriously, dude. Slow down."

The man turned and glared at Austin but said nothing. He tapped the brake, then continued to speed along the highway. Green fields and farmhouses flew by as I listened to my music, trying not to get carsick. The trip that should have taken an hour and half took about forty-five minutes.

We peeled into the parking lot of a pub, and he opened the doors. Everyone stumbled out of the van, and Amy looked rather green. She should have been the one to sit up front it seemed. I turned to talk to the driver about being more careful on the way back, but he cut me off.

"I must pick up another group. I'll be back in four hours to pick you up." The man slammed the door shut and gunned the engine before taking off.

“So much for a tour.” Kaitlyn glared at the van and turned to the group. “Everyone alive?”

Austin held onto Amy’s arm as she held her stomach. “I’m not so sure she’s okay.”

Amy held up a hand. “I’ll be fine. I just need a minute. Let’s start walking and see if that helps.”

I turned to find Gavin losing his breakfast in a bush nearby. Maybe we needed to find a different way back to the hotel . . . He finally stood and wiped his mouth.

“That was the worst road trip I’ve ever been on. Maybe I’ll just stay here tonight.” Gavin staggered over to us. “Come on. I need to find something to calm my stomach.”

“If I’m right, the castle is just up here a ways.” I looked up at Austin, excitement building. “Do you realize we’re walking on streets that have been around since before our country even existed?”

Austin raised an eyebrow. “They had blacktop and stripes on the road?”

I blinked. “Okay maybe not *this* road, but the side streets.”

“I knew what you meant.” He laughed and grinned as they walked past all the small shops painted in bright colors that lined the streets.

Kilkenny was the most adorable little town I’d ever been in. It was a lot different than where we were from, and I wasn’t sure I ever wanted to leave. We walked over a bridge that went over a small stream. Many parts of the town still had cobbled streets, and signs here and there were in both English and Gaelic. I took as many pictures as the group would let me before moving on to the next block.

I turned the corner and stopped, gasping at the sight of the large castle just up ahead. It was so much cooler than what I’d seen online or in books.

“Whoa.” Amy’s mouth dropped open as she looked up at the castle.

“I told you it’s awesome.” I grinned and took a picture of the castle. “Come on, let’s get everyone in a photo.”

Austin and Gavin stood in back with Amy and Kaitlyn right in front of them. I took a quick picture of them, then turned so I could get a selfie of me with the castle. Everyone crowded around my phone to see if we liked the picture, or if we should get another.

Amy gasped and took the phone from me. “No way.”

“What?” I peeked over her shoulder to see what she’d zoomed into, then jumped back and looked up at the window of the castle. “How did she get here?”

The woman from the night before stared out the window, her mournful eyes seeming to stare into my soul.

“No.” Kaitlyn shook her head. “No. There’s no way. How can she be here and be in Dublin?”

“I don’t know. I’m beginning to think all the ghost stories I’ve heard are wrong about a spirit being tethered to one spot. That, or there’s more to this ghost than we think.” I put my phone in my purse. “Come on, let’s go check out the castle. I want to see if we can find her.”

Gavin raised his eyebrows. “Shouldn’t we be trying to get *away* from the ghost that won’t leave us alone?”

I shrugged. “Maybe. But I do know that I’m not going to let her keep me out of this castle. I’ve been waiting too long to see it. You guys can go somewhere else if you want.”

“We’re not splitting up now. Safety in numbers and all that. Besides, there will be tons of other people in the castle. She won’t do anything in there.” Kaitlyn started toward the castle, and I jogged to catch up.

“Thank you for saying something. I was worried we’d scatter all over because of some ... whatever she is.” I looked back to find Austin, Gavin, and Amy right behind us.

Kaitlyn looked up at the window again, but the ghost seemed to have disappeared. “Do you think she could be a banshee or something?”

My eyebrows shot up. “A banshee?”

“Yeah, like . . . maybe she’s supposed to be following just one of us, but we all see her. That wouldn’t mean one of us would die, right?”

“Depends on the lore.” I glanced over at her. “Not that I believe they actually exist—even if I think it would be cool if they did. I just know they follow one family and wail when someone dies. She’s not wailing, and we’re not Irish. None of us should have one hanging around, right?”

She shrugged. “Maybe we get assigned one when we get here or something.”

I frowned. I hadn’t thought of that before. Still, that didn’t seem right. She didn’t act like a banshee. Of course, she didn’t act like a ghost, either.

The reception room was adorned with rich wood furnishings and red carpets. An older woman stood at the desk and looked up when we walked up to her.

“How can I help you?”

“We need five tickets for the next tour, please.” I pulled out my wallet, but she held up a hand.

“No payment today.” She pointed at a sign. “The next tour will start in just a moment. If you stand just outside those doors to our right, you’ll be let in soon.”

I smiled and took the tickets from her. “Thank you.”

While we waited for our turn, I got pictures of the fields at the back of the castle. While I loved a lot of the other castles, this one was my favorite because of the stories that came with it. Another group came out of the castle, so I picked up my backpack and met Austin by the door.

“Where are the others?” I pulled out my ticket.

“Up ahead. Amy wanted to flirt with the guide, and Kaitlyn was hoping to find a gift shop or something.” Austin nodded toward my camera. “Get any good pictures?”

I grinned and handed it to him. “I can’t wait to get these printed. I want one of them on my wall. Or . . . maybe all of them.”

Austin stopped on one. “Wow, that’s a cool panorama. Could you please send me a copy of that one?”

“Of course. Want the one with you-know-what in there too?” I grinned mischievously.

“No, I’ve seen her in real life enough times, I think I’m good forever. I swear she looks at me like she wants to eat me or something.” He shuddered.

The tour finally started, and I had to chuckle at how close Amy stuck to the guide. Kaitlyn and Gavin wandered away from her and looked at other parts of the room, and I stayed back with Austin. He was acting strange, nervous almost. After we made it through the third room, I finally put a hand on his arm. He jumped and crashed up against a pedestal that held an old vase.

I dove for it and managed to snag it before it crashed to the floor. “Hey, are you okay?”

Austin leaned against a wall for a moment before shaking his head. “No. I’m not. I swear that woman is close by, even though I can’t see her. I keep expecting to run into her at any moment.”

I frowned. “You sure she’s still here?”

“No. Yes. Maybe. I just know something feels off.” He shuddered. “Let’s talk about something else. Like, about that vase I almost broke. Tell me about that one.”

“Uh . . . It’s a vase. From a castle in Ireland. And it’s blue and white. And it came from . . . a time.” I laughed. “Sorry, I might know a lot about a lot of things, but I don’t know about stuff like that. What about you? You’re the one who said you’re excited to see all the castles.”

He grinned, seeming to finally relax. “I thought you’d never ask. You see, this comes from the Duchess of . . . Ireland . . . and she gave it to the Duke of . . . Kilkenny . . . for helping her find her missing cat.”

I raised an eyebrow. “I see. And did this duchess have a name?”

“No, she was nameless. Or, at least, that’s what she told everyone.” He leaned closer. “What she didn’t want anyone to know was that her name was Brunhilda.”

“Wow. Why didn’t she want anyone to know that awesome name?”

Austin put a finger to his lips. “Because she was hiding from the evil King Frankincense of Germany. Now, if you’ll follow me, we should probably catch up to the rest of the group.”

I blinked and looked around. We were the only two left in the room. He grabbed my hand, and we hurried through the hallway down to the next room where the tour guide was telling stories of the tapestries on the wall. I’d been waiting for this part. These paintings were older than my country. Even after all the giggling from Austin’s “lessons” in the last room, I had to stop in awe and let the history wash over me.

I looked over at Austin and blushed when I caught him staring. “What?”

“Nothing. I just . . . you have this look when staring up at the paintings that looks almost homesick.”

“What do you mean?”

He shook his head. “I don’t know. It’s hard to explain. Maybe homesick isn’t the word. Maybe more longing? Never mind. Maybe I’m just imagining things.”

The truth was, I don’t think he was that far off. I don’t know if it was *me* or if it was the rage monster but being in this castle just felt *right*. I shuddered and followed the rest of the group to the next room.

Austin stepped up next to me as I stared out one of the stained-glass windows. “I didn’t freak you out or something, did I?”

“No, not at all. Truth is, those tapestries were the part of the castle I was most excited for, and they were even cooler in person. Maybe it was just that excitement you saw.”

“Maybe.”

I cringed, knowing I’d made things awkward again. “So, tell me, sir, what do you know about this room?”

Austin shot me a grateful look and rubbed his chin. “I do believe this is where the battle of the teacup took place.”

A few other tourists looked over, so Austin scooted closer to the wall. He gestured to the cups on the table nearby. “As you can see, there are only three. The fourth, sadly, fell in the battle. Shattered into small enough pieces that, like Humpty Dumpty, it could not be put together again.”

My snort earned a glare from several tourists, the tour guide, and Amy. I did my best to keep a straight face, but the offended look from Austin just made me double over in laughter.

I stepped out of the room, and tried drawing in deep breaths to stop laughing, but every time I thought of the look on his face, it started up again. By the time I composed myself, the group had moved onto the tearoom, and I had to stand in the back.

Kaitlyn and Gavin stood by Austin, talking in whispers. They quieted as soon as I walked up.

“What’s going on?” I whispered.

“We’re just trying to figure out what’s gotten into you.” Kaitlyn pulled me away from the boys. When we were out of earshot, she stared me in the eyes. “I haven’t seen you like this in months. Are you all right?”

I nodded. “I’m good. I promise. Austin was just giving his version of what each room was, and I couldn’t stop laughing.”

Kaitlyn stared at me for a moment longer before giving me a hug. “It’s so good to see *you* again. Happy, carefree, monsterless . . .”

“I know. It’s weird, right?” I looked around to make sure no one was paying attention. “I don’t think that thing is gone. I think it’s just happy I’m *here*. I don’t know how to explain it, but I’ll take it.”

“And, uh, Austin? He has nothing to do with this?” She wiggled her eyebrows.

I shrugged. “Maybe? I just know I’m seeing a side of him I haven’t seen before, and I have to admit, I like it.”

She squealed and threw her arms around me again, almost knocking me over. “I *knew* it.”

“Can we just not tell Amy about this right now?”

Kaitlyn rolled her eyes. “I think she’s too into Sir Tour Guide to notice anything else. Speaking of which, I think they’re like two rooms ahead of us. We’d better go.”

We joined Gavin and Austin in the hallway overlooking the ground floor. Austin shot me a curious look, so I smiled up at him. I wasn't exactly going to tell him that we were talking about him. As the rest of the group moved on, Austin stayed back with me.

"I was afraid you were no longer enjoying my tour."

"Are you kidding? It was awesome." I ignored Kaitlyn as she winked at me from behind Austin. "What can you tell me about this room? I kinda missed the explanation from the other guy."

Austin pointed at the banister. "This is where the young children would have contests to see who could spit on the most heads during a ball. Sir Edmond of Kilkennyshire won with twenty-four."

I nodded. "That makes sense. And it also makes me think maybe that's what I felt as I walked up the stairs earlier."

"Wait, what?" He followed me into the last room on the tour.

It was a ballroom on the second floor, covered in paintings, furniture, and memorabilia. This was the room I wanted to see almost as much as the tapestry room. The ceiling looked like the inside of a giant ship, and the room was long and skinny. I could almost see people dancing and mingling here centuries ago.

Austin was quiet and tense next to me. I tried to get him to speak a couple of times, but he was too busy watching everything around us to pay attention to what I was saying. When he jerked and whipped around, I finally put a hand on his shoulder.

"Hey, what's going on? You seem totally freaked out about something."

"It's nothing. I mean, it's something, but I don't *see* anything." He looked up in the rafters. "She's here somewhere. I've felt her."

I frowned. That was the second time he'd felt or seen her when I hadn't. Maybe the ghost had decided she wanted him instead. "Let's take off then. But first, I want to get a closer look at the armor."

"Okay." Austin stayed close to me, and even though he tried to pretend nothing was going on, I could tell he was still super tense.

"Ready?" I made Austin jump again. "Sorry. Let's go before you climb the walls or something."

"Yes, please." He shook his head. "I don't know what's gotten into me today."

I just laughed. "We've seen a ghost in several places. Anyone would be freaked out by now."

"You're not."

"I am. This just seems different for you, though. To me, she just smiles and seems friendly. But she has you spooked, and I want to know why."

He frowned. "Are you saying I'm a wimp?"

"Nope. I'm just saying there's got to be a reason she feels threatening to you."

He opened the door for me. "I don't think I want to know."

The grounds were wet with rain, but they stopped to get a few more pictures before heading on. We stopped to take pictures of the grounds really quick.

Austin pulled his coat tighter against the rain. "I'm starving. Where should we eat?"

Amy pulled out a map of the area before quickly putting it away so it wouldn't get wet. "I got this from Liam. There's this pub right over here that's been around since the 1200s. It's called . . . Kyteler's Inn. The woman was accused of witchcraft. I kinda want to go see it."

Kaitlyn and I exchanged glances. Amy was on a first name basis with the tour guide now?

“Hey, if there’s food, I’m game.” Austin found the raincoat in his bag, and the rest of us did the same.

Ireland wasn’t kidding around when it came to rain.

We walked to the small pub. It was off the main road, which meant the streets were cobbled. Old buildings sat on either side of it, making it easier to find. The atmosphere was light, and they had sports playing on the TVs up in the corner. Austin’s stomach growled as they were getting seated, and the waiter chuckled.

“Sounds like you got here just in time.” He took their order and went back to the kitchen.

I laid out the map Amy got from her guy friend and pulled out a pen. “Mind if I mark it up?”

“Have at it.” She pointed to an old cathedral. “Liam said we should for sure go here, but not until after two. He could take us on a tour there once he gets off work at the castle.”

I marked that along with several other places I’d been dying to see. Kaitlyn scrolled through her phone, while Gavin cheered on a cricket game on the pub’s TV.

Amy leaned back in her chair. “So, we saw the castle and now this place. What else do you want to do before the guy picks us up? *If* he picks us up.”

Austin shrugged. “I liked the old stuff like the tapestries. We should find out if there are more places like that.”

I tapped the map sitting on the table. “This whole city is filled with history. These are just a few we can check out. I mean, that is if we all want to go see them.”

“Sounds great.” Austin picked it up and glanced through it. “Why don’t we walk through everywhere and then we decide?”

“Perfect. I just hope the food gets here soon. I’ve been dying to have more lamb stew.”

Getting out there to explore of the city was exciting, but I was going to enjoy the warm, dry pub while I could. I wanted to go learn more about Dame Anne Kyteler, the owner of this place who had supposedly been accused of witchcraft.

Chapter Five

After lunch and a history lesson on Anne Kyteler, we made our way through Kilkenny. We passed several Abbeys and through a shopping center where we looked for souvenirs. I checked my watch. We only had a little while longer until the guy came back with the van.

“Where to next?” I pulled Amy and Kaitlyn away from some leather bags.

Austin pointed up the street. “Look, I think that church Amy wanted to see is just up there.”

Amy brightened and shoved her wallet into her bag. “Let’s go!”

I chuckled and followed her up the hill. Nothing got Amy moving faster than knowing there was a cute guy waiting for her. The walk was beautiful on the way up to St. Canice’s Cathedral. A tabby cat sat on a stone wall as we entered the grounds, and I was pretty sure it was glaring at us.

The headstones that dotted the property were covered in moss, and if there had been writing, it was long faded. A tall tower sat in front, and I would have loved to climb up if I could. There had to be some pretty awesome stuff in there.

Amy opened the door to the church, and we walked in. While she searched the crowds for Liam, we walked over to the front desk. A woman stood nearby with a group of people, talking to them about a picture on the wall.

“Can I help you?” An older man stood next to a desk just inside the door. “Are you here for a self-tour?”

I glanced at the brochure in his hand before nodding. “That would be great, thank you.”

He took the money from me and the others while I stared down at a miniature version of the area. “Each of the numbers on the paper match the description below. If you have any questions, just ask one of us and we’d be happy to help.”

“Thank you.” I smiled at him and walked to the first spot on the map.

Amy brushed past me, finally finding Liam, and the others wandered off. Even Austin seemed off in his own world, reading his brochure as he looked at the different items. I couldn’t help smiling. This was what we were here for, after all.

I pulled out my phone to take notes on it, writing down as many names and dates as I could to look up later. When I got to the tomb of Piers Butler and his wife, I stopped, unable to move. Something had triggered the thing inside me, and it wanted out. Not in the angry “I’m-going-destroy-this-place” way, but more like what had happened in the airplane. Or in my dream last night.

It wanted me to stand at attention, but I wasn’t about to do that in a church full of people. I closed my eyes instead, allowing the story to rush over me.

Everyone was dressed in battle gear, ready to fight those who had tried to take their land. My mace felt heavy in my hands, and I was anxious to use it. Murmurs ran through the army, as the other army approached. They were unlike anything I’d fought before, but I was going to make sure they went back to where they came from.

“Hannah? Hey. You okay?” Austin’s voice broke through my vision, pulling me back to the present. “You haven’t moved for two minutes—whoa, your eyes.”

I blinked several times, hoping they’d go back to normal. “I’m fine. Sorry. I just . . . I didn’t yell anything, right?”

“No, you didn’t. Just the eyes.” He looked closer. “They’re fine now. The same beautiful green I’m used to seeing.”

Heat rose in my face. “Thanks. Hey, do you know about these two?”

Austin leaned closer and read the description. “No, why?”

“Because I think they have something to do with . . . you know.” I cleared my throat. “I guess I have something else to research while we’re here.”

“Sounds good. I want to hear what you saw. For now, we need to take off. Kaitlyn said the dude with the van is back and we have a ways to go.”

My eyes widened. I’d been out of it for longer than I’d thought. I took a picture of the brochure so I could look up the rest of church that I’d missed and turned to leave—then stopped dead in my tracks. The woman stood just outside the church staring in at them, her eyes were red, her eyebrows in a sharp ‘v,’ and . . . were those fangs in her mouth? I shuddered. The friendly woman I’d seen the first day was clearly angry she couldn’t get in.

“Uh, Austin? Can we not go outside yet?” I grabbed Austin’s sleeve.

“Wha—oh.” He stepped back closer to me. “We can’t just stay here, or we’ll get left.”

I gestured toward the lady, panic rising in my throat. “Well, do you want to go out and meet *that*?”

Austin looked around and found an old poker for the fireplace. “They don’t like iron. We’ll just sprint and hit her with this if she gets too close.”

“I don’t think I like that plan. She already looks like she’s going to rip us to shreds.” Kaitlyn stood next to me, shivering. “Besides, I’m pretty sure that’s just a myth.”

“Maybe, but we have to try something.” I looked closer at the woman, and it seemed like my suspicions from before were right. I stepped away from Austin, but the woman continued to

stare at the same spot. “Kaitlyn, look. She’s not paying attention to you or me. She’s staring straight at Austin.”

“I don’t care *where* she’s looking, I don’t want to go out there.” Kaitlyn bit her lip.

“Austin, walk toward her. Kaitlyn, you go that way. Follow Amy and Gavin.” My heart thumped with fear. No one else in the chapel seemed to pay any attention to the ghost staring through the door. In fact, a few of the tourists walked right through her.

Austin shot me an uncertain look before he did what I said. The woman’s expression calmed and almost became hungry as she watched him closely. He lifted the poker and pointed it at her. The woman hissed and bared her teeth, but her eyes seemed to show more fear than anger. And there was something familiar about her now. We’d seen her several times in the two days, true, but it was more than that. This woman was bad news, I could tell that.

Austin took a step forward, and the woman’s expression changed from scared to hungry. I jumped up and down, but her eyes didn’t leave Austin. I studied the area around us and noticed a crucifix next to the window. No wonder . . . ghosts and other spirits couldn’t set foot on hallowed ground.

“Wait. I don’t think she wants to hurt you.” I met him at the door and took the poker from him. “We’re in a church. Whatever she is, I don’t think she can get in here, and she doesn’t like it one bit.”

“What do you mean?” Kaitlyn looked over at me. The woman backed off but kept watching Austin.

“I don’t know how I know it. I just do.” I walked toward the entrance. “Come on. I think we’ll be fine. As long as we don’t make any sudden moves.”

Kaitlyn frowned, but she followed me out of the church. The woman disappeared, but I was pretty sure she hadn't gone far. As we jogged down the streets of Kilkenny, I was sure I saw something out of the corner of my eye, but there was never anything there when I looked.

The van sat at the same spot where we'd been dropped off, and the driver didn't seem too thrilled that he'd had to wait for us. But because he'd ditched us there instead of taking us on the tour, he couldn't really complain.

We climbed into the van and buckled. The man got in and slammed his door, glared at us, and started the engine. Within seconds, we were on the road, and Kilkenny grew smaller in the distance.

I looked back at Amy, who was flipping through her photos. "Hey, it'll be fine. You'll be able to see him again. We'll be here for a while, remember?"

"Yeah, but he's kinda stuck at work in Kilkenny for the next little bit." Amy sighed. "Maybe I can just go stay there for a couple of days. That wouldn't be so bad, right?"

"Maybe. Except you already paid for your hotel in Dublin." Kaitlyn nudged her. "Although, I think I'd probably try to stick around Kilkenny for a guy like that too."

Gavin waved. "Hello? I'm *right* here."

Kaitlyn patted his knee. "Yes you are. But I stand by what I said."

I laughed and turned back to the front of the van. Austin was busy looking up some names on his phone, so I leaned my head against the window. The vision had left me exhausted, and I needed to find out more about any battles those people had gone through. Maybe it could help me figure out why I was dreaming about it. Then there was the ghost. Was she part of this whole rage thing, or was she just an added bonus?

There was an obvious attraction between the ghost and Austin. Her actions outside the church were obvious. We just needed to figure out what it was before something bad happened. Austin was about as American as a person could get, and as far as I knew, there was no Irish blood in him. It could be that he looked like someone the ghost knew from her life however long ago.

“Earth to Hannah.” Austin’s voice made me jump. “Kaitlyn asked you where we’re going, like, three different times.”

I shook my head, trying to clear it. “Sorry, we’re going to Glendalough next.”

Kaitlyn frowned. “Isn’t Glendalough on the way back to Kilkenny?”

“Yeah, why?”

“Because we seem to be going west instead of east.” She held out her phone. “I don’t think he’s taking us to Glendalough.”

Goosebumps rose on my arms as I leaned forward. “Excuse me, where are we going? We’re supposed to be heading north.”

The man just glared at me in the mirror and kept going. “Look at your ticket again. You have the Kilkenny to the Cliffs of Moher tour.”

I looked back at my friends who clearly didn’t believe him any more than I did. “You sure? We bought the one to Glendalough.”

“Uh, Hannah?” Amy tapped my back. “He’s right. I don’t know how, but he’s right.”

I turned back to the man and caught his smirk. “Okay, fine. But can you at least slow down?”

The man took his foot off the gas for a moment and then put it back down. “We have places to be. We can’t be late.”

Amy handed me the ticket and leaned up closer to my seat. “Hannah, I *know* we bought the other tour. I even double checked the tickets before we got in the van. What is going on?”

I shook my head. “I have no idea. Just be on alert when we get wherever it is he’s taking us.”

The man stopped at a parking lot and pulled in, leaving the rest of us to wonder where we were. We were definitely not by any cliffs. I pulled the location up on my phone and smiled over at Austin.

“Hey, you get to see another castle today. It’s your lucky day.” I zoomed in. “Looks like it’s called Bunratty Castle.”

“I’ve heard of that one.”

The man rapped on the window. “Everyone out. We must get going or we won’t get to cliffs until after sunset.”

“Touchy. Sheesh.” Gavin climbed out first and we followed.

Austin held back as the others joined the man by a trail. “Hey, I don’t trust this guy, like, at all. Even if he *is* taking us to a castle.”

“I don’t either.”

We joined the others and the driver immediately started down the path. His explanations were monotone, obviously memorized straight from a guidebook. Even the castle wasn’t as exciting as we’d hoped because he was too busy talking about how it was built than the history behind it. I was going to have to come back here later. Maybe Austin could give his own rendition of the tour again to make it more exciting.

“And here we have the—hey, where are you two going? And where is the rest of your group?” The man glared at Kaitlyn and Gavin who had tried to slip away. “I didn’t come out here to take you on a tour just to have you act so rudely.”

Gavin glanced down at Kaitlyn, then grinned sheepishly. “We just wanted to find something to drink.”

“There’ll be plenty of time for that later. Now, come. We have one more place to visit.” He turned and limped off toward a trail near the woods.

I frowned and looked through the pamphlet. We should have been done already. I looked up at Austin, but he just shrugged.

“Do we follow him?” I whispered.

“If that means we can get something to eat after, I’m game.” Gavin pushed past me and followed the man down the trail, pulling Kaitlyn along with him.

Amy leaned in. “Your rage monster hasn’t steered us wrong yet. Are you feeling anything?”

I closed my eyes and concentrated, but something seemed off. It was . . . muffled or something. “I don’t like this. Something is wrong.”

“So, what do we do?” Austin looked toward the path where the others had disappeared.

“We can’t leave the others with that guy. Let’s go. Everyone, watch for anything out of the ordinary. And if I . . . lose it, let me go. Maybe I can figure out what he’s up to or where he’s taking us.”

Amy shook her head. “I don’t like that idea.”

“What other choice do we have? We’re out in the middle of nowhere and this rage is clearly meant to be used for something.”

“She’s right. I don’t like it, but she’s right.” Austin sighed and turned to me. “Let’s go.”

I took his outstretched hand and started up the path. While the rage was muffled, it seemed to be fully aware of where we were. Hopefully it would help us if we were in trouble. Maybe, just maybe I could finally figure out why this rage monster had come for me.

Chapter Six

“Where do you think we’re going?” I asked between gasps. We’d been walking for what felt like hours and were no closer to . . . anywhere. The signal on my phone had disappeared a few miles back.

“I was hoping our map would be able to tell us. My knowledge of Ireland focused mostly on the castles and battles and stuff. Not as much on the landscape.” Austin didn’t seem quite as tired as I was, but then he ran a few miles every day while I usually stayed inside studying.

I stopped and looked at him. “Wait, what battles have you studied?”

He shrugged. “Any of them that dealt with taking over land, so most of them. Why?”

“My dream back at the church. We were ready to fight to get our land back. That’s why I was asking if you knew that couple.”

Austin glanced over at me. “We’d have to look it up when we get back to the hotel. That may have been a section I missed last semester.”

I grimaced. Of course it was. I kept walking, too tired to say anything else. It was Gavin who started complaining first, then Kaitlyn. By the time the man finally stopped, even my patience—and leg strength—was at an end.

The man’s grin was hungry as he studied each one of us. “Stay quiet as we enter this sacred place. What once was the most revered monastery of this land now lies in ruin. But here, you’ll get to see it in all its glory.”

I tensed as he pulled back several branches of an old tree. The rage monster was here full force, telling me to run. I backed up several feet. “Guys—”

That was all I could get out before the rage took over and I headed back down the path. Shouts from my friends came from behind, and I prayed they'd managed to escape the guy. My legs screamed as I kept going, branches and twigs ripping in them as I went past.

It wasn't until I came to a clearing that I finally stopped. I dropped to the ground gasping for air. The rage wasn't gone, but it wasn't in control anymore. It had gotten me away from whatever danger was back there, but I wish I'd been able to take my friends at least.

Shouts came from ahead, and I jumped up, energy surging through my body. They were in danger. But how did they . . .? I looked around the clearing, but the only thing that seemed to stand out was a wall of bushes that ran along the other side. A maze? Maybe.

Another cry from up ahead. I had no choice. I had to go in there.

After a quick glance behind me, I took off at a jog. I had no idea how I was still able to run after that hike, but something told me that at once, long ago, this was my stomping ground. I took a step inside the maze, and time seemed to stand still, or go backwards, or . . . something. I checked my phone, but the time told me nothing. The date, on the other hand, made things come into perspective.

In this place, it was Midsummer's Night, the time where the walls between our world and the fairy world were thin. Sure, this was from fairy tales I'd been reading my whole life, but here I was in a maze after dealing with a ghost and a pent-up rage monster. Having the fairy world so close just seemed to make sense.

Each turn seemed to only confuse me more. I stopped, trying to get a sense of which direction I was facing, but the ground seemed to laugh. I turned around to go back and try another way, but a wall stood in front of me. What the . . .? I tried the way in front of me, but after two turns, I'd managed to get back to where I was. This was messed up. I stopped and

rubbed my forehead, listening for my friends so I could figure out which way to go. After two more wrong turns and a wall that shot up right in front of my face, I finally growled in frustration and closed my eyes.

“Okay, fine. You win. Take me through the maze.”

If the rage had been a real person, it would have smirked at me. Instead, I felt a shiver through my legs and arms, then up my spine. Power, strength, and just a little fear surged through me. This was odd, but it also felt . . . right. I stalked through the maze taking one turn and then another. While I walked, I tried to keep track of turns so I could get out of this place once I had my friends back.

Austin’s strangled cry several feet to the left of me stopped me in my tracks. I had to get to him, but even with the rage helping me, I wasn’t going to get there fast enough. I pushed my way through one of the hedges, then another one and another one.

As soon as I stepped through the next hedge, it was like I’d hit a wall of sludge. I couldn’t move and everything around me seemed hazy and out of focus.

Two wraithlike creatures shrieked and floated down in front of me, sending a spike of terror through me. They spoke in unison, their voices hollow. “That is not how the maze works. Follow the path or you will be punished.”

I pointed toward where I’d heard Austin last. “Is that what he did? Is that why he’s being punished?”

“Pay no attention to that which is not your concern. Stay on the path.” Their voices faded as they began to float away.

“Not my concern? Austin is my friend.”

“Stay on the path.” The last word floated away on the wind.

As soon as the sludgy feeling went away, I growled in anger and plowed through the next two walls. I had to get to Austin, and those two wraith things weren't going to stop me.

I slid to a halt and watched in horror as I finally came to where Austin lay on the ground.. The woman—the ghost that had followed us for the last two days—was dragging Austin along the path by his wrists. Large red welts marked both arms where her hands held tightly to him. His shorts were in tatters from being dragged along the ground. His legs looked like my arms did at that point—probably worse.

“Let go of him!” I shouted and darted forward, moving faster than I expected. I don't know if it was the rage or the adrenaline, but either way, I'd take it.

The woman stopped and hissed at me.

“You can't just grab him like this. You're hurting him.” I jumped forward and grabbed his ankles, but that only made him yell louder.

“No, Hannah . . . Let me go . . . You need . . . to find . . . Amy.” The words came out in gasps. “Trapped . . . in . . . pit.”

Amy.

“Where's the pit?” I asked, desperate to get any answers as the woman pulled Austin away.

“Left . . . right . . . left . . . left—” Austin's words were cut off as they went around a corner.

I stared after him for a moment, torn between helping him and going after Amy. He could help himself. If Amy was down in a pit, she could be injured. With one last look toward the direction Austin had disappeared, I ran for Amy.

I repeated the directions in my head, careful to follow them exactly. Hopefully those directions could get me close enough that I'd be able to hear Amy if she called. Except that Austin had only told me four different turns, and I clearly wasn't anywhere near the pit.

"Amy? Can you hear me?" The echoes faded into nothing. I paced back and forth, trying to decide what to do next. Walking through the walls wouldn't work. I'd have the wraiths come after me again. The old man who'd brought us here was probably long gone. Trust him to feed us to a crazy ghost. If only there was some pattern or something, but the walls had already proven they could do whatever they wanted.

I suddenly stopped. I'd gone one left, one right, then two lefts. What if I was supposed to do it more than once? Most likely not, but it was worth the try. I took the next left and then a right, praying that there was another left ahead. Once I got to the next turn, I called again with no answer. Nothing. I tried the same pattern another two times, calling out to Amy each time.

At the last turn, I had to grab onto a branch as my feet slipped out from under me. The pit was there, all right, and I'd almost fallen in. I scrambled until I found something solid to stand and pulled myself out. I leaned over, resting my hands on my knees, gasping for air. No amount of strength or rage would help me if I fell into a bottomless pit to my death.

The hole was deep and wide, but it seemed to thin out on the far side. "Amy? Can you hear me?"

It was a moment before I heard something back. A shout. I moved along the edge, squinting into the darkness to find anything other than black. Why couldn't my rage give me magical powers or something? Like the ability to make fire. Oh, wait. I pulled out my phone and prayed it still worked in here. There was no signal, but the flashlight light worked. Even the light

disappeared before it reached the ground. Fearing the worst, I continued forward, praying she was okay.

“Amy?” I called again. The echoing from below changed, but I still couldn’t see anything.

“Here! I’m here.” Amy’s voice was louder and closer than I’d expected.

I searched for something to throw down to help Amy, but there was nothing. I had no way to cut down any of the hedges, and only rocks and small branches littered the ground. “Is there any way to climb up?”

“No, but it doesn’t matter. You need to come down here.”

Being able to hear her but not see her was driving me crazy. This maze had played tricks on me already, and I wasn’t about to trust it now.

“I don’t think that’s a good idea. Look, I’ll go find some vines or something to get you back up here.” I stood to go back where I’d broken through the hedge. Maybe there were better branches there.

“No, I’m serious. Come down here. There’s a way out. Come on!” Amy’s voice *sounded* like her.

I still hesitated. Jumping into a pit in a scary maze in a place that seemed outside of reality was exactly what one shouldn’t do, and I still needed to find Austin. Still, if there was a way out down there . . . “Hey, Amy. What was your favorite play during freshman year again?”

“What?”

I smiled to myself, picturing the look of disgust on Amy’s face, but I still had to hear the answer.

“What was your favorite play from freshman year?” I stood and brushed myself off. Either I would need to run, or I’d have to get down into the pit, and lying there wasn’t going to help me do either.

Amy made a gagging sound. “I hate drama, remember? You couldn’t get me to go with you.”

Right answer. I grinned to myself as I looked for a slope I could slide down. “Any idea how I get down there?”

“Look to your . . .” There was a short pause. I could almost see her putting her hands out to figure out which way was left. “It’s to the right. The land starts going up so you shouldn’t fall as far.”

Gee, that made me feel a lot better. I walked farther away from where I’d first found the pit and found that Amy was right. I could actually see rocks and roots protruding from the side of the pit. I kept walking until I could see the ground below before I turned and lowered myself down the side. My feet could slide down a steep slope, so I wouldn’t free fall, but that didn’t make me feel any better. I found a ledge that was wide enough for me to turn so my back would be against the wall, then crouched down and allowed myself to slide the rest of the way. My shoes filled with dirt, and the small rocks bit into my back and arms, but I finally reached the bottom. The smell of mildew and decay was pungent down here, but it was oddly satisfying after the nothingness from up above.

Amy threw her arms around me and almost knocked me over. “I thought I was going to be stuck down here by myself forever. But look, I think this path leads somewhere.”

“Hold on. Let me get my bearings.” I leaned against the wall of the pit, trying to figure out what we should do next. “When Austin told me you’d fallen down here, I pictured you with a broken leg and a gaping wound or something.”

Amy laughed. “Your imagination is way too active. I was actually worried that would happen too, but thankfully, I was able to catch myself on the way down. It was that dang ghost. She pushed me out of the way so she could grab Austin—wait, you’ve seen him?”

I grimaced and nodded. “I did. It was awful. That ghost lady is dragging him through the maze. I tried to grab him, but he told me to come and find you.”

Amy rolled her eyes. “Always the gentleman. You should have saved him.”

“I wanted to, but he was insistent that I find you. I’m just hoping we can find him before it’s too late.”

Amy pointed forward. “We go that way. There’s an opening there, and I think it might get us out of here.”

“Or it could lead to another pit.” I sighed and followed Amy. Anything was better than just sitting here.

We followed the path for a while, careful to leave markings so we know how far to go on the way back. There were a few places where the path was narrow enough only one of us could fit, but most of the time I couldn’t see the other side. It amazed me how deceiving the pit had been from above.

“Where do you think the others are? I haven’t heard anything from Gavin or Kaitlyn.” Amy slid through a gap and waited for me.

“I don’t know. I just knew I had to get out of there. The rage monster wouldn’t let me go through whatever the guy wanted us to see.” I held my breath as I squeezed through the gap. Not that it would help at all.

Amy stared at me for a moment. “What do you mean it wouldn’t let you?”

I looked down at my hands, feeling its strength course through me. “I don’t know. It’s weird. But Amy, that’s not all. It’s kind of *part* of me now.”

“What do you mean?” Amy moved closer to me. “You don’t look any different. Well, you’re covered in dirt and have branches in your hair, but other than that, you’re the same ol’ Hannah I’ve known for years.”

“No, there’s more to me now, but it’s hard to explain, and I’m not sure there’s a way to show you.” I moved past her and stopped suddenly. “Hey, I think we found the end.”

Amy turned, her eyes widening. “Whoa.”

The cave opened into a room where ruins of old stone buildings were laid out in front of us. A broken staircase led out of the pit, some of it hanging down as if the steps had been split down the middle.

I moved forward and climbed through the last gap to find myself in a place I remembered as if it were yesterday. This was my home. It was old and pretty much just rubble now, but I’d been in this old castle, run through its halls many times. Amy had been right. Austin was close. I could feel it.

“Come. We go this way.”

“Wha—hey, wait up.” Amy grabbed me by the arm and pulled me around to face her. “Don’t go all weird on me with no explanation. How do you know where we are? And why are you talking like that?”

“Like what?” I frowned.

“All . . . Irish.” Amy moved closer until her face was inches from mine. “You *are* different. Your eyes. They’re not black like before, but they’re also not green. They’re this cool hazel color.”

“Hazel? Dang, I miss the green.” Well, Austin did. I always wanted them to be blue like my mom’s.

Amy gasped and jumped back. “Your—they—your eyes just changed. How’d you do that?”

“They did?” I paused, and other memories of eagles, ravens, wolves, came to mind. I could shapeshift. At least I could a long time ago. “Did they happen to go from hazel to green to blue?”

“Yes. How’d you know?”

I blinked again, thinking of red eyes. “How about now?”

Amy clapped her hand over her mouth and stepped back for a moment. She slowly lowered her hand. “Dude. That is—freaky. And awesome. And how did you do that?”

“I think it’s part of the rage thing. Part of who I used to be.”

“Who you used to be? What are you talking about?” Her eyebrows raised. “Are you trying to tell me you were some kind of wizard once upon a time?”

I shook my head. “Not wizard. I’m not sure what—or who I was yet. I’m still trying to figure that out. I think . . . I think I was a warrior of some kind.”

“That would explain the rage, for sure.” Amy pulled out her phone. “Shoot. No service. Internet won’t help us. Do you think this place has something to do with it?”

“I do. I think this is—was my home. But seriously, though, we’ve wasted too much time talking. Austin could be de—could be in trouble, and I won’t forgive myself for that.” I rubbed my forehead as I walked toward the steps. “When was the last time you saw Kaitlyn or Gavin?”

“We got separated. The old guy was too interested in where you went to grab them when they took off. He shoved Austin and me into the little chapel thing and then went after you.”

I breathed a sigh of relief. “So, they’re okay?”

Amy shrugged. “As okay as you can be when you’re stuck in the middle of nowhere in Ireland. They have their phones, though, so they should be able to get back to our hotel.”

“What I don’t get is how you guys got ahead of me in the maze. I went one way, you went another, and then suddenly I can hear Austin yelling.”

“You saw a maze? I saw this sprawling Victorian home and was just about to enter when the dream was shattered, and the ghost got all grabby. Austin said he saw a giant castle. It was some illusion thing he sent us through to confuse us.”

I shook my head. “Mine was definitely not an illusion. Maybe that’s where he wanted us to go, and I just found my own way.”

“Maybe.” Amy took the last two steps. “Where do you think we are?”

I climbed up behind her and stopped in awe. Green fields covered the landscape in front of her. Sheep dotted the fields and up on the hill was a castle that stood several stories high. It didn’t look like anyone had inhabited it for years, which would make sense if this was where the woman had taken Austin.

“I don’t know. Let’s get up higher.” I climbed up the hill, avoiding the large stones and knots of grass. Sheep scattered, clearly not used to seeing humans.

Amy huffed behind me, her breaths coming in gasps. I stopped at a stone wall so Amy could rest.

“When did you get so in shape? If I’m remembering right, you’re the one preferred a book to exercise.” Amy took the water out her of her bag and took several gulps.

“Kinda came with the rest of this I think. You stay here. I’m going to see if I can figure out where we are.”

Amy lifted a hand to acknowledge what I said while she took another drink. The castle ruins were quiet—too quiet. I was used to hearing sounds from the servants, cooks, and other warriors calling out to each other.

I shook my head. No, that wasn’t me now. That was long ago. I made my way around the castle and stopped in shock. There were no rolling hills or fields, or tourists or anything else. There was nothing but ocean.

We were on an island surrounded by mist. In the distance, I could see land, and somehow I knew we weren’t in Ireland anymore. At least not how we knew it. I jogged back to Amy, my stomach twisted in knots.

“Did you figure out where we are?” Amy took a bite of her granola bar.

“No. I mean, kind of. We’re on an island.” I ran my fingers through my mess of hair, trying to sort out what I had seen. I slid down the wall and sat next to her, grabbing a water from her bag.

Amy snorted. “That’s funny. I could have sworn you just said we were on an island.”

I grumbled. “I wish I hadn’t left my bag on the bus. I need my book.”

“I know you love to read and all, but this is not the time or the place for it.” Amy stood and paced in front of me.

“Not for enjoyment. I swear I read something about an enchanted island. Kinda like Brigadoon in Scotland, but not quite that.” I tapped my fingers on my leg. “It makes sense, right? We all see different things like we were in a dream, and then *poof!* We’re here.”

Amy shook her head. “That doesn’t make sense. Brigadoon only comes every few years. And besides, you’d think we would know if we crossed an ocean to get here.”

“Do you know what today is?” I stood and stretched.

“I don’t know. Wednesday?” Amy packed her things back in her bag and found a small alcove to set it in. “Think this place has an armory?”

I nodded toward an old rundown shed to the left of the castle. “It’s out there. There was one in the basement, but it had to be moved when the blacksmith caught some hay on fire.”

Amy blinked. “I’m not going to ask how you know this.”

“I don’t know. But listen. I meant the date, not the day of the week. It’s June twenty-third.”

“Yeah? So?” Amy froze. “Wait. That’s—”

I nodded. “Midsummer’s Eve, when the fairy world and the human world are connected.”

Amy sighed. “Of course it is. Remind me, why’d I let you talk me into coming to Ireland in the summer again?”

“Because the other option would have been Samhain when things are worse.” I grinned and took the door I’d suggested.

“So, what do we do once we get a weapon? I don’t exactly know how to use a sword.” Amy stalked toward the armory.

I opened the door and waited for her to walk past. “I’m not sure we want to go in the front door with guns blazing. Well, swords swinging. We need to scope everything out first.”

“Yeah, I kinda figured that. But how are we supposed to know where we’re going?” Amy stopped talking and stared at the room filled with old swords, bows, shields, and old armor.

“Whoa.”

“Find something you’re comfortable with. That’s the most important thing about a weapon.”

Amy walked past all the big stuff and found herself a smaller knife. “There, I’m good. I’d be more than likely to hurt myself instead of hurting someone else.”

“Fair enough. At least wear this, though.” I tossed her some chain mail that almost knocked her over. “I know it’s heavy, but at least you won’t get stabbed—as easily.”

“Thanks for the confidence.”

I found myself a belt where I could add a sword on one side and a smaller knife on the other. I found chainmail for me, then added the belt and weapons. I shifted things around until it felt just right and then turned to leave.

Amy stared at me. “You look so . . . medieval.”

“Uh, thanks?”

“No, I mean that in the coolest way possible. Just don’t hit me with that thing, okay?” She pointed at the sword.

I grinned. “Got it. Ready?”

“No.”

Chapter Seven

Amy and I stood at the front of the castle, weapons ready, but not entirely sure we wanted to open the doors. There were too many unknowns on the other side.

“On the count of three?” I gulped. Sure, I was some warrior, but I could still be scared.

“Sure.”

We pushed the heavy wooden doors open and peeked through. The front hall was silent and full of dust, but there was no doubt Austin had been through here. Something or someone had been dragged in and down the left hallway.

I gripped the hilt of my sword, wanting to go after whoever did this. Except that something didn’t feel right. My warrior senses were tingling—or whatever it was they did.

“Wait.” I held onto Amy’s arm. “I think it’s a trap.”

“Why?” Amy stepped behind me. “What kind of trap?”

“I don’t know.” I shook my head and studied the markings on the floor. “Look, something was clearly dragged through here, but it doesn’t look like a body. It looks like someone did this to throw us off.”

Amy frowned. “Where do we go then?”

“Hold on.” I closed my eyes and slowly turned, hoping for some kind of intuition to settle in. There. I pointed. “This way.”

“Um, Hannah? There’s a wall there.” Amy pointed at the tapestry in front of them.

I shrugged. “Hey, just going with my gut here. We need to go that way. And quickly. Whatever she’s going to do, it’s going to be soon.”

Amy pulled the tapestry away from the wall, revealing a door. She shook her head but didn't say anything as I pushed on the door. It wouldn't budge. Amy let go of the tapestry and helped until the wooden door finally moved. A long dark passage met us, and Amy took a step back, letting out a small whimper.

"Please don't make me go in there."

"I don't think we have a choice." I grabbed a torch off the wall and stepped into the passage first with Amy holding tightly to my arm. The path took a turn, and I stopped to peek around the corner. "They went this way. Look."

This time the trail was more apparent. Small streaks of blood had dried on the stone floor, and my heart lurched in my chest. If anything happened to Austin, I'd never forgive myself.

The trail went down another hallway and ended in a large cold chamber. The door we walked through appeared to be one the servants had used because we were now in what had to be the throne room. The walls still stood, and old tapestries hung on each of the walls, untainted by age. Sun streamed in through the windows, the only light in the room.

Austin sat in one of the thrones, his head hanging to one side as if he was asleep. The ghost of the woman sat in the other, a proud expression on her face. This woman must have been a queen at one time. But what did she want with Austin? I pulled my blade out of its sheath and stepped forward, forgetting that Amy was holding on so tight. She tripped, knocking a table over that contained glassware that shattered on the floor.

The woman stood, her dress flowing out from her, and her hair turning a fiery red. Her eyes matched color of her hair as she turned to face us. She was no longer the ghostly figured we'd seen before. She was here in the flesh, and she was not happy.

“Sorry. We didn’t mean to disturb you. We just want our friend back.” Amy gestured toward Austin. “This is your home?”

The woman ignored us and thumped the floor. “Let them in. And dispose of these two before they ruin the ritual.”

Moments later, the doors burst open, and an army of many different creatures flowed through. Banshees, fairies, even small leprechauns, came armed and ready to fight for their queen. They gave off the slightest green glow, their eyes red with anger. My heart thumped in my chest. Clearly I had to be dreaming. These creatures didn’t exist. But then, neither did ghosts or warriors that somehow came back centuries later, and yet here we were.

“Um, Hannah?” Amy scooted closer.

“Yeah?” My words came out as a hoarse whisper.

“What’s going on?” The terror on Amy’s face matched how I felt.

I shook my head. “I don’t know. Some kind of ritual that she doesn’t want us to be around for.”

“How do you know that?” She looked over at me, confused.

She couldn’t hear the woman? It was clear as day . . . unless it was just the warrior in me that heard it . . .

The woman stamped her staff twice and the army stopped, making a path down the middle. Amy and I exchanged glances but said nothing as the doors opened again. I pinched myself to wake up from whatever nightmare I was in. Clearly I’d hit my head somewhere along the way and I was still on the plane to Ireland. But the pinching hurt. I pinched again with the same reaction.

The man from the tour company walked through the doors, and I was rather relieved to see that he was alone instead of with Gavin or Kaitlyn. Instead of the drab clothing that he wore earlier in the day, he was dressed in an old-fashioned tunic and leggings, and a large cap with a feather sticking out of it. He bowed low to the ground, then turned to us. I'd wanted to laugh at the hilarity of his outfit, but his eyes seemed to burn into my soul.

"You have been advised by Queen Maeve to leave this place immediately. If you do not, we will be forced to do away with you ourselves."

I blinked. It was as if every book I'd ever studied in school and on my own had come alive and now stood right in front of me, but even more terrifying than I could have possibly imagined. These creatures were stories. All of them. And Queen Maeve? There was just no way this could be possible.

And yet here we were in a castle, after having followed some creepy maze into a deep pit that took us to a magical island. All of that was crazy enough. But to see Austin on the throne, blood streaked across his face . . . I drew myself up, trying to look braver than I felt.

"Give Austin back to us, and we'll be happy to get out of here." Amy took a step forward, but the nearest guards moved between her and the queen. Considering most of them were only about four feet tall, it was still easy enough for us to see Maeve. "Please. I beg of you to let us go."

The man chuckled. "Austin is no longer your concern. Her Majesty has chosen her new suitor and will be wed at midnight."

The crowd cheered, and I shouted out a "No!" that pierced through the noise. All went completely silent.

Amy grabbed my arm. "What are you doing? What's going on?"

“No. You can’t have him. His—his heart belongs to another.” I allowed the tears to run down my cheeks. Memories of Austin ran through my mind. The first time we met, the times he’d taken me out for ice cream because of a bad date, the way he looked at me with those beautiful blue eyes, the way he’d joked during our tour of the castle earlier. My voice cracked with emotion as I straightened and spoke again. “He belongs to me.”

“Whoa. What?” Amy’s mouth dropped open. “They aren’t going to sacrifice him or something, are they?”

“No,” I whispered. I had to make her hear what was going on before she did or said something the queen didn’t like. I put a hand on her shoulder, and pushed whatever magic actually existed in me into her.

“Silence.” The queen’s voice was terrible, a grating scream that shook the castle. “You will not have him. He is to be mine.”

Amy stood there, stunned. “What the—?”

“Sorry, but you had to know what was going on.” My hand glowed white. I jerked away from her, hiding it behind my back. I didn’t know I could do that. Maybe I *was* a wizard.

“Everything was quiet, but then you said something . . . what happened? Did everything just get loud for you too?”

“You can hear her because I let you.” I did my best to talk without moving my lips because the queen was staring right at us.

Amy shook her head. “What are you talking about?”

I grimaced. “When you didn’t react to the queen talking earlier, I figured out that I could hear her, but you couldn’t. I thought maybe I could *make* you hear, and I guess it worked. I’m just not sure how long it will work.”

“That doesn’t explain what’s going on.” Amy blinked and stepped back. “But you know, don’t you? You can tell what’s going on?”

“Yes. And it’s time for you to go.” I whispered. “Will you tell my parents I love them and that I didn’t want any of this to happen?”

“Wait, what?” Amy grabbed my hand as I walked past her, ready to take my place. “Where are you going?”

I turned and smiled, fighting back tears. “It’s okay. I promise. When I tell you to go, you need to run as fast as you can. Got it?”

Queen Maeve’s voiced was like fingers on a chalkboard. “Why are you still here? I told you to leave. I will not have a mortal ruin my wedding day.”

Amy cowered, covering her ears. “Hannah, come *on*. We need to get out of here now.”

“You do. I need to take care of this.” I gave Amy a quick hug. “I’ll be out as soon as I can, I promise. Go out the way you came in. Now that I’m in here, all the dream stuff you had before should be gone. Find the others and get out of here.”

“No, I want to fight.” But it was clear Amy wanted to go.

I took her by the shoulders and pushed her toward the door. “Go. Run.”

Amy hesitated a moment longer before disappearing through the servant hall. I took a deep breath, pushed away the fear, and faced Queen Maeve, holding tight to my sword. Now that Amy was gone, I could be the warrior I was born to be. After I got Austin out of the way.

“You can’t have Austin. He is mortal. He can’t be what you want him to be.” I paced in front of the queen, waiting for my moment to strike.

“He may be mortal, but he is no different than you.” Maeve stepped toward Austin and touched his arm, making him jerk away in pain. “Awake, my king.”

No different . . .? No way. Maeve had to be wrong. Austin didn't have the same weird . . . rage thing I had. He was normal. Right?

Austin woke up and scrambled away from Maeve. "What's going on?"

"Don't let her kiss you, Austin." I stepped around the dais where Maeve and Austin stood, hoping to keep the queen distracted from what I was doing.

"Silence! You interfered before. I will not have you do it again." Maeve shot a beam of green energy toward me, but I jumped out of the way.

Austin rocked his chair, almost falling over. "Leave her alone. You said you wanted me, remember?"

"Austin—" I stopped when I saw the look on his face. He was trying to give me time to do what I needed to do.

While Maeve went off on how irritating mortals were, I reached over and touched the head of one of the leprechauns. He glanced up at me in surprise before bowing. I put a finger to my lips, then gestured toward the others, hoping he'd figured out what I needed. The leprechaun nodded, then turned and muttered to the leprechaun next to him. This continued throughout the group, and soon the others were bowing as well.

Maeve paused in her attempts to kiss Austin and glared toward me. "What is this sorcery?"

I smiled. "I believe you already know. We've met once before, remember."

"No." Maeve glared for a moment, then her eyes widened. "You were killed. I made sure of that myself."

I shrugged. "Yeah, well, I'm here now."

Austin stared at me and Maeve with his mouth open. "What's going on?"

“Nothing we haven’t done before. Only last time it was a bull you were trying to get at if I remember correctly.” I began circling around Maeve, gaining more confidence with every step.

Maeve turned to face me, her eyes red with anger. “Trust you to ruin my wedding day. You couldn’t let me have what I wanted then, but I will take what’s mine now.”

I laughed and shook my head. “This was never meant to be your day. Leave Austin alone. You know your quarrel is with me.”

“There is no quarrel. You should be dead.”

“And you should not have brought the kingdom this close to the mortal world. The faerie council will not be pleased.” I raised my hands above my head. “I suppose you need a reminder of what I can do.”

I slammed my hands, and a force of wind blew outward. The tour guide and all Maeve’s followers flew back, landing in heaps on the ground. Maeve held her hands over her ears, screaming, blood dripping through her fingers.

I strode forward. “You may have defeated me the last time, but it’s only because I was already weak from fighting off all the armies to get to Cú Chulainn. That won’t happen again.”

The faerie queen straightened, wiping blood from her cheek, and began to laugh. “Parlor tricks. Is that all you’re capable of now? And here I thought you would be difficult.”

I turned toward the first leprechaun I freed and nodded. He bowed, followed by all the other creatures the queen had cursed. They stood, and pulled out weapons, turning their glares on Queen Maeve. “It’s not just me this time, Maeve. Your followers have tired of your cruel ways. It’s time for a new queen.”

Maeve laughed, taking in the army. “You traitors. Do you not know who this woman is? She slayed your beloved Cú Chulainn, simply because she could. And you would go after me instead? I *saved* you from her.”

“You enslaved them.” I stepped forward, anger building. “And you and I both know it was not I who killed Cú Chulainn. I was trying to save him from you. He paid his price when he slew his son, and I was there to protect him.”

“Are you trying to tell me you still loved him? After everything he did to you? He betrayed you just like he betrayed Aoife and his own son.” Queen Maeve threw her head back and laughed.

Glass shattered throughout the throne room. Behind her, Austin struggled to get out of his ropes, but I couldn’t let her know that. I stepped forward, sword at her throat.

“Cú Chulainn loved me. If not for his meddling wife and her servants, we could have been together. We *should* have been together.” Memories were flowing into me as we stood there, and it felt like I was drowning in them. One after another, beating at me until I was gasping for air. I knew who I was. Fand, the betrothed of a sea faerie, one who was betrayed by both Manannan MacLir and by Cú Chulainn. Killed by Maeve when I lay on the battlefield, mourning the man I loved.

Austin stood behind Maeve and put a finger to his lips as he moved around her to get to me. I pushed my sword closer to her throat, praying she wouldn’t notice.

“Yield.” The word felt like it had been ripped out of me, but I refused to back down. Not this time. Not to her.

“Never.” Maeve waved her hand, and a giant invisible force sent me flying into a column, knocking the air out of me.

I landed hard, trying to draw a breath. My ribs screamed from the impact. Strong arms wrapped around me, pulling me closer.

“Get up. We need to get out of here.” Austin’s voice broke through the pain.

“No. I need to finish this. Go find Amy.” I pushed myself up and staggered toward Maeve looking for my sword. “I said, yield.”

Maeve laughed again. “I don’t have to. I’ve already won.”

I held my side, hoping she hadn’t broken any of my ribs from the impact. “What do you mean you’ve won? I have your army. I have Austin. You have nothing.”

Maeve’s grin grew even wider. “You really are naive.”

“What do you mean?” I looked back at the army to make sure they were still with me. They didn’t look at me, though. Or Maeve. They were all focused on Austin, staring at him in reverence.

Maeve thrust her hand toward Austin, pulling him toward her using her magic. Austin’s body crumpled, and he began to change just enough that I dropped to my knees. His nose grew more pronounced, his cheekbones higher, and his lips . . . the lips I’d kissed so many times before. My Cú Chulainn. He’d been with me this whole time.

“Leave him alone.” I pulled back on him with a power I didn’t know I had. His head jerked as he moved, and I was worried he hadn’t survived the transformation.

Maeve relaxed her hand and Austin dropped to the ground, unmoving. “It is done. Now, go. Leave me in peace. Thanks to you, I have to come back and find a new specimen to continue my reign.”

I looked up from the man I loved, that I’d loved for centuries, and all the hate, anger, jealousy, and fury that had built up inside me over the last few months bubbled to the surface.

This time I didn't try to reign it in. This time, I focused every ounce of it on the woman who had taken everything from me. I let out a battle cry as I leaped forward.

Maeve's eyes widened as a bolt of red and black smoke poured from my hands straight at her. She fought back with her own green and purple magic, but she was no match for the monster inside me. I continued forward, whipping the small dagger out of my belt and ramming it into her heart, then twisted, keeping eye contact with her as the life faded from her eyes. She groaned as she tried to speak, but she choked on her own blood.

Maeve fell to the ground, and I collapsed next to her as the rage drained from me. Cheers from all the small creatures rose up around me. Grief suddenly overwhelmed me, and the rage that had been my constant companion for the last several months was finally gone, burnt out of me by the queen of the faeries.

Blackness enveloped and I was more than happy to succumb.

"Hannah? Hey, wake up!"

I groaned and held my head as it pounded. "Five more minutes, Mom."

Austin laughed. "I'm not your mom, and you don't have five minutes."

I jerked up, trying to figure out where I was. Austin was definitely not supposed to be in my room. I still sat on a dais in the middle of a castle throne room. Fairy tale creatures surrounded us, looking rather confused.

"What's going on?" I rubbed my temples, trying to clear my head.

“You tell me. I was tied up in the chair, then I tried to help you. That’s all I remember until I woke up a few minutes ago to find the woman dead and you looked like you might be too.”

I stood and walked over to the queen and kicked at the sword. “I guess I won’t be getting that back.”

Austin laughed. “You *want* it back?”

“Well, it *was* mine.” I turned to the nearest leprechaun. “You’ll take care of this?”

The leprechaun bowed. “It will be our honor. Thank you for freeing us, Your Majesty.”

“Whoa ... hold up there. I’m no majesty. I was just saying stuff when I told Maeve it was time for a new queen. I didn’t mean it.” I took a step back. “I just came to stop her from stealing Austin. I need to get back . . . I don’t know how to get back.”

“We need a new queen. You must reign.” The leprechaun pulled the crown from Maeve’s head and held it out. “This should have always been yours by right. Please take it.”

Austin took my hand. “They’re right, Hannah. You took down their queen. It’s your right.”

I looked up at him, seeing him as both Cú Chulainn and as Austin. “I thought you were taken from me again.”

“That could never happen. Everyone who kept us apart has disappeared.” He leaned down and kissed me gently. “What I want to know is, how we’re going to get out of this now.”

I crouched next to the leprechaun and took the crown. “I cannot stay here. But I can make this promise. Every year when Hy-Brasil appears off the coast of Ireland, I will return.”

“And if someone tries to take your place?”

“They won’t. Because the legend of The Morrigan will be spread far and wide by your—my—people and no one will dare come up against me.” There were many legends of The Morrigan and how she was the goddess of death. She didn’t compare to me after I’d been spurned by both Manannan MacLir and by Cú Chulainn and the three demons Manannan had sent after me. But her reputation was enough to keep people away.

The leprechaun’s eyes widened, and he nodded before bowing. “Yes, Your Majesty.”

I stood and took Austin’s hand. “Now, if you’ll excuse me, and the King, Cú Chulainn, we will be going. Take care of this land. I’ll see you soon.”

“There’s the matter of you getting back, Your Majesty.” The leprechaun stepped forward. “I can get you back there, but it will be as if none of this ever happened. You two alone will remember everything from this day.”

“Deal.” I held tight to Austin’s hand as the leprechaun snapped his fingers.

Chapter Eight

We appeared with a thump several feet away from the van just outside Kilkenny. Austin and I ducked as Kaitlyn, Gavin, Amy, and Liam came jogging up the hill toward us.

“Oh, there you guys are. We couldn’t find you at the cathedral. We were afraid you’d left us.” Amy looked between us. “You two okay?”

“Yeah, we just wanted to get moving to Glendalough.” I really hoped we’d actually go to the right place this time.

Kaitlyn handed me a bag. “Here, I found this and thought of you. I had to buy it, which is why we were a little late.”

“Thanks.” I climbed in the van and was surprised to find a young man about our age at the wheel. “Sorry, did we get in the wrong one?”

Kaitlyn and Gavin climbed in behind us while Amy said her goodbyes to Liam. At least that hadn’t changed. As we pulled out of the parking lot, I opened the small box and gasped at the delicate necklace inside. It was a warrior with her sword and shield, running to battle with her hound. Austin took it out of the box and helped me with the clasp, then kept an arm around me as we drove away, listening to my friends talk about everything they’d seen that day.

SEVEN YEARS LATER

I stepped out of the car and stretched, hoping the time we had to spend in Hy-Brasil would go quickly.

Austin helped Conall out of his car seat, and I opened the other door to help Eva out. The walk to the old cathedral wasn't far. I just hoped my leprechaun friend was there to help us get back to Hy-Brasil without having to take the route through the pit again.

"Mommy, why are we here?" Eva yawned and looked around at the forest.

"You'll see in a minute." I caught movement in the bushes and nodded toward it. "He's here."

We walked together to the small leprechaun who leaned up against a log, chewing on a piece of straw.

"I was afraid you'd forgotten." He dropped the grain and pushed off the tree. "And who are these two strapping children?"

"This is Eva and Conall." I looked off toward the ocean. "How has everything been?"

The leprechaun grinned up at me. "Your rumors worked. No one dared to go up against the goddess of Death."

"Good." I grinned. "Shall we go?"

"Aye." The leprechaun snapped his fingers again, and we appeared moments later in the throne room where I'd defeated Maeve.

They'd cleaned up the place. It was no longer in ruins, and where there'd just been the one throne, two now sat.

"We'll have to get something for your children, but we hope the rest is to your liking." The leprechaun bowed and moved away.

"Wait! I need to ask. You've been so much help, and I failed to ever ask your name."

The leprechaun grinned and tipped his hat. "The name is Louie, Your Majesty. I must go, I have other work to do. I'll be back at the end of the day to escort you home."

Annotated Bibliography

“Árd Ladhra.” *Voices from the Dawn*, 8 September 2023, <https://voicesfromthedawn.com/ard-ladhran/>. Accessed 16 November 2023.

This article was used to talk about Ireland and its settlements, along with how the lands were named. It speaks of the three people from Ireland’s creation story and where they died, along with other tales from this time.

C, Richard. “The Nemed: A Journey Through Irish Mythology - IrishWishes.” *IrishWishes* -, 7 April 2023, <https://irishwishes.com/nemed/>. Accessed 16 November 2023.

This article tells of the Nemed, the third invaders to claim land in Ireland. They fought with the Fomorians, the inhabitants before Nemed arrived. They’re also the people who began tales of Tuatha Dé Danann, a magical race. These creatures became the fairies that the world knows today. Some of the Nemed moved on to Greece before returning to Ireland. Some of the tales changed after this from influences of other countries.

Cartwright, Mark, et al. “Leprechaun.” *World History Encyclopedia*, 4 February 2021, <https://www.worldhistory.org/Leprechaun/>. Accessed 16 November 2023.

The World History Encyclopedia defines the leprechaun and gives many other names for the creature. It also talks about the influence of leprechauns on the names of many cities or counties in Ireland. Many of these names came long before leprechauns began appearing in Irish lore. This post also talks about the different types of fairies that are like leprechauns and how they’re related.

Cléirigh, Micheál Ó. *Leabhar Gabhála = the Book of Conquests of Ireland; Volume 1*. Creative Media Partners, LLC, 2016.

This is an ancient book that has been translated a few different times that tells of how Ireland was created. It's the origin story of the country that stems from the great flood of Noah and goes down through each of the groups of people that inhabited Ireland. This book also has one of the first mentions of fairies or other magical creatures. The book itself is both in Gaelic and in English.

Doughan, David, et al. "Biography – The Tolkien Society." *The Tolkien Society*, <https://www.tolkiensociety.org/author/biography/>. Accessed 14 November 2023.

JRR Tolkien was a man of many talents, including learning new languages. He used this knowledge to create his own elvish language for this book and went on to inspire many fantasy authors after him. This article is used to help describe Tolkien and how he grew to become the storyteller is, along with the influences of the outside world on the books he wrote.

George, Andrew. "Epic of Gilgamesh." *12CP Reading*, 1999, <https://ia800802.us.archive.org/0/items/12CPReadingTheEpicOfGilgamesh/12CP%20Reading%20-%20The%20Epic%20of%20Gilgamesh.pdf>. Accessed 10 November 2023.

The story of Gilgamesh is one of the first epic poems found and it tells its own story of creation after the flood. There are many who try to use this poem to disprove the Bible, but in many ways it actually helps to show the Bible was real. The purpose of using this poem is to show the story arc of an early poem and how it affects us today. The story is told of Gilgamesh and Enkidu and how they both pulled each other down, but also how they helped build each other up. It's the death of Enkidu and many attempts to find immortality that finally helps

Gilgamesh grow as a character when he realizes it's the people around him that are the most important.

Guide, Step. "Why Greek Mythology is Still Relevant." *Centre of Excellence*, 2 September 2019, <https://www.centreofexcellence.com/greek-mythology-still-relevant/>. Accessed 10 November 2023.

This article talks about how important Greek mythology is to us today. It's not just about the different myths and those stories, but also the different things we've borrowed from the mythology. Amazon, Pandora, and Oracle are just a few names that we've borrowed. These stories also help teach life lessons by telling the stories of humans, gods, and demigods, and how they learn from their mistakes. While there were many things wrong with how Zeus and Hera dealt with life, they act as a precautionary tale for those who read them.

Gummere, Francis B. "Beowulf (trans. by Francis B. Gummere) by Unknown." Poetry Foundation, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/50114/beowulf-modern-english-translation>. Accessed 18 November 2023.

Beowulf is one of the very first epic poems. He's a hero that helps villages and fights monsters to save the day. He fights and wins and becomes king. Unfortunately, he dies by poison from a dragon, but not before he gives directions on how to help the kingdom. While his experiences might not actually happen today, learning of his bravery and how he grew can help us. The epic poem shows his character arc as he grows into the hero his people need him to be.

Hetherington, Toni. "Greek myths: A continuing influence on modern life." *Kids News*, 25 April 2019, <https://www.kidsnews.com.au/greek-myths-and-legends/how-greek-mythology->

continues-to-have-a-large-influence-on-our-modern-lives/news-story/334bb7fd1e685e99ebe229f5a685bc5c. Accessed 10 November 2023.

This is another article on the importance of Greek myths on modern life. It goes more into depth into how we see the influence in our everyday lives, including names we've kept from myths, and even the Olympics that were created by the Greeks and still remain today. This also goes into architecture used as well as pop culture.

Larrington, Carolyne. "WHERE DO MYTHS, LEGENDS AND FOLKTALES COME FROM?" *TORCH | The Oxford Research Centre in the Humanities*, 15 March 2019, <https://www.torch.ox.ac.uk/article/where-do-myths-legends-and-folktales-come-from>. Accessed 6 November 2023.

This article will be used to talk about the difference between myths, legends, and folklore and how each of them have influenced society. It goes into why these stories are shared and how they affect society with the lessons they taught. Along with a few basic myths, it talks about where those stories came from – whether they were written in stone or passed down through families.

Lopez, Santos, and Squier Ben. "Native American Creation Story." Kumeyaay, <https://www.kumeyaay.com/native-american-creation-story.html>. Accessed 18 November 2023.

This thesis is based on the myths and stories of different cultures, so it's important to focus on more than just the European myths and legends. Native Americans have a rich history and origin story that help to explain the creation, how things

are made, and why things are the way they are. This article focuses mostly on the creation story, but also talks about other myths as well.

Mark, Joshua J. "Mythology." *World History Encyclopedia*, 31 October 2018, <https://www.worldhistory.org/mythology/>. Accessed 6 November 2023.

In this Encyclopedia post, it delves into what myths are and how they're passed down. Some are through story told from one family down the next. Others are printed on walls with pictures, while others are in written form. It talks about myths from all over the world and how they affected their people. And most importantly, it brings up that what was is now considered mythology was once a religion to the people of the time when it was created.

Morris H. Lary, "The Banshee: The Wailing Fairy Woman of Ireland", History Cooperative, March 27, 2023, <https://historycooperative.org/banshee/>. Accessed December 2, 2023

Celtic mythology is one that is focused on the most for this thesis because it's where the manuscript for this thesis will focus on. The banshee is one of the most popular of the Irish myths, so talking about her origin is important. Not only that, but this article also goes into how she was created and how her story changes depending on who tells the story and what region they're from.

"Myth - Origin, Ritual, Belief." *Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/myth/Functions-of-myth-and-mythology>. Accessed 10 November 2023.

This article in the Britannica discusses Native American stories and myths and how they came about. It also discusses mythologies from other regions, such as Egypt, Polynesia, Indo-Europeans, and the Incas.

O'Hara, Keith. "Cu Chulainn: An Irishman's Guide (Includes 8 Stories)." *The Irish Road Trip*, 4 January 2023, <https://www.theirishroadtrip.com/cu-chulainn/>. Accessed 10 November 2023.

Cu Chulainn is one of the Ireland's most well-known legends. His story is one of heroism where he saves Ulster from Queen Maeve, the fairy queen. While his stories have a lot of symbolism in Northern Ireland, he is lauded as a hero by all of Ireland. He was strong, fought hard, and fought for the underdogs to help them keep their land. It's important to talk about him when mentioning Celtic mythology because he plays such a big role.

Pruitt, Sarah. "What Paul Bunyan a Real Person?" Was Paul Bunyan a real person? | HISTORY, 20 November 2015, <https://www.history.com/news/was-paul-bunyan-a-real-person>. Accessed 18 November 2023.

Paul Bunyan is an American legend who was well known for his lumberjack skills. He was a giant and had a blue ox that accompanied him through the country. His origin story is important to learn as well so people can see that all myths or legends have some origin of truth. He seems to come from two different lumberjacks to get his larger-than-life persona.

Sanderson, Brandon. *The Hero of Ages: Book Three of Mistborn*. Tor Publishing Group, 2023.

Hero of Ages digs deep into how religions are brought about as Sazed, a companion to the main characters, talks about the different religions within the book. He mentions the pieces he likes and doesn't like, which ends up playing a big role in how the book series draws to a conclusion.

Sanderson, Brandon, et al. "15.16: Balancing Plot and Character." *Writing Excuses*, 18 April 2020, <https://writingexcuses.com/15-16-balancing-plot-and-character/>. Accessed 16 November 2023.

The Writing Excuses podcast delves into story creation by talking about different aspects of the story. This topic speaks directly about character and their influence on the plot, both of which are important to this thesis, but also to any story that is being written.

Scott, Nelson R. "Steel Drivin' Man: John Henry, the Untold Story of an American Legend." Virginia Museum of History & Culture, <https://virginiahistory.org/learn/steel-drivin-man-john-henry-untold-story-american-legend>. Accessed 18 November 2023.

John Henry is another legend from America who was created from the original story of a man who played a big part in American history. While there are many similarities to the original story, The legend becomes one that reaches American Legend status among the other greats.

Synan, Mariel. "Who Was Johnny Appleseed?" Who Was Johnny Appleseed?, 18 September 2013, <https://www.history.com/news/who-was-johnny-appleseed>. Accessed 18 November 2023.

Johnny Appleseed is another American legend who was based on a historical figure. There were many similarities between the two, but the original Johnny Appleseed also planted the orchards for a profit along the way to he could make a living. This story is another one that shows how a great man influenced the growth of the United States as they moved out west to claim more land. All of these stories are important as they show the mix of truth and legend, much as

many other myths do in other stories to show how their people were created and thrived.

Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Fellowship of the Ring*. vol. 1, Ballantine Books, 1986. 3 vols.

The Lord of the Rings played a huge role in the creation of fantasy books throughout the world. It used legends from many different cultures, while also creating its own creatures and stories of the past within the book. In this book, it talks about Gandalf as he fights the balrog to save the companions. He falls and come back later in the series as Gandalf the White.

Weis, Margaret, et al. *Dragonlance Chronicles*. Penguin, 1988.

This series was originally written as part of *Dungeons and Dragons*, but it came to life as the story was told. Besides the three original books, and then another sequel that followed those same characters, many other series have stemmed from it, telling other stories of bravery. This series focused a lot on the characters and their arcs both as individuals and as a group.