

Prologue—Fianna Kearney Dolan

2065, Ireland

I can tell I'm dreaming as I take in the dreadful scene in front of me. This is the second vision I've had come to me in nightmare form, and I am hopeful it will also be my last. I still feel strong arms around me and know I'm being held firmly in the embrace of the man I love as I sleep, yet I can smell the acrid smoke and feel the heat from the flames as I watch my father's house burn. I hear the screams of my father and brothers as they roast alive in the house where I grew up. I see the flames building and I know I have to try and help them. I command my legs to move, but it's like I'm being restrained by invisible bonds. I cannot move forward. I tamp the panic down and remind myself this is only a dream; my father is not burning alive in front of me. There is a voice in my head suddenly; coaxing me to go home, see my boys and prove to myself that they are alive and well. The voice whispering instructions to me sounds like my twin sister, Aoife; dead for five years now. Never once in her life did I hesitate to listen when she issued advice, and I'm not going to start now. Gagging on the stench and terrified to my bones with the knowledge that even in a dream I cannot save my family, I stagger back from the front walk and glance down the street to the home I share with my husband and our two sons. There's no smoke that I can see from here, so I try to dispel the unease that has settled under my skin.

I canter down the short incline to reach my home; heart pounding with trepidation as I consider what I might find there. There is a feeling in my gut that bodes ill for my family. I do my best to stay calm as I throw open the door and look around the entryway, calling out, "Seamus?" at the top of my voice. I can't hear anything but the beating of my own heart inside the normally animated, noisy house. My dread crystallizes into a ball of ice that settles in my heart as I do a circuit of the downstairs of the house. No sign of my husband or sons anywhere. Even the normal day to day detritus of life with two boys under the age of five is absent. Confusion wars with worry and I shout again, not as loud this time. "Seamus? Patrick? Where are you?"

"The bedroom, Fianna. You'll find answers there," I hear my sister say in her eerily serene voice and I cringe inside; heading for the staircase to the second floor. When I reach our bedroom, the door is slightly ajar and I hear an odd creaking noise. I take a deep breath and wish I hadn't instantly; the smell brings tears to my eyes. Rot and urine assault my senses and I do my

best to stifle a sob and ignore the rancid air. With a shaking hand I push the door inward and cry out at the sight that greets me. My husband, normally ruddy with fervor, is gray and silent as he hangs from a rafter. His arms hang limply at his sides and his wedding ring is absent from his left hand. Guilt and grief tear at me. The window is cracked open as it usually is when we go to bed at night, and the breeze coming through has set him swinging slightly. One of the dining chairs from downstairs is turned on its side on the floor beneath him; leaving me a macabre image of him stepping off and then floundering for his footing as his oxygen is cut off.

“I’m so sorry, Seamus,” I whisper around my tears as I back out of the door and turn towards my sons’ bedroom at the end of the hall.

“They aren’t here, Fianna,” Aoife seems to sing in my head; making me start to shake. I ignore her, run to their room and push the door open wordlessly. She is right, of course. Not only are my sons not physically present, but none of their belongings are either. The room is barren and cold. I feel the panic rising in me, threatening to undo me from the inside.

“This isn’t real, it isn’t real!” I start chanting to myself as I tear through the house looking for any evidence of my boys. “Where are they, Aoife? Tell me, please tell me now! Where are my boys?” I am sobbing now, and the need to see their precious little faces is too much for me to ignore any longer. Lightheadedness takes me, and before I realize what’s going on, I’m on my knees on the floor in the den where they love to play with their building blocks, gasping for breath.

“They are with him, sister. You know where. You should go now,” Aoife says, sounding somber. I jump up as understanding finally dawns. I know where I have to go to find my sons. I only hope they fare better in this twisted fate than the rest of my family. I am running now, through fields of wildflowers and down a path to a valley where there is a cottage hidden in the side of a hill, listening to my sister’s whispered words the entire time. With each step I take I am surer that I will never recover from what I’m about to witness. Normally when I reach this door, I bound inside for a joyous reunion. I’m terrified of the devastation I can feel waiting for me there now.

I take a deep breath and remind myself that I am safely asleep in the arms of my lover. This is a horrific nightmare that I know I must let play out before I can wake from its grip. *I can do this* I tell myself, and turn the knob. Again, it’s the smell that hits me first; the pungent metallic stench of blood floods my senses. I realize I’ve involuntarily closed my eyes and am crying,

shaking my head back and forth. I don't need to see the husks left behind to know there is no one left alive here. I hear my sister's voice in my head telling me I must open my eyes. To do what I must to save them, I have to witness their demise. Choking back a sob, I force my eyes to open and see what is left of those I love most in this world.

There are no words to describe the agony that tears through me as I look upon the still forms strewn like refuse across the great room of the cottage. My sons, Patrick and Seamus, lie close to one another like broken dolls. I step closer and see that there are parts of them missing, and I am suddenly and violently ill. Gagging and sobbing, I kneel next to what is left of my boys and press a kiss to each of their foreheads, trying to ignore the blood and the gaping wounds. I press my hands into my eyes, shaking with sobs, and my sister nudges me once again. *How can there be more?* I wonder in horror.

I make myself stand and head to the back of the house. Here the smell of blood is strong as well, and I am struck again by the utter violence that took place in what was previously a quiet retreat. When I enter the kitchen, I find I can still be shocked. The bodies here have clearly been posed after death. The tall, dark haired man is clutching the smaller form of a woman to his body. They are propped up on the floor against a cupboard, looking peaceful except for the yawning slits in both their throats and the pool of dark, red blood they're sitting in. I listen as my sister whispers for me to look down upon the dead bodies of my lover and myself, and vow vengeance for the loss of the life I wished for.

Jerking awake, I bolt upright in bed bathed in a cold sweat and look around wildly. I feel a little calmer when I see the inhalations of the man sleeping soundly in the bed beside me. There are tears on my cheeks and I feel my heart breaking in my chest as I look down at the sleeping face on the pillow, knowing that I have to hurt him to save us all. He rolls onto his back and flings an arm over his head as I study the perfection of his face; memorizing every detail to treasure later. Battling the sobs that long to wrench themselves free of my chest, I lean down and press a kiss to his lips before I slip out of bed and tiptoe to the door without looking back.

My legs feel like they are made of lead as I trudge through the wildflowers and back to the home I share with my husband and sons. I feel weighted down by the magnitude of the undertaking that has been sent to me in the vision. I think about everything that is left to do before I can really relax and have to stifle a new sob. Two hearts broken already, and next I have to uproot my sons and husband and move them across the ocean to America without telling them

why. Once there, I must bide my time and make my plans to stop the Fae from inflicting their rule on all of humanity.