

INTO THE MISTS

A Thesis

by

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ABSTRACT

My thesis project is a creative fiction novella, *Into the Mists*, which is accompanied by a critical introduction discussing the children's and young adult (YA) genres and the placement of my work in the contemporary context. Although primarily intended for marketing to YA audiences, the content and construction of my novella also considers readers of children's fiction. The story follows Liam Flannigan, an eighteen year old human, as he enters the mythical fairy realm of Cathair Rúnda.

Liam travels to the seaside city of Ciallaíonn where he must make a choice to either continue his journey to King Cormac in the Crystal Palace, or else follow the dark fairy, Muran, in pursuit of his long lost fairy father. On his journey, Liam becomes acquainted with Dwarves, Sprites, and Fairies and is introduced to the strange world in which they reside. This novella gives insight to Liam's formation into the eventual fairy king of Cathair Rúnda, in what will evolve into a series of novellas cataloguing his adventures throughout the human and fairy realms.

DEDICATION

To my parents: for all of the bedtime stories that led to the dreams that led me here.

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INTRODUCTION

In this digital age of entertainment, the Young Adult (YA) fiction genre still manages to capture the attention of youth. Vampires and wizards walk the streets of children's imaginations, and the most popular novels end up on the big screen ultimately reaching millions of viewers. At times, it would seem that every paranormal romance has been written and every fantasy tale told, and so the modern day author is challenged with conceptualizing the next fantastically unique and yet classically framed myth for young readers. My attempt at this endeavor is told through the eyes of Liam Flannigan and his host of fairy companions in my novella, *Into the Mists*. The story gives an explanation of young Liam's first encounter with the fairy world of Cathair Rúnda. In addition to providing a brief synopsis of *Into the Mists*, I will also discuss the YA and children's genres for which my creation is intended. The main works that I will be considering in regards to my novella will be *The Eye of the World* by Robert Jordan, *The City of Bones* by Cassandra Clare, and the *Game of Thrones* series by George R.R. Martin. *The Eye of the World* will be discussed in respect to my use of the hero's journey, *Game of Thrones* for my application of the third person limited omniscient, and *The City of Bones* for the light it sheds on my intended audience.

The shift from children's literature to YA fantasy fiction is a delicate one that *Into the Mists* attempts to navigate with as much grace as possible. The novella and the series it accompanies strive to deliver a didactic adventure providing morality on a series of levels. Although a tale about fairies, *Into the Mists* does not fall into the category of

“fairytale” per se. Moreover, it is an adventure fantasy work that floats between the children’s and YA fiction genres. J.R.R. Tolkien explains the concept of the fairy story in simple terms:

“...for fairy-stories are not in normal English usage stories about fairies or elves, but stories about Fairy, that is Faerie, the realm or state in which fairies have their being. Faerie contains many things besides elves and fays, and besides dwarfs, witches, trolls, giants, or dragons: it holds the seas, the sun, the moon, the sky; and the earth, and all things that are in it: tree and bird, water and stone, wine and bread, and ourselves, mortal men, when we are enchanted” (113).

Tolkien’s explanation provides a differentiation between the concepts of fairytale and fairy story. *Into the Mists* falls under the category of fairy story as a tale of Faerie, or as it is named in my novella, Cathair Rúnda, and its inhabitants. In my work, the fairy realm is just as important as the races of Fairy, Elf, Sprite, Dwarf, and Nymph that it holds. The relationship between the world and its inhabitants will be a foundation for the theme of environmental responsibility throughout the novel.

Into the Mists seeks to be accessible to a wide audience while also delivery thematic elements on a variety of levels. On the surface, it is a fun-loving, adventure story, but as it progresses, the internal development of the protagonists encourage thoughts of moral duty and obligation to one’s loved ones and country. Perry Nodelman explains the complication of works in children’s literature that are “either more purely didactic or more purely optimistic, preachy tomes about trains that stay on the track and

teenagers who learn to cope with bullies or wish-fulfillment fantasies about children who defeat evil villains and save the world” (2). This novella runs the risk of falling into Nodelman’s latter category, but it hopes to evade such a problematic nature in two, specific ways. The first is by offering a variety of protagonists of different ages and races. The youngest protagonist in the series is human Raegan at fifteen, who will contrast her eighteen year old brother and his 100+-year old fairy companions. Different mental vantage points show how the teenagers perceive or dismiss the issues and concerns of the fairy race. Similarly, the fairies accompanying the humans fill the “adult role” and comically reflect the ignorance of human adults who have forgotten the ways in which children are capable of simplifying the most difficult problems. The second way in which the series evades Nodelman’s stereotype is in its exclusion of the happy ending. Honest intentions and a moral consciousness will be shown in a positive light, but these qualities will not necessarily always merit positive results for the children.

The development of the quest motif in *Into the Mists* also sets it apart from its fantasy fiction predecessors as it focuses on the internal and psychological development of its protagonists. In her study of contemporary children’s fiction and the fantasy world, Anne-Kathrin Höfel explains recent adaptations to the quest motif, where the internal journey is seen to be of predominant importance to the narrative structure. Höfel points out typical examples of children’s literature that lay primary focus on the actual quest and physical triumphs of its characters. She then observes that in contemporary, popular fiction the emphasis now lays on the “development and maturation of individual characters... whose personal psychological development, not that of physical strength,

enables them to devote their attention to problems of general interest” (170). Although the physical aspect of Liam’s journey, in particular, is important to the entertainment aspect of the novella, it is the psychological journey that maps his transition into adulthood and into the eventual leader of the fairy realm that is of utmost importance to the narrative structure. Through Liam’s innocent, “country boy” understanding of life, the reader discovers the good and the bad in both the light and dark feys. The very concept of good is challenged as Liam eventually befriends the Shadowseeker, Muran, who sets out on his dark path.

To better understand how *Into the Mists* adapts the quest motif, it is helpful to look at specific examples of other popular works that have employed similar narrative tactics in YA and children’s literature. The hero’s journey has become a staple concept in much of the YA fiction enjoyed by readers today. One of the earlier and most well-known examples would be J. R. R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy. This concept of the young, naive traveler whisked away on a fantastic mission to save the world has been recycled and adapted time and time again. One of the most recent works embodying this concept, that also shares a similar narrative strategy with *Into the Mists*, is Robert Jordan’s *Eye of the World*. A first in a series of novels, this book tells the story of Rand Al Thor’s journey from the little village of the Two Rivers to the great city and to his eventual discovery of himself as the Dragon Reborn. My novella entertains a similar concept of physical travel being accompanied by an elevation in social status, allowing my protagonist to affect great change in the new world that he has come to live in. In a study of the cyclical nature of quests in early children’s fiction, Mecu Ginting

asserts that “[m]ost characters start at *Home* and travel to *Not Home* and then return *Home* again” in a way “that does not allow for any change in the family situation of the children” (12). In this case, Ginting’s “*Home*” is the physical space where the protagonist finds peace and solace. In *Into the Mists*, Liam’s *Home* is complicated by the fact that he can never return to Earth, or if he does, it may be centuries after everyone he has known is gone. This dilemma complicates Liam’s feelings of the fairy world, redefining his new home and further complicating his feeling of the fairy realm and the relationships he makes in it.

Although a classic and beloved fixture in the genre, *The Lord of the Rings* in its literary form excludes some, and arguably most, modern day young readers with its complex writing structure and overwhelming scope of narrative content. *Eye of the World* and *Into the Mists* contemporize the literary tradition of Tolkien in a more accessible way. *Into the Mists* concerns itself with modern-day environmental concerns while reflecting the classical and beloved narrative elements of the hero’s journey and moral development, seen also in Tolkien and Jordan’s works of prose. *Eye of the World* is primarily considered to belong to the YA genre due to sexual content and a more complex writing style; however, *Into the Mists* seeks to utilize the same concept of the journey while presenting the story in a more direct and simple narrative style and also excludes any explicit sexual content. In these ways, *Into the Mists* seeks to reach a broader scope of readership in both children’s and YA literature.

The third person limited omniscient narrative style adopted by the novella has recently been utilized and made popular by George R. R. Martin’s *Game of Throne*

series. Each chapter is told indirectly through the point of view of one particular character. This affect allows the narrator to pass judgment and offer insight to that particular character's thoughts and decisions. Martin is also unique in that his novel is one of the more notorious pieces in contemporary fiction to give readers a glimpse into the minds of the "bad guys." This holistic presentation of characterization makes the characters more realistic and blurs the lines between good and evil. Although this style allows for readers to gain more intimate knowledge of multiple characters, Martin jumps from character to character in no particular order, which can at times create confusion. In contrast, *Into the Mists* will focus on four primary characters: Liam, Keiran, Sorcha, and Mickey. This will provide clarity and make the piece more accessible to both the readers of children and YA literature. In her examination of how fairy tales are being conceptualized at the turn of the 21st century, Merja Makinen explains that if we consider "fairy tales [as] already pre-postmodern narratives that postmodern fiction invokes to write new alternative versions, then the postmodern text could be argued as reduplicating a further critical, subversive layer when they are being radical" (147). Makinen's contemplations reflect a similar vein of contemporary criticism considering the implication of adapting classic folklore. The new writer has a responsibility to streamline the classic tales and concepts in a way that is not only innovative, but justified in realigning old issues in a new and relevant way. The third person limited omniscient narrative style employed in recent works, including *Into the Mists*, can be seen as a tool for such restructured storytelling.

Cassandra Clare's *A City of Bones* most closely reflects the intended audience of *Into the Mists* while employing the same concept of contrasting fantasy with reality in a contemporary setting. The novel tells the story of Clary Fray, a young high school student who finds out that she belongs to the race of Shadowhunters, a group of "guardian angels" responsible for managing supernatural creatures on earth. The narrative employs violence and sex just enough to strike interest in an older, more mature audience, without transgressing lines so dramatically that middle-school aged children would be forbidden from reading it. Although *Into the Mists* is driven by a similar idea of the teenage earthling being exposed to a supernatural realm, the narrative will focus more on the journey of the group and also be presented in a slightly more sophisticated language than Clare's novel, which often relies on the slang jargon and colloquialisms of today's American youth. In "Reflections on Recent English-Language Fairy-Tale Fiction by Women Extrapolating from Nalo Hopkinson's 'Skin Folk,'" Cristina Bacchilega's study of the "cross-fertilization of fiction, folktale and theory" she emphasizes the responsibility of the contemporary author to "continue to develop the interdisciplinary relation between folkloristics and literary studies" (202). Again, the importance is stressed of the author's obligation to contemporize the narrative in a way that young readers can relate to and digest the information provided. It is important to not only reform narrative structures but also to perform this responsibility with a literary integrity. Where Clare's novels almost read directly as a screenplay, arguably written with an advanced scheme for marketing in mind, *Into the Mists* strives to retain the classical veracity of its older predecessors. The language of the text wants to be

accessible and yet poetic, popular but with a majestic conscious that harkens to the long-standing tales it embodies.

The greatest challenge that will be faced in the completion of *Into the Mists* and the series to which it belongs, will be in the creation and maintenance of Cathair Rúnda. In creating a separate universe, every detail must be meticulously catalogued, in addition to providing a thorough background of the realm's major characters. George MacDonald explains the obligation of the author like so:

“... in the process of his creation, the inventor must hold by those laws.

The moment he forgets one of them, he makes the story, by its own

postulates, incredible. To be able to live a moment in an imagined world,

we must see the laws of its existence obeyed. Those broken, we fall out of

it. The imagination in us, whose exercise is essential to the most

temporary submission to the imagination of another, immediately, with

the disappearance of Law, ceases to act.”

Considering MacDonald's advisements, I have created outlines for the political, social, and theological aspects of the world. References are made in *Into the Mists* of the different titles and training of the major characters that will be significant later in the series. So as not to overwhelm the readers, this information will be disseminated slowly over time through the human eyes of Liam and Raegan. As they become acquainted with the realm, so will the readers.

The narrative of *Into the Mists* belongs to a greater story of the seven realms in which both Earth and Cathair Rúnda reside. Although not anonymous, my novella does

belong to a series of tales that also relies on classical constructs of the fairy tale genre. *Into the Mists* will begin with Liam's entering the fairy world and conclude upon his arrival to the Crystal Palace. Liam, an eighteen year old mechanic from Halettsville, Texas, has just found out not only of fairy kind's existence, but of his own fairy lineage. A squadron of fairy soldiers (Keiran, Sorcha, and Mickey) has been sent to recover him upon the orders of King Cormac to bring him to the palace in Cathair Rúnda for protection.

The first chapter will open through the perspective of Keiran, one of the fairies in charge of bringing Liam to King Cormac for protection along with his companions, Sorcha and Mickey. The fairies are worried about being pursued by members of the rebellion, who for a reason unknown to Keiran and his group, have just tried to kidnap Liam for their own purposes. Concern is raised that they must take shelter as Liam begins the painful process of transforming into his fairy self for the first time. This will lead the fairies to the nearby seaside city of Ciallaíonn, where Sorcha's father stands as regent.

In Ciallaíonn, the budding romantic feelings between Liam and Sorcha will become apparent, and Sorcha's caretaker, Iffy the Dwarf, will be introduced as she nurses Liam back to health. Disoriented, Liam struggles to comprehend the sights and sounds of the fairy world and is belabored by fairy wings that are trapped inside of his back. Meanwhile, the emergence of the dark rebellion will also come to light as the Shadowseekers, Muran and Keenan, are seen in relentless pursuit of Liam's travelling party. Mickey and Kieran hasten to reach Liam and Sorcha before the Shadowseekers

after discovering that Muran has been given orders to retrieve Liam by a powerful, mysterious member of the rebellion.

The ultimate goal of the fairies is to get Liam to Beannaithe, or The Blessed City, home to King Cormac's Crystal Palace. Muran offers Liam a different path, and promises him a meeting with his long lost, fairy father, Niall. Ultimately Liam decides to pursue his father on the condition that his fairy companions accompany him to Dramhadhman. Muran swears an oath, promising the group protection, and the novella concludes with Liam, once again, setting off into the mists, looking for the truth about his past. This decision of Liam to pursue his father is the defining moment where he establishes himself as an independent agent, determined to find the truth while also wanting to fulfill his obligations and do what is best for the greater good.

To better understand the world that Liam has entered, is important to consider the structure of the fairy realm. In Cathair Rúnda, the fairies are ruled by the current King Cormac. Fairies are separated by four clans: The Tenders, The Builders, The Seekers, and The Keepers. The Builders are not only responsible for the construction of the great Crystal Palace in Cathair Rúnda, but they are also in charge of the construction and maintenance of portals between worlds. The Keepers are the guardians of the portals in charge of maintaining and recording the flow of time between the realms. For instance, the time in Cathair Rúnda passes much more slowly than that of Earth. When a human enters the fairy city, they can be gone only five earthen days, but return to Earth and find they have been gone for five years. Entering though different portals will constitute different lapses in time. Due to the fact that Liam entered through a damaged portal, the

time lapse dilemma is complicated even further. The Tenders are the nature guardians of Cathair Rúnda and Earth. They will be more involved in the theme of environmental concern throughout the rest of the series. Finally, the Seekers are in charge of watching over half-breeds, children born on Earth conceived in the union of a fairy and a human, and furthermore recruiting those half-breeds who prove to have strong enough fairy abilities to train in Cathair Rúnda's Academy. The Academy is where all novice fairies train before being assigned to one of the four clans.

This piece is essential to the greater work in that it will help me explore the formation of Liam from human child to fairy king. These first few months covered in the novella will acquaint both the reader and Liam simultaneously with Cathair Rúnda and all of its wonders. It will also provide interested readers with background information on the relationships formed between Liam and his fairy guides: Keiran, Sorcha, and Mickey. Although the primary goal of this work is to provide entertainment, the moral undertones of the series will be to emphasize the importance of ecological responsibility and moral consciousness. As Earth is discriminated against by Shadowseekers for its wastefulness, Cathair Rúnda will be portrayed as a world where its inhabitants' primary focus is putting back into the environment what they receive from it.

PROLOGUE

Tomas

Tomas Flannigan stood on his porch with a piping hot mug of tea and surveyed the quiet street before him. The sun shone bright in the sky, and a certain wetness hung in the air as if a storm was not far off. His chest rose and fell as he let out a large sigh, his eyes staring into the distance, full of anxiety and excitement. In human form, the fairy stood over six feet tall. Broad shouldered and fair featured, he could have been mistaken for a professional athlete... not rugby or soccer, mind you, but more of the tennis or golf pro sort. When he had come to Hallettsville almost eighteen years ago, he could have passed for that of a high school student, despite his near four hundred years in existence. On Earth, his human body had then aged naturally. Now, he embodied something of a middle-aged man who had matured quite gracefully into his latter years, and like the Hollywood movie stars, seemed only to improve with age.

Tomas rather enjoyed his matured form. He walked the earth now garnering more respect from humans than his younger self ever had achieved. Smiling now as he thought back on his time in the small Texas town, he admitted to himself that it was not only his physical being that had transformed. His heart and mind had grown in ways he had never thought possible. At first, when he had been charged with the caretaking of infant Liam and his mother Mary, Tomas had been furious. After years of faithful service to Cormac as one of the most well-respected Keepers in the land, he was being

banished to earth to care for a *human*. It was not that Tomas shared the same ill-feelings that so many other fairies harbored for the lesser-race, but it was traditionally a Tender's job to watch over the half-breeds. That is just the way it was: Seekers were charged with finding and testing human children suspected of possessing fairy blood, Tenders looked after them until they were of age for the testing, Builders constructed the portals that allowed for travel between the worlds, and Keepers were responsible for the flow of time and maintaining the balance between realms.

As a young fairy, Tomas had done everything in his power to secure a spot at The Academy, the royal school that trained members of future Síog leadership positions. After obtaining his hard-earned invitation and training mercilessly for two years, Tomas placed first in his class and was the first recruit called on by the Keepers. The Keepers took fewer recruits than any of the other guilds, sometimes electing to not even take one Síog from a graduating class, and so it was a huge honor to Tomas and his clan for him to have been chosen for such an esteemed position. Tomas had worked tirelessly to hone and develop his talents, until he was considered by society to be the most successful Keeper Cathair Rúnda had seen in almost a thousand years. Not only was he incredibly diligent in his training, but he also possessed the rare gift of being able to manipulate and control the thoughts of others, only further distinguishing him as one of the most powerful fairies alive.

And so at the height of his success, right before he was to be appointed as Chief Keeper, Second Position, King Cormac called ambitious Tomas to his private chambers

in the Crystal Palace. Tomas would never forget that day, as at the time, he thought his life was ending.

“Your grace,” Tomas bowed, breathless from his swift journey to the castle. “Filly awoke me and instructed that I must attend to you without delay.” Tomas looked up at the king with bated breath, and was taken aback by the vision before him. Towering over eight feet tall, Cormac was easily one of the largest fairies in the realm. Before his rise to power, he had been a Builder, which was no doubt partially due to his enormous stature. During their time together at The Academy, Tomas had joked with him on several occasions that he must have some giant blood in him. His once-friend and now High King, would smile and shrug off the jokes about his carriage. Cormac had always been so quiet and reserved and had never cared to be the center of a discussion. Tomas would never forget the first time that he had been called by Cormac into these very chambers, where he informed him that he now possessed the Great Throne. In complete shock, Tomas had wondered how such a gentle giant could ever rule over such a vast and demanding kingdom. Time moved swiftly though, and showed Cormac to be the strongest and truest of rulers. Almost five hundred orbits later, Cormac had won over the entire kingdom, heart and soul. And so now, it was not Cormac’s great size that startled Tomas, but the look of despair that he now witnessed in his friend’s tired eyes. “Cormac, what is it?” he whispered urgently. A heaviness hung low in the room and insisted that his words be cautious and quiet.

The king was standing next to one of the great, stained crystal windows that lined the room, and his face glowed from yellow to orange and red as his gaze left Tomas’s

prostrated figure and turned to stare off into the distance. Still looking away, the king's voice matched the quiet tambour with which Tomas had spoken, while possessing a fierce gravity, "Tomas, forgive me if I have alarmed you, but I could think of no one else with whom I could entrust this mission."

Tomas rose from the ground and approached Cormac in earnest, "My king, tell me how I may serve my kingdom, and it shall be done."

Although Cormac smiled, his eyes betrayed an overwhelming sadness. "You have always played this part so well, Tomas. Always so formal, so correct. Perhaps it should have been you to wear this crown..." Cormac's voice trailed off as his mind trespassed into the forbidden possibilities of the roads not taken. Tomas looked on in dismay, he had never seen Cormac so... so not in control. The lapse was brief as the king looked back to his friend continuing, "Yes, but it was not you, was it? No, this is my burden." His face hardened, and he turned, walking back towards the great stone chair in which he sat while giving audience to those that sought his private council to discuss matters of the realm. He did not sit down, but instead leaned into its side, head down like a warrior regaining composure after battle. He took a deep breath and straightened, and when he spoke to Tomas it was no longer as his old friend, but as the High King. "Tomas, know that I request your service out of necessity. Also know that I am aware of the sacrifice that I ask of you." The king then raised his right hand and touched his fingers to his temple, calling his Sprite Filly back into the room."

Tomas was speechless, his mind overflowing with so many questions that his mouth could not find a way to voice just one. Cormac stared knowingly at the door as

Filly entered, flying over to the two fairies, hastily bowing his head, "My King." The little sprite spoke with a grave sincerity, carefully avoiding Tomas with his eyes. Evidently, he had been made aware of the reason for Tomas's visit.

"Bring him in." Cormac instructed the sprite decidedly. Filly nodded his head, and in an instant, flew across the room and through the wooden door that led to the king's private chambers.

"Cormac, who is he bringing? I care not how dangerous or fearsome you have concluded this mission to be, I live to serve you, to serve Cathair Rúnda. Do not cloak your words in mystery, do not doubt my resolve, my honor..." Tomas was grasping at words to try and move the king from his solemn disposition.

Cormac only nodded back at him instructing, "Remember your words, dear Tomas." And with that, he walked over to the wooden door, pulling it open. Tomas heard the sprite's beating wings before he saw Filly flying down the corridor pulling a package at least ten times his size through the air alongside him. The sprite flew through the doorway and carefully deposited the parcel into the king's arms. The king took hold of the small object, his body tensing in anticipation while his face shone with surprising tenderness. Had almost any other fairy witnessed this transaction, they would have immediately recognized the package as infant child and the holder as fierce protector. Tomas, though, had little experience with matters of this sort, and looked upon Cormac with an unfaltering confusion, until the small child let out a shrill cry.

"A baby?" exclaimed Tomas, almost laughing in relief. "Seven Suns Cormac, I thought there was a bloody war starting. Don't tell me it's yours!" Cormac laughed

now, almost manically, as the nerves and anxiety flooded out of his body. He shook his lowered head and rubbed his eyes, chuckling, finally looking back to his friend.

Cormac's face was stark, his jaw clenched, and the baby began to cry fiercely in his arms. Filly flew anxiously behind Cormac from side to side as if he wished to go to the child, but was too afraid to cross into the king's gaze, which now rested determinedly on Tomas. He then began to unwrap the cloth that had held the baby. Tomas took a step back, as he looked upon the child, and stared in complete awe at what he saw before him.

The baby was male, as this was determined in the same concrete fashion with which humans make the distinction. He was young, so small that he could not be but several days old. Already possessing a generous amount of fine, blonde hair, the blue eyed baby cried out desperately as the king raised him gently but with purpose into full sight of Tomas. The blanket cast onto the floor, silky, ink-black wings sprung forth from the child's shoulder blades and began to beat frantically in rhythm with the child's belabored cries.

"Incredible," breathed Tomas as he took a step closer to Cormac, who now bending down retrieved the blanket meant to cover the child, signaling that the demonstration had ended. "How long has it been since we've had fey with wings?" Tomas went on excitedly, "Truly incredible Cormac! Just truly amazing..."

"Not fey," responded the king, his enormous visage now deftly rocked the child back and forth. "His parents were mortal."

“Mortal!” Tomas made no effort to mask his indignant tone. “That is, Cormac, it’s simply impossible.”

“And yet here we are. This child is now, and will remain for the foreseeable future, in the gravest of danger. Tomas, I do not yet know what he means for this world, but his survival is absolutely imperative. There is no one else that I can trust with him.”

“Cormac, no?” Tomas meant for his words to be an answer, but his voice was tight and instead begged the king to end what he had convinced himself must be a cruel farce.

“I have a house prepared for you, the boy’s mother will be waiting there. You will not be alone, I have arranged it so that you will have adequate assistance...”

“Cormac, this is for the Tenders! What am I to do with a Halfling?!” Tomas beseeched the king, his tone blatantly defiant.

Cormac had now handed the child back over to Filly, who flew the quieting babe back down into the king’s chambers. The king then walked back to the great, stone chair, this time, falling heavily into its clutches. He leaned forward with his great arms, and rested his elbows upon his knees, hands met almost as if in prayer as he stared into his lap. The authority had left his voice, as he questioned his distressed friend, “Do you think I do not know what I ask of you? Tomas, I am aware of your love for this world, and through that love, you have blessed all of Síog-kind with your faithful and dutiful service. The truth is, I have failed you.” The king spoke with pain and regret that were left hanging, tangible in the air. “I sought to build a new world for the Síog race, a brighter realm, with roads connecting all of our peoples, and windows that let us see

into each other's once-separate worlds. Such folly... now I see that the roads are cracked and warped, the windows so easily broken, sacred treasures are stolen, and sacred trusts are betrayed." Cormac finally looked up at Tomas, willing him to understand, "Tomas, I have reason to believe the dark fey is among us."

"Howdy there, neighbor!" Tomas snapped out of the day dream and was jolted back to his porch in Hallettsville. He cursed under his breath as his now cold tea spilled over his hand onto the wooden steps below. Riley Cook waved from his porch across the street to the disgruntled fairy.

"Hullo there, Riley." Tomas stepped off the porch and walked to meet his neighbor at the mailbox. Riley and his wife, Cara, had lived across the street ever since Tomas had moved to the small town and had been something of an aunt and uncle to the kids. "How's it going?" he shook hands with the shorter, heavy set man.

"Oh can't complain, Fred's bringing his family in for the weekend, and Cara is getting the house ready for her grandbabies." Riley gave his friend a knowing smile, "Honestly, I had to duck out before she could give me another chore. Crazy woman is washing the baseboards right now."

"Riley honey, what are you doing out there? I've been looking for you for the last twenty minutes!" called a deceptively sweet voice from the neighbor's window.

"Crap, she found me." Sighed poor Riley.

"Oh, hey there, Tommy! Send him back in won't you, I need him to dust the guest rooms!" Cara waved at Tommy in the polite country way, subtly masking her irritation towards her husband.

“Have a good one partner.” Tommy shook hands with a dejected Riley and walked back towards the house. The fairy smiled to himself, musing over the curious nature of human relationships. It had taken a long time for him to understand the daily squabbling of his neighbors to actually be a sign of affection between the two. Tomas’s memories drifted to his own human love, beautiful Mary. He could still remember her sweet face, her kind voice, her unbounding love for life...

It was Mary who King Cormac had ordered him to protect all those years ago in his private chambers. The Dark Fey, or the Shadowseekers as they liked to call themselves, were after the young widow and her son, and Tomas was charged with hiding the pair in Halettsville. Despite his protests, the king had cajoled him into accepting the mission. What Tomas had once considered to be a gross misfortune, revealed itself to be nothing short of a miracle. Mary had truly saved his soul, and it had taken less than a year for him to fall hopelessly in love with her. A year after that, Raegan had been born and so the family became complete. They raised the children together for ten wonderful years, and decided to let Liam believe that Tomas was his father until he reached an age to be able and understand his unfortunate beginning in life. Everything seemed to be perfect, until Mary’s nightmares began. Despite Tomas’s attempts to reassure her, Mary became inconsolable, until that fateful day, when Tomas awoke to find his wife gone and a note left where her sweet head had once rested in their bed.

Dear Tommy, please forgive me, but the dreams have only gotten worse. I have to try and find him. I would never forgive myself if there was a chance he could be out there...

I knew you would only try to stop me, this was the only way. You have been such a blessing in my life, and I hope one day, you will come to understand why I had to do this. I know Liam and Raegan will be safe with you. Please give them all of my love, and tell them I will return as soon as possible. I don't expect you to wait for me, but know you are in my heart and mind every day. Always, your Mary

Tomas had resisted every urge to go after her, but was forced to let her go and care for the children. She was convinced that Liam's father somehow lived, although she had seen him murdered in front of her very eyes all those years ago. King Cormac had sent scouts in secret to find her but to no avail, and so now six years later, Tomas was left wondering and worrying every day over his lost love. Liam and Raegan had, of course, struggled with her departure still, as Tomas could never tell them the truth of why she abandoned them. Liam had kept his feelings mostly to himself, but anger and resentment now governed Raegan's feelings towards her mother, and to this day, she refused to speak of the woman that had left them now almost five years ago.

Cormac had insisted long ago that Liam's re-entry into fairy life was crucial to the survival of the nine realms. At that time, this had meant very little to Tomas outside of the fact that he was then being forced to care for the half-breed. Paternal love now filled his heart and mind where only cold fairy logic and ambition had once resided. His heart now ached at the path the young man's life would take, should he choose to enter

the realm. And for these reasons, he had kept the truth from his children, willing them to live a normal and happy childhood for as long as possible.

Tonight was Liam's birthday, and it was finally time to tell him the truth about where he came from. Even though Raegan's Testing was still two years away, Tomas knew that he would not be able to explain another disappearance to her should Liam choose to leave the human world behind. For her own peace of mind, Raegan deserved to know the truth just as much as her brother did.

Tomas pulled out his phone and sighed. It was already 10:00am, and Liam would be picking up Raegan from school in less than five hours. The fairy sighed as he walked back into the house to prepare for that evening's festivities. Little did he know that he had waited one day too long to tell Liam the truth, for the Shadowseekers also had plans for Liam's birthday.

CHAPTER I

Keiran

In the middle of the dark woods surrounding the seaside city of Ciallaíonn stood The Lake of Adrienne. And in the center of the great lake floated the remnants of what legend claimed to be the first portal ever created, connecting the fairy realm of Cathair Rúnda with the world known as Earth. Centuries ago the famous Keeper, Adrienne Swiftstream, built the massive stone structure hovering over the waters that now claimed his name. Before then, Cathair Rúnda had floated between worlds, an invisible island nation whose earthen location lay in the Irish Sea just off the coasts of the Isle of Man.

Swiftstream's construction of the first portals allowed the fairies direct connections on Earth. A great stone archway, each portal stood over twenty feet high. At one time, hundreds of portals were erected across the land. In the period known as the Age of Exploration, fairies traveled freely and frequently between the dimensions, including Earth. In the Great War that followed this era of peace, the Dark Rebellion, who wanted to end all earthen contact, made its primary mission to destroy as many of the portals and their makers as possible. Tragically, Swiftstream and most of his guild met their deaths in this war, and all portals save seven were destroyed before the rebellion was finally put down.

The secrets to constructing the portals died with Swiftstream, and now the remains of hundreds of portals, like the crumbling ruins that stood above The Lake of

Adrienne, were strewn across the land. Although magic still resided in the abandoned portals, it was a perilous, and oftentimes fatal task for a fairy to try to access any of the sabotaged structures. And so the majority of the once, great stone archways lay quiet and forgotten by all.

Now, the woods were still as the morning mists rolled in through the trees and over the calm waters they surrounded. As birds chirped and tree sprites flitted through their morning rituals over and around the lake, suddenly a blinding light burst forth out of the mouth of the portal, and the water around it broke into furious waves. From the portal's mouth, Keiran's massive figure came hurtling out as he clutched Dante, his personal sprite, close to his chest and crashed into the water below. Disoriented and loaded down with his traveling garb and weaponry, it was all Keiran could do to keep his head above water. Waves crashed over him as he held one arm above the water, holding Dante, and regained control over the rest of his limbs. Weighed down, Keiran began a slow swim to shore, pulling himself onto the dry land and surveying the area around him.

The woods smelled familiar, and he knew he had tasted this water before. As he came to his senses, the fairy slowly realized he had landed in the Lake of Adrienne, a place where he and Sorcha had spent much of their childhoods escaping from the chores and obligations of daily life in their homes in Ciallaíonn. This was not good. They had landed leagues away from the Crystal Palace, their intended destination. He had known using the corrupted portal was a risk, and now he just hoped the rest of his travelling

party would make it through safely, and they could worry about the rest later. *Where are they?* the distressed fairy thought worriedly.

Ten minutes later, he paced back and forth along the shoreline, staring at the still quiet portal that floated in the distance before him. When activated, the portal filled with a warm, yellow light that could be seen for miles. This light had gone out after Keiran had made his way through, and now it stood menacingly hollow as the fairy stared through it to the great sea beyond. The others should have followed right behind, and yet here he stood helplessly alone. Well, he was not entirely alone. Dante flew around his head worriedly, also staring at the portal, as if their thoughts could bring it to life. Standing about two inches high, the Sprite resembled what most human children would probably expect all fairies to look like. His tiny, golden wings beat furiously as he flew around Keiran's head, worriedly muttering concerns that reflected the fairy's own fears.

“Too long, too long! They should be here by now! This is not good, oh this is really not good!” Despite Keiran's repeated requests for silence, Dante had continued on in this manner shortly after the pair had entered through the portal, which now had been almost fifteen minutes ago. Keiran tried to walk a ways down the beach by himself, but as usual, the Sprite flew alongside him, mindless of his companion's troubled demeanor. Keiran could not really blame him, as the situation became more troubling with every minute that passed. Without a Keeper, they had no way of entering back through the portal, so they were left powerlessly in Cathair Rúnda, waiting for the others to make it through.

Keiran reflected on all that had transpired since he agreed to this evidently cursed and hopeless mission. Six days ago, he had been called to the High King's chambers, along with fellow-Seekers Fionn and Sorcha, and the young Keeper, Mickey. The four were given little instruction beyond that their mission was to be top secret and that they were being sent to test an unregistered Halfling, under the care of Tomas Flannigan and Lillian Sharp in Hallettsville, Texas... wherever that was. This alone was startling news, as Tomas and Lillian were reportedly based in the Arctic. Keiran remembered the concern in King Cormac's eyes and the urgency with which he spoke, a disposition the young fairy could never remember having witnessed before in the great king.

Keiran was suddenly jolted from the troubling memory by a blinding light burst forth out of the mouth of the portal, and the water around it broke into furious waves. The earth under Keiran's feet began to quake as torrential gusts of wind sent him flying backwards. He forced himself to look towards the portal entrance as a huge mass seemed to be struggling to force its way out. A monstrous green and brown blur pushed forth, made up of... branches? All of a sudden, a gigantic oak tree burst through the portal, burying Keiran and all of his surroundings in a mass of rock and earth. All manner of forest continued to issue out of the portal mouth without prejudice, as small birds and woodland creatures were sent crashing into the beach along with countless trees and shrubbery.

The wind died down and Keiran pushed himself up as he took hold of his surroundings. Half of the Hallettsville Forest seemed to lay in ruin at his feet. Panicked, Keiran called out to Dante, who was nowhere to be seen. Moments later, the ground

seemed to breathe as a figure pushed its way up to the surface. Keiran recognized Sorcha's white-blond mane of hair as she struggled out from under the rubble, muttering a curse as she pulled the Halfling, Liam, onto his feet behind her. His face was a mix of agony and confusion as he cried out in pain, falling back to his knees, as the change began to take hold of his body.

In his almost two centuries as a Seeker, Keiran had brought back fewer than fifty Halflings once they had tested strong enough to enter Cathair Rúnda. Even after their fey blood was confirmed to be strong enough, there was never any way of knowing if the half-humans would survive entering the fairy kingdom. Only half of those brought through the portals survived the change and most who survived would go on to experience dismal failure in Síog training. King Cormac reasoned that the Halflings were the kingdom's only chance at survival as fairy numbers continued to dwindle, but others had questioned the almost certain death sentence that Halflings faced when trying to adapt to the fairy form. After seeing so many transitions first hand, Keiran could not help but sympathize with this line of thought, though ultimately his loyalty was with the High King.

Keiran looked on as Sorcha bent down over Liam, advising him to stay calm and assuring him that this would surely be the worst part of his transition. That was not entirely true, but hopefully it would help him to quiet down. Keiran turned to find Dante, who had seemingly surfaced and was now worriedly flying from creature to creature, as birds and forest animals transformed into Sprites all throughout the wreckage. Squirrels cried out as tails were lost and feet and hands formed where paws once were. Little birds

shook helplessly as translucent wings took shape where their feathers once had been. It was never as bad for Earth's animals, but according to Dante, who had also originated on earth, it was still not a very pleasant experience.

“There, there, you're all right old chap,” the Sprite helped a once-bluebird to her feet as she looked in wonder and confusion at her new found legs. “Yes, those do come in quite handy,” Dante encouraged excitedly. “I was a cormorant myself, other side of the ocean from you most of the time. Yes, you will find the legs a very exciting option for travel. Never much understood the need for them before, but they are truly delightful. There's just something about toes, you know?” The blue-winged Sprite smiled at Dante gratefully. Although speech would come to the once-animals much later, they came pre-equipped with the patience and understanding of love and nature that all innocent creatures are endowed with at birth. She looked upon Dante and likewise Keiran and nodded as if to say, “Yes, you are indeed my friends.” Dante took her hand and continued on to encourage all of the other fledgling Sprites as they pulled their little selves up onto shaking legs.

Seeing that Dante had the situation under control, Keiran now dealt with the realization that Fionn and Mickey had still not made it through the portal and considered the dilemma he and Sorcha now faced. Where four guardians were meant to watch over the Halfling during his transition, now only two remained. Over the course of the next several days, Liam's body would transition into its fairy self, a process that would leave their group incredibly vulnerable. The boy would experience what had been described as a period of excruciating pain, and depending on the strength of his fairy blood, his body

would either accept the changes and become fey, or he would perish in transition. They needed to get him to safety as quickly as possible to avoid detection. Their instructions were to deliver him to the castle without being discovered by outside forces. The portal should have deposited them directly to the secret portal in the High King's chambers, but whatever had gone wrong with Mickey, had also consequently emptied the group out onto the other side of the kingdom.

As if hearing his thoughts, Sorcha answered, "I don't know what happened, Keir. We entered with no problems, but once inside, it was like an earthquake. I thought the walls were going to come down on us. Something was off with Mickey's camán. It took hold of him somehow, his eyes were all green, it was awful. I—I don't know if he made it..."

"Green eyes?" Keiran did not want to think about what that might mean. "What about Fionn?"

Sorcha responded, the anger clear in her voice, "He went back for that, that *human*—she came running in after her brother when the portal began to quake, and he was trying to lead her back out. I think they made it back to the other side, but I can't be sure. It all happened so fast." Her last words came out like an apology, as if she should have been able to have somehow prevented the entire catastrophe. Liam let out a sharp cry of pain, reminding the two fairies of his presence on the ground beside them.

"He's going to wake the entire bloody forest. We need to get him to a safe place while he is in transition, somewhere close and as quickly as possible." Keiran's statement asked the question he knew Sorcha would not want to answer.

Her face communicated utter shock as she realized his meaning. “No, absolutely not, no way. I’ll stuff a sock in his mouth and carry him to the castle myself.” Sorcha’s eyes were cold as ice as her mouth pressed into a hard line of defiance. Keiran patiently stared back at her until, eyes downcast, she admitted, “He wouldn’t even let us in.”

Keiran sighed, “Sorcha, I don’t think that’s true, and I’m not asking.” She looked up at him, her eyes now full of contempt, and he didn’t blame her. He hated playing the authority card, but he did not have time for her issues with her father. He continued on, entreating her to see reason, “Look, we have no idea what we are up against. By now, Murtagh will have realized he has been tricked and will have alerted the enemy, and I say the enemy, but we really have no idea who that is. Until we do, we can trust almost no one. Without Fionn, we have no way to alert the king. We need to get to the castle as quickly as possible, and we are going to need help from friends that we can trust. Your father may not welcome you with open arms, but he will not turn you away. This is bigger than us, probably much bigger than we would like to imagine, and we have a responsibility to now. To the boy, to Cormac, and to the kingdom.”

Keiran had struck upon Sorcha’s weakness, as her tribe above all else, had held duty to the Síog race in its highest regard. She looked at him helplessly and conceded, “Fine, but I don’t think we are going to be as welcome as you’d expect.”

“We are under instruction of the High King, and your father can either open his gates or answer directly to Cormac.” At this, Sorcha let out an exasperated sigh, clearly dreading the impending journey. Keiran nudged the fairy girl mischievously with a

wink, “And if I was a betting fairy,” Sorcha could not help but laugh here at her friend’s sarcasm, “I would bet we have a place to sleep tonight.”

CHAPTER II

Sorcha

“Please, please, someone help me!” Liam writhed in pain on the ground calling the attention of the fairies back to his tortured figure.

Dante flew swiftly to the boy, landing on his head. He placed his tiny palms on Liam’s face and muttered worriedly, “Too hot, he’s too hot! The fever has already set in!” Using his spritely magic, he continued to take measure of the boy’s condition, when all of a sudden, he looked up at Sorcha and Keiran in shock. “Turn him over,” he commanded with an atypical sense of authority.

Without pause, Sorcha bent down and gently turned the moaning figure onto his stomach. Dante signaled for her to lift the boy’s shirt, and they watched in pure awe as she uncovered the twin sores that had begun to form on either side of Liam’s upper spine. “It cannot be,” she whispered, and Keiran echoed her confusion from behind.

“Wings?” Keiran knelt down beside her and rested a hand on Liam’s shoulder blades. “What can this mean? There has not been a fairy born with wings in over a century. Unless—”

“Don’t be ridiculous.” Sorcha was sure that Keiran could not be so foolish as to believe...

“The prophecy has come true,” Keiran interjected before she could finish the thought. “It all makes sense, Sorcha. The secret mission, King Cormac’s warning, he had to know!”

“Know what exactly?” demanded Sorcha. “That this, this boy, this *human* boy is some kind of savior, the future king of the realms?!” In seeming support of her incredulity, Liam let out a pathetic series of moans, clutching his stomach with one hand while pulling at his hair and face with the other.

Suddenly, he reached up and grabbed Sorcha by the arm, “Please, please,” he gasped between the words, “Please help me, I-- I’m dying.” The brief moment of consciousness was lost as he fell back to the ground, eyes rolling as his body began to tremor.

“We don’t have any time to waste.” Keiran insisted. “Regardless of who the boy is, who he will be is important to the king, and that is all that matters now. We must get him to your father, you have to take him. If you run through the night, and rest at Calloway’s Cove in the morning, you should reach the city before noon tomorrow. Avoid the main gates... use Iffy’s passage, and remember, trust no one.”

Sorcha had been one of the fastest fairies to graduate from the Academy in decades, meaning that Keiran and Dante would be at least half a day’s run behind her. She loathed the idea of returning to her father’s fortress, but the idea of showing up alone without Keiran, was simply terrifying. “I won’t stop until I arrive,” she answered, trying to sound much braver than she felt. “I should be at Iffy’s before dawn.”

With that, she hoisted the boy up with ease, and took off into the forest. Through the trees and over the brooks and streams, Sorcha's feet fell into the footprints of her past. As a fledgling fairy, she had run through these woods countless times with Keiran. Those were simpler, sadder days. She struggled to recall the time before she had left the city... not much was for her there. Her mother had died bringing her into the world, and her father, Chief Swiftstream, was not known for a compassionate nature. Busy leading the tribes of Ciallaíonn, Chief Swiftstream had little time for the caretaking of his only daughter. That role had fallen to Iffy, Sorcha's nursemaid, who had essentially raised Sorcha from infancy to when she left the sea city for training at The Academy.

Iffy! Sorcha spent as little time as possible thinking of the fairy who had truly been the only mother she had ever known. What had she thought of Sorcha abandoning her without even a proper goodbye? How angry she must have been!

Sorcha remembered the night she had fled Ciallaíonn for Beannaithe, the royal city where selected fairies went to train at The Academy. She had been through The Testing in secret, and when she received her invitation to train, she knew that her father would never consent to her leaving her home and the responsibilities there. The Swiftstreams had been the ruling family over Ciallaíonn for centuries, and it was her father's expectation that Sorcha take over as Chief after him. But the young fairy dreamed of life outside of the city's waters, and as a fledgling had yearned to see the realms and worlds depicted in the story books that Iffy read to her.

Keiran, her best friend since childhood, came from a fishing family. His father, who also served on the city council under Swiftstream, had always encouraged his son's

passion for adventure and travel. In turn, Keiran had fueled similar passions within young Sorcha, and so together, they had planned her great escape from Ciallaíonn. Under the cover of night, Sorcha left two notes behind on her bedside table. The first, for her father, begging his forgiveness and his understanding for the life she knew in her heart that she was meant to live. And the second, for Iffy, reading simply, “You are the only reason I have the strength to do this now. I know that if I try to say goodbye, I will not be able to go. I promise I will come back one day, when father has had time to accept that this is the only way and that it is my right to choose! I will write as soon as I can, I love you!”

Sorcha had never written. After arriving in Beannaithe, it had been easier to leave the past behind her. She had put her heart and mind into training, and she had graduated with Keiran at the top of her class. She was recruited by the Seekers, and had so far completed four successful recruiting missions. She was the only fairy in her class not to have lost a Halfling to the transition. Seeming to challenge this achievement, Liam continued to shake and cry out as she ran through the forest. She whispered fiercely into his now pointed ears, “Hold on Liam, we are almost there!”

CHAPTER III

Keiran

Keiran watched Sorcha disappear into the trees and turned back to face the remains of the Hallettsville forest surrounding him. “What a mess!” the fairy cursed at the air.

This entire mission had been a complete disaster from the start. The king had offered little instruction outside of telling the Seekers to retrieve Liam and bring him to the Crystal Palace as quickly as possible. They were to tell no one of the assignment and were to enter through the portal in Chicago which would have emptied them at the gates of the castle. Then, the Shadowseekers had shown up and forced them to escape through the portal in Hallettsville. With a damaged portal, there was never any sure way to know where a traveler would end up. The fairies were lucky to have landed inside of Cathair Rúnda’s borders, albeit on the complete opposite side of the kingdom.

Now Keiran stood alone in the wreckage with his travelling party spread across the realms. Hopefully Sorcha and the boy would be safe in Ciallaíonn soon, but there was no telling where Mickey and Fionn had ended up in the confusion of the portal collapse. He said a silent prayer for his friends and continued his trek through the debris. As Keiran continued to hide traces of footsteps and other hints of evidence that linked them to the area, Dante had perched himself on a discarded branch and remained suspiciously quiet.

“Something on your mind, Dante?” The questions fell on deaf ears as Dante continued to stare off into the distance, completely unaware of his fairy companion’s presence. Slightly offended, Keiran grabbed the end of the branch and gave it a firm shake, sending the Sprite flying through the air.

“Arggh!” Dante flipped a few times before regaining his balance and flying back over to face his assailant. “Was that absolutely necessary?” Smoothing his little jacket, the sprite huffed and puffed, staring angrily back at Keiran.

The fairy grinned, “I’m not used to you being so quiet, it makes me nervous. Usually I couldn’t pay you a dozen shillings to shut your trap.”

“Very funny.” Dante feigned offense, and then after a brief moment, turned back to the fairy with a grave face. “Keiran, the boy...”

“I know, I know. I suppose we should have expected something like this from the beginning. All of the secrecy, the Shadowseekers... this was never going to be a normal Seeking. We should have been more careful... I should have been more careful. Now Fionn and Mickey might not...” his voice trailed off, and he stared off towards the crumbling portal that still floated over the lake waters.

“Now that’s enough of that,” snapped Dante. “You cannot hold yourself accountable for any of this... this absolute mess of a Seeking! That blasted Cormac should not have been so damned secretive!”

“Dante!” In the past, the Sprite’s hasty tongue had gotten the pair into a considerable amount of trouble.

“Don’t ‘Dante’ me; you know very well that I am right. Obviously the king knew there was more to this boy than the Halflings that were brought in before him. We should have been accompanied with a defense team. Now look at us!” The sprite kicked angrily at a twig and then cursed loudly, grabbing his toe in pain.

Keiran sighed, “Obviously King Cormac did not know who he could trust.” After considering this sobering thought, he continued, “Dante, something is coming, and I know you have felt it too. Tell me that you can’t smell the storm.” Keiran lifted his head, closing his eyes, deeply inhaling the air around him. “And whatever it is, it’s bad... and I have a feeling that this boy, Liam... somehow he is at the heart of it all. Now all we can do is make sure to deliver him safely to the castle.”

“Is that so? The king did not know who he could trust!” the Sprite scoffed. And you expect me to believe that in all of Cathair Rúnda , the most capable and trustworthy options were three young Seekers and a Keeper so fresh he can barely hold on to his Travelling Rod! Forgive me if I am not convinced!”

The universe seemed to answer Dante’s protests before Keiran could, and all of a sudden the wind began to roar around them as the crumbling remains of the portal once again began to shake. With an overwhelming roar, the bright light of the opening portal poured out over the lake blinding Keiran and Dante as the wind forced them back towards the tree line. Keiran reached out and grabbed at Dante. Holding the sprite to his chest, the fairy ducked down and braced himself. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw a figure thrown out of the portal mouth.

The figure fell into the water below, and the portal shook and roared as fiercely as Keiran had ever seen. “It’s going to explode!” cried Dante. Before he had finished the sentence, the portal flashed blinding white before breaking apart. Keiran wrapped himself tightly around Dante, as a shower of rocks rained down over the lake and surrounding forests.

Dust filled the air, and Keiran unfolded his arms and looked down at the trembling Sprite. “All right, little friend?”

“All right,” panted Dante. Looking over Keiran’s shoulder, he then pointed and cried, “Mickey!”

Keiran turned to see what looked like a mangled version of the young Keeper stumbling through the water up towards the bank. He ran towards the figure, jumping over branches, and rushed into the lake. Wading into the water, he met a bruised and bleeding Mickey. Keiran took his fairy companion by the arms, looking him up and down for any major damage, “Seven suns, am I glad to see you, Mick! Are you all right, what happened? We thought you and Fionn had gotten trapped on the other side. Bloody hell, Fionn! Is he okay? Mick, talk to me!”

Mickey was not looking at Keiran, but instead looked desperately back and forth across the bank. Wincing in pain, he gasped, “Liam! Where is the boy?”

“Don’t worry about him now, Mick. He’s safe with Sorcha, on his way to Ciallaíonn...”

“Ciallaíonn?!” Mickey’s eyes filled with terror as he grabbed Keiran by the collar. “Keiran, no, that’s where the Shadowseekers will expect us to take him!”

“Mickey, calm down, there is no way for them to know where the portal would end up... we didn't even know where it would take us.”

“No, you're wrong! They know. They are the reason that we are here, don't you see? They forced us through! I've never seen anything like it, Keiran. They had a Keeper with them, and he was stronger than anyone I have ever seen. I had to destroy the portal to keep them from following me in!” The fairy seemed to be catching his breath, and Keiran observed that any wounds he had taken on seemed to be superficial. “They'll have contacts in the realm Keiran, we need to get to Sorcha and Liam as quickly as possible.”

Keiran nodded, “If we run through the night, they should only end up half a day's run ahead of us. Can you travel?”

“Let's go,” Mickey's eyes were fierce and determined. “A prayer to the Sun that we are not too late.”

CHAPTER IV

Liam

Flashes of light, hushed voices, footsteps falling deftly on a wooden floor, and pain, an unbearable, mind-numbing pain... Liam was trapped in darkness, unable to open his eyes, as he struggled to comprehend the world around him, all the while falling in and out of consciousness. Brief memories flashed through his mind: a glowing doorway, green trees here, blue trees there, pink trees everywhere... a forest? The leaves, he had never seen anything like them before! And then there was the tunnel! Water surrounded him from every side, but it did not touch him! That tunnel had seemed to stretch for miles. How had he made it so far? The girl! Sorcha? There was no way a girl had actually carried him to... wait, where was he again?

“There, there dearie, all right, you’re all right. Try not to move now.” A kind, old voice whispered in his ear, and something cool was placed on his forehead. In a more urgent tone, the voice sent quick instructions across the room. “Filly, go now for Sorcha. Tell her the boy is coming round. Hurry now!”

Liam’s eyes began to flutter, taking in brief glimpses of a dimly lit, wooden room. A fire crackled in the distance and for some reason it seemed to be burning blue. A small, figure moved in his peripheral, continuing to dab the cold cloth over his face. “I must be dreaming,” his voice cracked, and his throat ached after days without use.

“No dearie, not dreaming.” The voice was calm and soothing, and it reminded him of old Granny Whitman, the sweet next door neighbor who always had a kind word for him and Raegan as children. There was something else in the voice though, almost a sadness, as she continued, “No, not a dream at all. Although this life may be yet far more than you could have ever imagined.”

Liam turned his head again trying to locate the grandmotherly voice, and he was astonished at the figure that took shape before him. Where he expected a kind, old lady, he found a tiny creature standing on the bed beside his paralyzed body. Although the voice rang distinctly female, he had never seen anything like the little beast that stared worriedly back at him through four, brightly glowing blue eyes. Light purple skin adorned an insect-like frame, and only two feet high, with scaly skin, the figure was the most terrifying thing that Liam had ever seen.

His sudden jolt into reality had his mind racing and his head spinning, and he was overcome with an overwhelming sense of nausea. He tried to cry out, but only managed to emit a quiet, pitiful moan. He struggled to raise himself off the bed, but the little creature placed both of its hands on his shoulders and forced him down with what seemed to be very little effort.

“All right, all right! Calm down, child! No one is here to hurt you. If they were, there is not a lot you could do about it now, could you?” The creature’s pleading fell on deaf ears as Liam continued to struggle to lift himself. “Have it your way then!” The purple form turned its back on Liam, grabbing some kind of pouch from the table next to the bed, while muttering under its breath, “Humans, so stubborn!”

Turning back to Liam, the creature filled its tiny palm with a white, shimmering powder from the bag, and blew it straight into his eyes. Bracing himself, Liam recoiled from what he was sure would be an overwhelming pain. The little monster was trying to blind him! Instead, his world went white as all the noise and confusion faded away, until the brightness faded into darkness, and quiet dreams of brightly colored forests and water-filled tunnels were all that remained.

This time, the dreaming was more peaceful, and the boy rested for several hours, unaware of the many comings and goings from his little wooden room in the little wooden house off the coast of the Crystal Sea. As he finally regained a conscious state, he was not met with the same sense of overwhelming anxiety as before. And now, it was Sorcha's smooth and urgent voice that filled his ears, bringing him back to whatever odd reality he had ended up in, "Hey there Cowboy, okay now, just take it slow."

Liam struggled to open his eyes, but a hand remained firmly pressed against his eyelids. "Okay Cowboy, now listen to me. Things are going to be a little strange at first. I am not going to look quite the same as you remember, but I need you to stay calm. It's me, Sorcha, and I'm here to help you okay? If you get crazy again, Iffy's going to have to get her special powder back out, and we don't really have time for that."

"Who's Iffy?" Again, Liam's throat felt like sandpaper as he tried to push the words out.

"I know you are going to have a lot of questions, and you deserve the answers, but I need you to promise me that you are going to stay calm, alright?" Sorcha's words were warm, but urgent, triggering a subconscious panic in Liam's mind. Why did he

need to promise to stay calm? What was wrong? As if hearing the boy's pending mental collapse, Sorcha urged, "Liam, promise me!"

Her hands clasped both of his now, gently squeezing him. The gesture was somehow reassuring, and Liam was suddenly overcome with a sense of calm. Sorcha was on his side, and Sorcha would not lie to him. She said everything was going to be okay, and she was going to answer his questions. He lowered his voice, "All right, I'm all right. I promise I will be calm."

With that, he felt Sorcha release his hands, and then slowly, the cloth was removed from his eyes. Again, the room slowly came into focus as he took stock of the wooden walls, the wooden ceiling, the blue-glowing fireplace, until his eyes finally came to rest on Sorcha. Sorcha? Before him, an ethereal figure clad all in white looked eagerly back at him. Those bright, blue-green, golden eyes were definitely Sorcha's, but the rest of her—Liam struggled to keep his promise to stay calm.

This creature was unlike any woman he had ever seen... even sitting, he could tell she was over ten feet tall. Blonde, flowing locks ran down her shoulders, her skin shimmered in the firelight. Her eyes were larger now, and seemed to emit a soft glow. Pointed ears peaked out through her white blonde tresses. Her face was the Sorcha he had met back in Hallettsville, and at the same time, it was also quite *other*. And yet, despite being unlike anything Liam had ever seen, he was surprised to find himself completely calm when staring back into her eyes. This creature, Sorcha, was distinctly feminine, delicate even... she was beautiful.

“How are you feeling?” her voice was heavy with concern, her eyes shifting nervously between him and the door as if expecting him to make a run for it any moment.

“You look pretty.” Liam struggled to smile, as Sorcha let out a laugh mixed with shock and relief.

“And that would be Iffy’s lavender powder talking. She had to give you quite the dose to put you to sleep. You should not have given her such a hard time, she’s probably the only reason you are still alive.” The concern was back, as she let out a heavy sigh, “I thought we were going to lose you to the transformation.”

“The transformation?” Liam’s senses were slowly returning to him. His nostrils filled with strange and yet familiar scents, and he was suddenly overwhelmed with the smell of honeysuckle, homemade apple pie, oil grease... flashes of images raced through his mind, almost as if he was smelling the physical memories of his past. His eyes began to take note of every detail surrounding him. He had to blink several times before he could accept the fact that the air seemed to be shimmering before him.

“You will be noticing some... changes. When we crossed over into Cathair Runda, your body began the transformation from human to fairy. It’s an incredibly painful process for humans... sometimes a very dangerous one.” Sorcha paused, and Liam understood that she was holding back here for his benefit. “Well, I guess you know that now.” She smiled nervously at him.

“Please, I need to get up, my back is killing me.” The strength was returning to his limbs, and he moved to push himself up off the bed.

“All right, easy there, Cowboy.” Sorcha put her arm under his as his feet found the ground, and he lifted himself up off the bed. He braced himself, turning to her and was astounded to realize that he was looking down into her eyes. He had to be at least twelve feet tall!

“Yes, you’re a bit further from the ground now.” She smiled at him as he shakily surveyed the limbs he seemed to be attached to. An athlete, he had always considered himself to be a big guy, but somehow he had managed to grow almost four feet taller. His arms and legs were swollen, and he felt every fiber of every muscle that ran through his body.

Sorcha walked over to a chest that lay on the opposite end of the room. She brought back a silver object, and smiled up at him. Turning the silver piece over, she held a mirror up to his face, “You see, there are quite a few changes.”

Liam looked down at his reflection, and all of the newly found strength in his limbs seemed to be suddenly lost. Again, he thought he recognized eyes that were his own, if only larger, and the jet black hair was still his, if only longer... but the rest of this, this thing... who was it? His face looked green, and three gold lines ran perpendicular from his eyebrow to his cheekbone on the left side. It must be a trick of the light. His face looked more angular, stronger... he was terrifying. “What—what’s wrong with me? Did it go wrong... the transforming thing? I—I’m green!”

CHAPTER V

Sorcha

The boy took the mirror from Sorcha in shock, and his body moved back down towards the bed as his knees temporarily appeared to have lost function. She could only imagine what he must be going through. She resisted the temptation to step inside of his mind to take a closer look.

“There is nothing wrong with you.” Sorcha tried not to look amused as Liam was clearly struggling with the situation. When she had first seen him, it had almost taken her breath away. He was, by far, one of the biggest fairies she had ever seen. He would be the fastest and the strongest of them all... he was beautiful.

“Why don’t I look like you!” he demanded. “You—you’re normal. I.. I’M GREEN!”

Sorcha sighed, perplexed as she attempted to gather her thoughts, and then continued. “Yes, you are green, well not green, we have different names for the colors here... It means that you have Dramhadhman blood. They are the fairies of the mountains. I am a descendant of the Ciallaíonn tribes, which is why we look a bit different.”

“Drama-what? Ciallee-who? What is this?!” Liam touched the golden marks on his face.

“Yes, oh well those, are what you might call a birthmark of sorts.” She had been amazed to find the golden symbols signifying that he descended from a royal line. The marks were rare, and they would definitely draw unwanted attention to him on their passage to King Cormac’s castle in Beannaithe. She resolved it was probably best not to worry him anymore at the moment, but she also did not relish the idea of lying to him. Perhaps it would be more useful to turn his mind to another potential problem. “How is your back?”

“It feels like someone stabbed me and left the knife behind. Correction, like someone stabbed me twice, and left both knives behind.” He lifted his hand and reached behind for his shoulder blades.

“Stop!” Sorcha reached to pull his hand back. “We are going to need Iffy for that. She is the only one with experience with wings here.”

“Come again?”

“You heard me, Cowboy.” She tried to look more certain than she felt. In all her seventeen turns, she had only met a handful of fairies who had wings. “Legends tell us that in the beginning every fairy possessed all of the divine gifts. The First Hundred, they were called, could read each other’s thoughts, disappear at will, create fire and ice from the air around them, and they could fly.”

“So... like Superman.” Liam’s face was skeptical, and Sorcha knew he was not taking her seriously.

She continued patiently, “I do not know of this super gentleman you speak of. But The First Hundred were incredible beings. They were created to watch over the realms and to monitor the flow of time between worlds.”

The boy’s glowing ice-blue eyes tightened, and she could tell his interest was beginning to grow, “What happened to them... to the hundred fairies?”

“Well, no one knows for sure, but stories say that some of the fairies became attached to the other worlds they were in charge of looking after. Most of the worlds house different kinds of life forms, vegetation and every kind of beast you can imagine. But there was one world that was different from the rest, where a new kind of creature lived. This creature could walk and talk and resembled the fairies in their own way.

“Earth?” Now she had his full attention.

“Yes, Earth. And so the fairies began to interact and well... intertwine themselves with the humans creating a new breed. The effects were two fold. Where the fairies gained the emotion and passion of the human race, they began to lose some of the magical properties of the fairy blood. For centuries, this continued, and now, we resemble the humans more than ever and most fairies only have one of the magical gifts, if any.” She took a breath, and looked to see Liam now staring down at his feet.

“So... the humans... we basically made you the weakest version of yourselves?” The words were half-accusation, half- apology, and it was clear she had put Liam on the defensive.

“Yes, some do see it that way. We cannot all fly and read minds and make fire out of the air, and there are certain families that have gone out of their way to avoid the

mingling of their blood with those from Halfling families. These families are strong and they still carry many of the magical gifts in their blood lines, but I have met fairies like this, and there is no love or warmth in their hearts. Physical strength is not power, Liam.” These last words had been spoken to her by King Cormac only a short time ago as Sorcha often found herself discouraged for not yet having discovered her own, magical gift.. They had given her the strength to commit to the mission to retrieve Liam, and she hoped they gave Liam the courage he would need now.

“But there are not a lot of fairies who can fly?”

“No, it is one of the rarest gifts.” Sorcha tried to mask the worry in her voice. She was not sure what wings meant for Liam, but she knew that regardless, with great power there would always be great consequences.

“So where are we now?” Liam looked around the room and back to himself in the mirror, touching his face in a mixture of awe and confusion.

“This is Ciallaíonn, the seaside city. It’s—well this is where I am from. My father is regent over the city.” Her voice was quiet, and she cursed herself for sounding so timid. She was not accustomed to coming across so hesitant and unsure, but Liam and the situation in general both had her feeling very vulnerable.

“So I get to meet the parents?” Liam’s playful glint was back in his eyes as he looked to her with sudden interest at the mention of her family.

“No, that... that is impossible. He doesn’t even know I’m here actually...” Before she could continue, a knock sounded at the door. “That must be Iffy. Behave!” She admonished him before opening the door to let in the little purple hobgoblin.

Iffy entered the room, walking straight over to Liam. She climbed up on the bed, hands on her hips, and wagged a finger in his face. “Gave me a lot of trouble boy, I hope Sorchy has sorted you out.”

“I—I’m sorry. I didn’t know what you, well who you--” Liam fumbled over an apology.

“There will be time enough for apologies later. Now let’s get you outside.” Iffy snapped at Liam and pointed a finger to the door.

“Outside?” His voice was confused, and his face still looked slightly terrified.

“Well you don’t think I am going to have you unharnessing those wings in here do you?” She continued to push him with her little arms until he finally lifted himself back up off the bed and reluctantly made his way to the door. He turned back to Sorcha, looking overwhelmed, asking a million questions with his wide eyes.

She smiled encouragingly and gave him a wink, “Don’t worry Cowboy, I’m right behind you.”

CHAPTER VI

Mickey

Mickey pushed himself to keep up with Keiran's fast pace as they ran through the forest. As a Keeper, he had less combat and physical training than Seekers like Keiran and Sorcha who were expected to interact with and travel through the other realms. He had been surprised when King Cormac had instructed him to join the Seeking party for Liam. Typically, a Keeper would stand guard at the portal of entry. It was almost as if the king had predicted the mission might be thrown off course. Had Mickey not been with the other fairies in Halettsville, the situation could have ended up even more disastrous than it already had.

Suddenly, Keiran came to a blinding halt, and Mickey narrowly avoided colliding with him. Keiran signaled for quiet as his pointed ears pricked up and his nose sniffed at the air. Mickey strained his ears until he thought he caught a faint whiff of words on the wind. They were still several leagues from Ciallaíonn, and the three moons of Cathair Rúnda hung high in the night sky. Who--or what--was out there?

Keiran signaled for Mickey to follow, and they made their way quietly through the trees as the voices became louder and a soft glow began to show in the distance. Almost upon the unsuspecting party, Mickey suddenly recognized one of the voices. It was Muran, one of the Shadowseekers from the portal! But he had destroyed the portal, it was impossible!

Sure enough, as they looked on from the cover of nearby foliage, Mickey and Keiran discovered Muran, Keenan, and the hunting party of Ghoraths surrounding a purple ball of angel fire. The earth around them was black and charred and the remains of several trees lay black and smoking around the party. The hunched, black figures of the Ghoraths seemed to be crowding over the carcass of some poor beast as the dark fairies argued.

“—landed us leagues from Ciallaíonn, you idiot,” fumed Muran. The agitated fairy stood almost two feet over his companion. He had trained in Mickey’s class at the Academy, and by fairy standards, he was as about as large and menacing as they came. Dark black hair sat atop a strong, angular, angry-looking face, his broad shoulders tight and fists clenched as he paced back and forth underneath the glowing angel fire.

Little Keenan cowered below him. Where Muran was tall and strong, Keenan existed as his exact opposite. A scrawny, light-featured fairy with a pinched nose and beady black eyes, Keenan had never been considered by any of the training schools, least of all The Academy. His type were typically found in league with the Shadowseekers and so finding him in Halettsville had been no surprise. Muran, on the other hand, had been at the top of Mickey’s class alongside Keiran and Sorcha. He had been hard, but was not an altogether unfriendly fairy, and Mickey could not believe it when he had broken down the door of the Flannigan home and named Liam his prisoner and property of the Shadowseekers.

As if responding to Mickey’s confusion, Muran continued angrily at Keenan, “We should not even be here right now! Correction, *you* should not be here. How Niall

expects me to accomplish this mission with an oaf of a Keeper is beyond reasoning!” Mickey and Keiran both perked up at the mention of Niall... he must be the Shadowseeker that Muran and Keenan were reporting.

“What?! As this supposed to be my fault? That blasted excuse for a Keeper, Dickey, or whoever he is! He was the one that disrupted the portal! My staff is all screwed up now... we should have landed right inside the city gates!” Keenan pleaded with Muran, indicating his still smoking staff. “Whatever he did closing the portal, it disrupted the Time in my staff. There’s no telling where it will land us now.”

Muran let out an exasperated sigh as he pulled a dark pouch out of his pocket. “I don’t need to hear your excuses. We need to check in and then keep moving.” From the pouch, he sifted a yellow powder into his hands. Mickey thought it looked a lot like the magical dust used by the dwarves, but every time he had seen it used, it was usually pink. Blowing the powder into the wind, Muran whispered an indecipherable incantation, in a language Mickey had never heard before.

The yellow dust swirled faster and faster, forming a glowing circle. At first the circle was hollow, until it slowly filled with a warm light. It looked almost like a miniature portal. Suddenly, a figure emerged from the glow. Mickey’s eyes slowly recognized the shape of a floating head. The figure seemed to be wearing a cloak and its facial features were indiscernible. A low, guttural voice spoke resounded in the night air, “I trust your mission was a successful one then. Show him to me Muran... show me the boy.”

Muran bowed his head with surprising solemnity, responding calmly, “There were complications, my Lord—”

“Complications.” The anger in the rasping voice sent chills down Mickey’s spine, and fear glowed in Muran’s eyes. Keenan shook behind him, out of sight from the floating head.

“Yes, my Lord. When we arrived at the human residence, we came upon a troop of Seekers, Keiran McLaren, Sorcha and Fionn Swiftstream. They had a Keeper with them too, Mickey Treesong. They fled to the secret portal in Halettsville, though I know not how they knew of its existence. We chased them into the portal, but Mickey disrupted the time flow. We were pushed out somewhere into the nearby forests, and Keenan’s staff seems to have been affected...”

“Keenan’s staff?” The figure’s head shot up, the dark voice seemed to be a mix now of anger and confusion.

“Yes, my Lord, we used the Time to open a temporary gateway, but his staff seems out of alignment...”

Again the voice cut Muran off, “What do you mean Keenan’s staff? Where is Connolly? He was assigned to accompany you on the mission.” The voice was almost growling now as Keenan sobbed on the ground, eyes shifting up and down pleading wordlessly for Muran’s mercy.

“I—I just wanted to help, Master,” Keenan’s trembling voice whispered. “I thought, well I thought if I helped bring back the boy it would prove to you I was worthy of the cause... It, it wasn’t my fault, I—”

“Where is the boy now?” The voice was calm and burning, like a fire before it catches flame.

“We believe they are headed to Ciallaíonn, my Lord. Sorcha’s father is regent over the city.” Muran’s gaze was fixed and furious on Keenan’s trembling figure.

“Very well. Your mission remains the same. Waste no time, and bring the boy to Dramhadhman.” Muran bowed his head in ascent. “You say the idiot’s staff has been damaged?” Again, Muran nodded. “Then he is of no use to you. Get rid of him”

For a moment, Muran’s voice seemed to falter, “As you wish, my Lord.” Keenan now lay shamelessly sobbing on the ground. In a moment, the floating head was gone leaving a burst of yellow dust in its wake. “You damned fool, you just don’t know when to leave well enough alone.” Muran’s voice almost seemed to carry a note of pity as he looked down at his whimpering companion.

Keenan had his arms over his head, bracing himself for the worst. Muran sighed and kicked at the air, “Oh get up and stop your quivering.” Gasping for breath, Keenan peeked out from behind his crouch reluctantly. “Get up you oaf, today is not your last. Against my better judgement, I will allow you to live, but you must never return to Dramhadhman unless you want us both killed.”

Keenan stood on shaking legs, staring at Muran in disbelief, “I, I don’t understand... thank you, thank you...” he moved towards Muran, as if to embrace him forcing the other fairy backwards.

“Get out of here now you fool!” Keenan set off blindly into the forest, just narrowly avoiding running straight into Mickey and Keiran’s hiding place. Muran turned

to the Ghoraths and began to shout orders. “Alright maggots, we need to make our way to the city gates. We will spread out, take note of our position, and then press onward. There is no time to waste!”

Mickey tapped Keiran’s shoulder and the two backed away quietly as Muran continued shouting instructions. When they had put a safe distance between themselves and the Shadowseekers, the two fairies paused to collect their thoughts.

“What do you think that was?” Keiran asked nervously.

“The powder?” guessed Mickey. “I’ve never seen anything like it before.”

“Don’t be daft. Why would Muran let the Keeper live? And who is this Niall? I don’t like this, Mick, I don’t like this at all.” Dante, who flew nervously now around his fairy’s shoulders shook his head vigorously in agreement.

“It doesn’t matter much now though, does it?” Mickey reasoned, “Regardless of his intentions or who he is or is not serving, Muran is still headed to Ciallaíonn, and he still wants Liam.”

“It will take them some time to gather their bearings and find their way to the gates,” Keiran’s statement almost sounded like a question.

“Then we must go now. If we hurry, we will have Liam out of Ciallaíonn before they ever arrive.” And with that, the fairies set off once again for the city gates.

CHAPTER VII

Liam

Liam had to duck as he followed the little creature down the short, narrow hallway. Iffy, her name was Iffy. His back ached and his head was spinning as he reflected on the past week. Just forty eight hours ago he was safe in his home in Halettsville, refusing to believe the news from his father and the oddly dressed houseguests. He had laughed when Dad said fairy, and then he had argued, and then he was angry, and now... what was he? There was no denying this other world now. That is, unless it was all some crazy dream. And if that was the case, it was almost certainly time for him to wake up.

“Watch your step, Cowboy,” Sorcha cautioned from behind as Liam stepped out from a little square door into the night air. She looked nervous, and a nagging feeling in the back of his mind made him realize she had looked that way for quite some time now. Several times she had grabbed his arm or looked at him expectantly before turning away, thinking better of whatever she was about to say. What did she have to be nervous about? He was the one with wings apparently stuck inside of his back! His thoughts were suddenly interrupted as a sparkling wind engulfed him, forcing him to face the world in front of him. The picture that greeted him took his breath away.

The air was alive. Currents of blue and gold shimmering particles whisped through his hair and ran off into the night. He looked up and saw three moons hanging in

the sky, two were the same gold and the third one hung bright blue! The sound of the ocean filled his ears as water ran over his feet. Startled he looked down and almost fell backwards in shock. He stood on stepping stones of a walkway that connected Iffy's home to a cluster of other houses that looked just the same, and the stones and the houses were all floating over water! Liam strained his eyes, but could not seem to find any kind of support that held the structures up and out of the currents.

Sorcha laughed, "The city is built out of moon trees." Her eyes sparkled, and Liam could tell that she was enjoying what must be a look of complete and utter shock on his face.

"Quiet down you two," cautioned Iffy. "We need to get him out of sight, here put this on!" Iffy's tiny arms held up a cloak that Liam tied around his shoulders, pulling a hood up and over his head. All craziness aside, he was actually feeling pretty excited. It was like he was Aragorn in *Lord of the Rings*! "Let's head for the meadows," Iffy's shrill voice cut off his dreams of cloaks and grand journeys.

Sorcha nodded in agreement and signaled for Liam to follow, but not before giving him an encouraging wink, "Nice Cowboy, you are starting to look like a proper fairy." She turned away, tucking her shimmering hair beneath her own hood of crimson and nimbly took off after Iffy.

Liam ran after her as they traveled between houses, towards the outskirts of the little village. He struggled to keep up the pace while his head whipped from side to side, taking in the world around him. It was so beautiful! He could never have imagined a night time so full of light and color. He imagined that this is what Vegas or Tokyo would

be like, without the neon and the people and traffic. The stepping stones finally gave way to what felt and looked like sand (there was really no telling in this place!), and Liam assumed they had made it to the shoreline of the ocean settlement. Up ahead seemed to be a large, glowing wall built up around the coast. Not until they neared the structure, did Liam realize that the wall was actually composed of massive, multi-colored trees.

As they entered the forest, Liam had to stop and feel one of the tree trunks that was pulsing bright yellow and orange. As his hand met the bark, light burst forth, capturing his hand print. He jumped back, pulling his hand away, and the brand of his print still shone on the tree.

From behind, he received a swift, tiny kick to his posterior, “Ignorant child! What are you doing! Should we just draw a map and leave it at the edge of the forest?!” Iffy’s tone was exasperated as her little hands perched atop her hips, and suddenly Liam recognized the very motherly, even human nature of the creature that had given him such a fright just the day before. It was Granny Whitman yelling at him all over again for accidentally adding salt instead of sugar into her famous apple pie.

“I—I’m sorry, I’ve just never seen anything like this. How do they do that? Glow, I mean—” Liam reached his hand out again instinctively and the dwarf swatted it away. He thought he heard Sorcha suppress a giggle from behind.

“No time, no time! We need to get to the meadow. Hurry now, we are almost there!” And so again, Liam followed the fairy and the dwarf through the trees, resisting the temptation to stop and touch everything in his path. They ran for what felt like miles,

and Liam questioned what “almost there” meant in this fairy world. The pain in his back had become so intense that even the brightly colored trees were not enough to draw his attention.

Then, just before he thought his legs would give out, he stumbled into a clearing. Iffy and Sorcha stared up at him expectantly, and the dwarf moved to retrieve his cloak. “Alright boy, off with the shirt.”

Liam did not argue, he was so eager for the pain to subside. Removing his shirt, he looked up and his eyes caught Sorcha. The fairy looked away from him immediately, biting her lip. Was he imagining it, or did she look afraid? He had never seen her look anything but determined and fearless. “So how does this work?” Liam stretched his shoulders, ready for instruction.

“Well according to the scrolls, you should be able to command the wings—”

“According to the scrolls?” Liam interrupted Iffy, suddenly feeling his anxiety double. “What do you mean, you don’t know how this works?”

Iffy started to answer, and then paused, looking to Sorcha. The fairy sighed, finally answering, “We are not exactly sure how it works, Liam, because it’s been almost 100 turns since a fairy was born with wings.” Seeing the confused expression on his face she continued, “Thousands and thousands of years, Liam.” Before he could say anything she assured him, “It is one of the rarest gifts Liam, and a great honor. But, for now, it is better that we keep it a secret. We do not want you to be so easily identified before we get you to the king. At the palace, they can also train you on how to use them. For now, I

think the pain should subside if you at least unharness them for a little while and let them breathe.”

It was a lot for Liam to take in. Not only was he a freaking fairy, some kind of creature from a world that he never would have believe existed, but even here among “his own people” he was some kind of freak. A wave of pain suddenly ran through his spine, forcing him onto his knees. “All right, all right” Iffy was beside him, grasping his arm with surprising strength and even more startling tenderness. “Try to calm your mind. You need your thoughts to be still in order to perform the spell.”

Liam was in too much pain to question the fact that he was also apparently a witch that could perform spells. “What—what do I do now?”

“When your mind is completely calm, I want you to say these words exactly: *Sciathain oscailte!*”

“Skee-ott-ayn oh-sky-latte... got it...” Liam responded almost completely breathless. His vision was starting to blur as the pain worked its way into his head that was surely about to explode from the pressure.

“Seven Suns, this is never going to work!” Sorcha cried out exasperated. “Iffy, he’s in too much pain, he’s had no training, there’s just no way. If something goes wrong, it could—”

“Enough!” snapped Iffy. “This is the only cure for his pain. Unless you’d prefer to carry him over 100 leagues to the Crystal Palace.” The dwarf moved in front of him, placing one hand on his cheek and slowly closing his eyes with other. “Now boy, calm your mind.”

She began to hum words that Liam did not understand, and he felt his thoughts begin to drift. Everything seemed to rush up at once: the fairies showing up at his little country house in Halettsville, his dad disappearing, leaving his sister behind... Raegan! Where was she now? He had left his family behind... and now he was here. He was a fairy? A fairy with wings... As soon as the thoughts had come, they began to slowly fade away, until there was just a warm and empty void, pulsing to the tune of Iffy's incantation. "Very good boy, now repeat after me... *Sciathain oscailte!*" she whispered.

"Skee... skee-ott-ayn oh-sky-latte" his voice was raspy as he tried to mimic her words.

"*Sciathain oscailte!*" her voice was growing louder and the pulsing in his head was beating furiously.

"Scia-thane oh-skyl-tay!" the pressure in his shoulders seemed to build with the words. The pain was unbearable.

"*SCIATHAIN OSCAILTE!*" The dwarf was shouting in his ear, and somehow she seemed to be holding him up in her tiny arms.

"*Sciathain oscailte!*" he cried out. What happened next was an excruciating blur of light and pain. It felt as if his back was trying to rip open. He could feel his body at war with itself. He fell to the ground and was sure that every bone in his back was breaking. He felt Sorcha above him, pulling his head and shoulders up into her arms. All of a sudden, he thought he saw two figures run up out of the forest. There were multiple voices arguing over his body. After the initial white hot blaze of pain subsided, he also became aware of the fact that his back was still intact and seemingly wingless.

“This was a mistake, a mistake!” cried Sorcha.

“It should have worked,” muttered Iffy to herself. “He recited the incantation perfectly...”

“Let me see him, Sorcha” a third voice answered, sounding very familiar. Liam squinted through the pain and thought he recognized another one of the fairies who had come to Texas to collect him... Mickey?

“How’s it going Liam?” Mickey’s voice was warm and kind as he placed a hand on Liam’s forehead. He then pulled out the glowing crystal that all of the fairies seemed to hang around their necks and whispered something into it. The crystal glowed bright as Mickey blew on it. A swirl of sparkling dust flew from it to Liam as Mickey continued the unintelligible whispering. His eyes were closed and his eyebrows furrowed in deep concentration.

The whispering continued and slowly but surely, Liam felt the pain start to subside. It was still there, in his back especially, but the blinding light was leaving his head, and he was able to once again take in his surroundings. He was lying in-between Mickey and Sorcha on the ground, and behind them he could see a pacing Iffy and the dark fairy, Keiran, who watched anxiously. Mickey’s whispering finally subsided and the dust connecting Liam to the crystal dispersed. Tucking the crystal back into his clothes, Mickey confirmed worriedly, “It’s what I feared. There is a block on him... a powerful one. It’s beyond my powers, and he won’t be able to unharness the wings until it is removed.”

“Could it have anything to do with the portal collapse?” Kieran’s deep voice questioned from above. “Time was altered, and he would already have begun the transition...”

“I don’t think so,” Mickey answered. “This block is specific, it has an essence about it. Almost like a signature. I could have sworn I have seen this before, but I just can’t remember.”

A million questions raced through Liam’s mind, but before he could voice any of them, Sorcha interjected, “Thank the Suns you found us, Mickey. I don’t know what we would have done... Wait, how did you find us anyway?”

“The fool boy left his imprint on one of the trees. I connected to their network, and they told me where you were headed. Which is why we need to get him out of here.” Kieran’s voice was urgent as he surveyed the surrounding trees as if any moment he expected intruders.

“What do you mean the portal collapsed?” Liam was finally able to put the words together, deciding this was the most pressing and important question on his list of thousands. “I—I thought you said that you have to return by the same portal that you leave a world.” He had pushed himself to his feet and now directed the question straight to Sorcha, whose eyes seemed suddenly fixed on the forest.

“We had no choice Liam...” her voice was soft and slow, panicked almost. All of the nervous looks and pauses from the past couple of days came back to him as a sense of dread slowly washed over him.

“Look, this is not a discussion to be had now,” Kieran’s voice was commanding and urgent, “The Shadowseekers will be right behind us and we need to press on. There is no time...”

A dark chuckle seemed to echo from the nearby forest, as a hooded figure stepped out into the clearing and answered the fairy, “You are right there, Keiran. You are most certainly out of time.”

CONCLUSION

Liam

The figure walked towards the group, pushing back his hood. Liam recognized the Shadowseeker, Muran, who had pursued them into the fairy realm. Keiran reached for the long blade that he carried on his back as Mickey extended his staff. Muran almost seemed to smile as he lifted his hands in the air, “Now, now, no need for all of that. I come in peace. I only want to have a conversation with Liam.”

“Get out of here, Muran, while you still have the chance. Liam wants nothing to do with you.” Sorcha had stepped between Liam and the dark fairy.

“Now I don’t think that’s true. I can give Liam something you can’t... the truth.” Muran’s statement was a challenge as he looked Liam directly in the eyes.

“What do you mean, the truth?” Liam stepped out from behind Sorcha and approached Muran. Sorcha moved to intercept him, and he held his hand out towards her, suddenly overwhelmed with anger. “No. I want to hear what he has to say.”

“Tell me I can go home right now, if I want to. Tell me there is a portal that will take me back to Dad and Raegan.” Liam’s voice was cold and biting as he questioned Sorcha and the other fairies. She looked offended and angry, sad even, but she said nothing. Liam continued, “I didn’t think so. You took that choice away from me. Regardless of your reasons, you had no right. And now I want to hear what he has to say.”

“Reasonable man.” Muran smiled.

“And you,” Liam pointed to the dark fairy, “I know that you are the reason my father disappeared. I have no trust for you either. But its time I heard both sides to this story, and I am not going anywhere until I get some answers. Why are you following me? What do you want from me?”

“Interesting you should mention your father,” Muran had pulled a small blade out of its sheath on his hip and had begun to run his finger over the point. “Your father is the reason that I am here.”

“What did you do to him?” Liam knew his voice sounded desperate.

“No, no, not Tommy Flannigan—that sad excuse for a guardian. I mean your real father, Liam. He is the reason I am here.” Muran’s black eyes pierced his own, and his voice was low and grave, “Your father was the one that sent me to find you.”

“Liar!” Keiran pointed his blade at Muran furiously. “He is a Shadowseeker, Liam. They are liars and deceivers, you cannot believe a word that he says.”

“What, what do you mean my father?” Liam was so confused, the question was one of many swirling through his mind.

“Tell him Sorcha,” Muran taunted, now looking at the blonde fairy, whose helpless eyes had filled with tears. “Tell Liam that Tommy Flannigan is not his father.”

Liam looked at her unable to ask the question. “It’s true, Liam,” she whispered. “The king was only trying to protect you. Tommy loved you, he loves you Liam—”
Keiran, Mickey, and Iffy all looked on to Sorcha with the same expression of shock that

Liam knew he wore on his own face. Obviously they had not been let on the secret either.

“I don’t understand,” Liam’s voice was almost robotic, the words were coming out on their own.

“Liam, the only difference between me and the fairies that brought you here is that they got to you first.” Muran challenged. “This kingdom is breaking between the old and the new. And the king that they serve would leave you blind and confused. I can promise you that the path to the castle will leave you only with questions upon questions. If you come with me, I can promise you answers. You are probably in a lot of pain right now, yes?” He nodded towards Liam’s back. How could he possibly know about his wings? “I know a healer that can lift the block for you. He is the only one that can help you, and he works for your father too. Your father is a very powerful fairy, Liam, more powerful than you can imagine. I can take you to him, and you can decide for yourself, who you will follow.”

Sorcha begged, “Liam, your father... your real father is not... he is not who you will want him to be.”

“Information that you have received from whom, Sorcha?” Muran scoffed. “I can tell you now, Liam, that this fairy has never met your father. She speaks on behalf of the king who sent your father into exile and took you away from him.”

“Is that true?” Liam knew that it was just from looking into her eyes.

“Liam, I understand you are upset,” Mickey reasoned. “Truly I do,” he scowled at Sorcha, obviously condemning her for keeping secrets from him as well. “But the fact

remains that Muran is a Shadowseeker. He belongs to a race of fairy that would see the destruction of your world and the human race, a people who the king has fought to protect his entire life. We must push forward to the castle, it is the only option.”

The air stood quiet and Liam felt the eyes of his companions upon him. His head hurt, his back hurt, and his mind was roaring with unanswered questions. Finally, he answered, his voice calm and certain. “No. It is not the only option.” He turned to Muran, “I will come with you.”

“Your father will be so pleased—”

“But on one condition.” Muran’s eyes tightened as Liam continued, “They come too, and you promise that they will come to no harm.”

“Liam no—” Sorcha tried to interject.

“It is the only way,” Liam was reasoning with himself now more than the others. “If the king truly hates my father so much that he sent him from Cathair Rúnda , then you know there is no way he will allow me to pursue him after coming to the castle. If my father is out there, I must find him. I need answers...” His voice was hard and sure, “...and I will have them.”

“Fine,” Muran answered begrudgingly. “They can come, but we must leave for the next portal now.”

“Absolutely not!” cried Keiran. “Liam, there is no way that we can trust him.

“Yes, you can.” Muran’s voice had lost all sarcasm as he pulled his own crystal out by its cord, “I, Muran Redstream, swear by the light of the Sun and the Seven Realms, that you, Liam and your companions shall come to no harm on this journey. I

ask only that you accompany me to your father's residence, and after you hear him out, you will have the choice to leave or stay. These things I swear." A burst of light glowed from the crystal, and just as fast, it was dark again.

"Then it is done," replied Mickey. "The crystal oath can only be broken at its maker's own undoing." He turned towards Keiran and Sorcha who nodded in agreement, "We will accompany you to your father, Liam. But then you must agree to come with us to the Crystal Palace."

Hoping he was not making a huge mistake, Liam looked on to the newly formed travelling party. "Alright then, let's go find my father."

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APPENDIX I

Glossary of Terms

1. Beannaithe- The royal city and home of the Crystal Palace; Major characters born in the city are Lillian Sharp, Tomas Flannigan, Fionn Swiftstream, and Iris Whitman; literal Irish translation is “blessed”
2. Builder- One of the four factions that compose Síog society; responsible for building construction and maintenance and upkeep of the portals
3. Camán- A scepter or staff carried by all Keepers; used to open portals and control the flow of time; literal Irish translation is a “walking stick”
4. Cathair Rúnda- Fairy realm composed of three fairy cities: Beannaithe (“blessed”), Ciallaíonn (“seashore”), and Dramhadhman (“wood waste”)
5. Ciallaíonn- One of the three fairy cities that is built partially underwater; it’s border floats in-between the fairy and human realm and resulted in the legends of the nymphs that once lured humans into fairy water; major characters from this city are Keiran McClaren and Sorcha Swiftstream and Fionn Swiftstream; literal Irish translation is “seashore”
6. Cormac Stonewater- Full-blooded Builder originated in Dramhadhman; King of Cathair Rúnda when Liam first enters the fairy world; created and raised in the dark city of Dramhadhman with his best friend Niall Heartstrong, Cormac’s upbringing was heavily influenced by those sympathetic with the Dark Fey; he

spent much of his time in the mountains with the dwarves who raised him to be sympathetic to all different breeds of fairy kind and led to his decision to be a Builder, one of the less celebrated positions of Síog society; While in training at The Academy, Cormac will fall in love with Lillian Sharp—this relationship ceases its romantic nature when Cormac takes the throne; At the age of just 110, Cormac was chosen by the late King Eamon to be his successor before he performed the sacred ritual of íobairt fá mhór, sacrificing his own life to create 100 new fairies; at first met with extreme opposition, Cormac would win over the heart of his kingdom and rule over 500 years of peace, the longest period without war in Síog history

7. Crystal Palace- home to King Cormac and housed within Beannaithe
8. Dante- Keiran's sprite
9. Dramhadhman- One of the three fairy cities that borders the dark mountains; major characters from this city are Cormac Stonewater, Niall Heartstrong, and Mickey Treesong; literal Irish translation is “wood waste”
10. Fairy- one of the five classes of the Síog race (Fairy, Sprite, Dwarf, Elf, Nymph)
11. Fionn Swiftstream- A Seeker originated in Ciallaíonn; once-lover to Iris Whitman
12. íobairt fá mhór- “The Great Sacrifice”; ritual in which a fairy sacrifices his or her own life so that another fairy might be born; when a normal fairy performs the ritual, it results in the creation of one new, baby fairy; when a King or Queen

performs the ritual, this results in the creation of 100 new fairies; this ritual was set in place by Great Father, and the creator of the nine realms.

13. Iris Whitman- A full-blooded fairy originated in Beannaithe, Iris was the one-time lover to Fionn Swiftstream. Iris fell in love with a human (Don Whitman) and gave birth to Cash's father, Phillip.
14. Keeper- One of the four factions that compose Síog society; responsible for the flow of time between realms; a Keeper must be present for travel between worlds
15. Keiran McLaren- A Seeker born in Ciallaíonn; Keiran descends from a line of fairies that were the result of a fairy/human union; a potential love interest to Sorcha
16. Light Fey- Opposing faction of the Dark Fey in the "third great revolt"
17. Lillian Sharp- A Tender born in Beannaithe; Lillian descends from a line of fairies that were the result of a fairy/human union; once-lover to Cormac Stonewater
18. Mickey Treesong- Keeper; A full-blooded fairy originated in Dramhadhman; Mickey is one of "The Great 100" that were created by King Eamon
19. Niall Heartstrong- Keeper; A full-blooded fairy originated in Dramhadhman; childhood friend to Cormac and Lillian; leader of the failed revolt against Cormac's rule as king; husband to Mary Black and father to Liam
20. Síog- Term for all inhabitants of Cathair Rúnda: fairies, sprites, dwarves, nymphs, elves...

21. Seeker- One of the four factions that compose Síog society; this faction was created by King Cormac to encourage human/ fairy relations; responsible for locating and monitoring humans with fairy blood
22. Shadowseeker- Faction of fairies comprised of Dark Fey that formed in the “third great revolt”, that resulted in the ascension of King Eamon to the throne after defeating his treacherous predecessor King Oran; leaders of the Dark Fey were imprisoned and the rebellion dispersed, but their theologies lived on, especially in Dramhadhman, the city where most of Oran’s followers originated; these fairies believe in the supremacy of the Síog race and advocate complete removal of fairy presence on earth; these fairies are not all “bad fairies” but they were disbanded as a result of their violent ways of approaching matters
23. Sprite- one of the five classes of the Síog race (Fairy, Sprite, Dwarf, Elf, Nymph); Every Fairy is paired with a Sprite upon graduation from the Academy
24. Sorcha Swiftstream- A full-blooded Seeker originated in Ciallaíonn; potential love interest to Liam Flannigan and Keiran McLaren
25. Tender- One of the four factions that compose Síog society; responsible for the caretaking of new fairy life and the introduction of Halflings into the fairy world
26. The Academy- Official training center for Síogs; Síogs usually enter at “50” years of age whereas those Halflings deemed strong enough, enter at 18 years of age

APPENDIX II

Annotated Bibliography of Related Works

Clare, Cassandra. *City of Bones*. New York: M.K. McElderry Books, 2007. Print.

Fifteen year old Clary Fray is introduced to a world of shadow hunters, vampires, and werewolves, along with an entire magical universe she never knew existed. Clary must quickly embrace her place in shadow hunter society in order to save her mother who mysteriously disappears as Clary learns the truth about her past. Romance, danger, and adventure surround Clary in this first installment of The Mortal Instrument series.

Collins, Suzanne. *The Hunger Games*. New York: Scholastic Press, 2008. Print.

Now a major motion picture, *The Hunger Games* exists as the mind blowing introduction to Suzanne Collin's three book series. When Katniss Everdeen volunteers to take her sister's place in the 74th Annual Hunger Games, she only thinks she knows the dangers that lie in store for her. Along with 23 other children from the twelve districts, Katniss must enter an arena in a fight to the death. In the midst of a beautiful story told through the lens of a heart-wrenching and eye opening plot, readers will find themselves hopelessly lost in Katniss's fight for survival.

Jordan, Robert. *The Eye of the World*. New York: T. Doherty Associates, 1990. Print.

Come along as Rand al'Thor, Matrim Cauthon, and Perrin Aybara leave their

childhood home of the Two Rivers in this first installment of Robert Jordan's ten book *Wheel of Time* series. In an intriguing tale of magic and adventure, the young men must brave great dangers in the fight against the coming darkness that seeks to destroy their world.

Lewis, C. S., and Pauline Baynes. *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. New York: HarperCollins, 1994. Print.

When four siblings (Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy) make their way into the magical land of Narnia via the wardrobe in their caretaker's house, they have no idea of the daring adventure that lies before them. Battling the evils of Narnia, the children provide an endearing story of coming of age. Magic and mischief are sure to delight readers of all ages.

Martin, George R. R. *Game of Thrones*. New York: Bantam, 2011. Print.

This first installment in Martin's epic fantasy series, *A Song of Ice and Fire*, introduces readers to the fictional continents of Essos and Westeros.

Chapters are separated by altering point of views of various characters, giving readers an omnipresent view of the goings on across the fictional lands. As men across Westeros fight for the Iron Throne, an evil is seen brewing outside its northern borders, foreshadowing mankind's fight for survival throughout the series.

McKenzie, Nancy. *Queen of Camelot*. New York: Ballantine Books, 2002/1994. Print.

A riveting tale of King Arthur's court, McKenzie's *Queen of Camelot* offers new insight on the legendary characters of Arthur, Lancelot, and Guinevere.

Told through Guinevere's perspective, the reader gets to know the woman behind the legend. Kind, smart, and compassionate Guinevere must face many battles in the desperate attempt to ensure both her own safety and that of her two, timeless loves... Arthur and Lancelot.

Niffenegger, Audrey. *The Time Traveler's Wife: A Novel*. San Francisco, CA:

MacAdam/Cage, 2003. Print.

Henry DeTamble has a medical disorder, Chrono- Impairment, that causes him to involuntarily travel through time, causing many complications for him and his wife Clare. The reader becomes enraptured as the past, present, and future selves of Henry and Clare fall in love across time. Heart breaking and warming all at the same time, this story of faith and hardship gives a completely new perspective to a love for the ages.

Pullman, Philip. *The Golden Compass*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996. Print.

Lyra Belacqua and her daemon Pantalaimon leave their home at Jordan College for a daring journey of mystery and excitement where Lyra must brave great dangers in a battle for survival. With the help of the Gyptians, Lyra must find a way to overcome the gobblers, who have been severing children from their daemons (spirit companions). Guided by her alethiometer, the golden compass, Lyra's adventure is a riveting story of intrigue and magic.

Rossi, Veronica. *Under the Never Sky*. New York: Harper, 2012. Print.

Rossi's futuristic novel is the first in a three part series chronicling the lives of Aria and Perry. When Aria, a citizen of the protected city of Reverie, is cast out

into the Death Shop, she meets Perry, a seer who is destined to lead his outsider clan. As the reader follows the ensuing love story of the two characters, a dangerous world of adventure unfolds in their fight for survival.

Roth, Veronica. *Divergent*. New York: Katherine Tegen Books, 2011. Print.

Divergent exists as the first installment of Roth's three part series set within the futuristic society of Chicago. When Beatrice Prior receives inconclusive results on her aptitude test, given to civilians to help them choose the faction of society they will belong to, she leaves her Abnegation home for the Dauntless. Beatrice must keep her divergent nature a secret at the risk of being discovered by government officials.