



The night air was deliciously cool. Moonlight and darkness held equal sway over the backyard thanks to the shifting clouds. I dashed across the lawn and halted in the exact spot where Aengus had stood. Panting, I looked around, willing some kind of clue to materialize.

The ruins in front of me darkened as large, heavy clouds swallowed the moon whole. The wind tugged at my long, loose hair and pajamas. Tiny raindrops spattered on my nose and cheeks. I turned my palms to the sky, and cold rain pelted them.

“Great.” Intending to return to the house, I swiveled around.

I gasped. My right hand flew to my chest. “Aengus?!”

The man himself stood an arm’s length in front of me. “Why are you here?”

“You scared the crap out of me!”

“Whisht!”

“What?”

“Shush!”

Pop!

The strident sound came from the ruins. I whirled around and stared at the dark keep.

Aengus grabbed me from behind. He pulled me to him and wrapped his arms around me. I reveled in the feel of his taut body, of his warm flesh against mine.

Suddenly, everything changed. The rain stopped. The wind died. The entire landscape was bathed in the soft hue of twilight. Breasal Castle looked brand spanking new, just as it had during the bizarre dream in which I brought Aengus to the cottage. But this time, I knew I was awake.

Dumbfounded, I gawked at the medieval magnificence before me. I had no idea what had happened and no desire to pull away from his embrace.

His lips brushed my right ear, sending a shiver down my spine. “This way.”

His right arm released me, and his left slid down to my waist. Maintaining body contact the entire time, he steered me toward the stand of oaks on our right.

Once sheltered by the trees, he turned us around so we faced the castle.

“Are we hiding?” I whispered.

“We are.”

“Why? And what just happened?”

“I can’t say.”

“Can’t or won’t?”

“Both.”

Until that moment, I’d forgotten I wore pajamas. Now I was acutely aware of it. Satin was pleasing to the touch, but something told me my attire had nothing to do with his grip on me.

I looked up at him. “Not that I mind, but why are you holding me so close?”

His hand tightened on my waist. “It’s necessary.”

“I don’t suppose you can explain that, either.”

With his gaze locked on the castle, he shook his head. He pressed his right forefinger against his mouth in a silencing gesture. Then he pointed up at the keep.

High on the battlements, the black-haired woman from my dream—and from Branna’s painting—paced back and forth. Her hair whipped about her pale face and slender frame.

She paused beside a gap in the crenelated wall and glared down at the fairy mound. Her colorless lips curled into a sneer. Then her human form morphed into a dark shadow, which fragmented into what seemed a million black particles. They swarmed into the air and shot across the twilight sky, disappearing into the distance.

I took a deep breath. “So she’s real.”

He nodded. “She’s real, to be sure. Come.” With his arm still hooked around me, he led me out of the woods and toward the fairy mound.