

Chapter Two



Daydreaming

Patrick walked in the door to the hustle and bustle of supper being prepared. His sister, Sarah, hurried from the root cellar with an apron full of potatoes. She eyed him suspiciously as she let the potatoes roll across the slats of the wood table. Sarah always looked at him with distrust in her brown eyes yet, as far as he knew, he never gave her any reason to be so skeptical of him.

“Where have ye been, Patrick? School let out hours ago.” His mother hurried to the door to look him over, her brows furrowed, and a loose tawny curl escaping its kerchief.

“I was in the field with Barry. We were talkin’ and didn’t realize it was so late.” He lied, crossing his fingers behind his back. He hated lying to his mother, but he couldn’t very well tell her he’d gone to the faery woods. That’s a forbidden place, and she would never understand why he would venture there.

“Ye best cleanup now for supper. How did ye get so dirty?” She wrinkled up her face at his appearance, and turned him around to see the back side. Patrick looked down at the dried leaves stuck to his trousers and tunic. In his haste, he missed some forest debris.

“Aye, I’ll just cleanup real quick. Barry and I were wrestlin’ around a little.” He smiled timidly, as he met his sister’s eyes, and slipped out of the door. Patrick knew Sarah was on to him. Hopefully, she would stay quiet.

Sarah always knew when Patrick had been someplace he shouldn’t have gone. In her mind, her brother was always guilty of something. She chewed on her lip as she washed the potatoes and sliced them into the pan. *Why did boys always go about gettin’ into trouble?* She was pretty sure he wouldn’t tell her where he’d really been. In fact, the older he got, the less he talked to her at all.

Patrick O’Sullivan grew up in the lush, rolling hills of Ireland where he helped his father in the potato fields when he wasn’t attending the village school. His father, Daniel, wanted a better life for his son than he had known. Sometimes Daniel wondered why he hadn’t pursued something else when it was his turn to take over the farm from granddad O’Sullivan. The family had always been potato farmers as far back as he could remember, every generation taking over from the generation before, so without much thought he just knew it was the natural thing to do. He didn’t dare cross granddad anyway by suggesting another occupation.

Sometimes Daniel regretted his decision not to move to town where there were more opportunities because working the land was hard, and many years the crop barely brought in a schilling or two. Usually all the hours of toiling only produced enough for the family to get by, but the O’Sullivan’s accepted that fact. They were happy and felt that’s what counted most.

Nevertheless, Daniel was sorry his family had to scrimp by all winter, despite all the hard work they put in when the sun lay upon the land. He hated to have his wife, Maggie, working the fields. But she was always a smiling and willing participant, and felt it was her duty to work alongside her husband and children.

Many evenings the four of them climbed wearily upon the porch, the smell of tilled earth on their clothes. The last crop had been a good one, so everyone felt better

about all the hard work. But Patrick was awfully tired that potatoes were generally served at almost every meal.

Patrick emerged from his room, awhile later, to find his ma and sister still in the kitchen. Dishes were served up and brought to the table, steam wafting from them and filling the room with delicious aromas. Everyone gathered around and slid onto the benches that flanked the table, a modest wood one Mr. O'Sullivan had built some years before.

Patrick's hair was freshly combed and laid curling over a clean tunic. Sarah gave him a knowing look as she elbowed him. He ignored her and reached for the platter of newly cooked potatoes. Heaping some on his plate, he scooted over out of reach on the bench.

"So how was school today?" Maggie looked at them cheerfully. "Did ye learn anything new and important?" Her eyes rested on Patrick, knowing how much he hated school, but hoping he'd learn to like it as time went on.

Patrick shrugged when his sister elbowed him again, jostling him from his thoughts.

"It was okay." He said, as he wolfed down his food. "It was like it is every day. Can I be excused now? I have some lessons to do." Patrick slid off the bench and walked to his room.

Once there, he opened his bag and took out all the school books, spreading them out on the little table that served as a desk. He stared down at the papers, but instead of looking at them, his thoughts were focused on the faery woods. He wondered where Elianne was today. She'd been there the last two times, but not today. In fact, he wondered if Barry even believed him at all when he told him about speaking to the faeries. He remembered Elianne was reluctant at first. A smile played across his lips as he let his mind roam back to his first encounter with her.

Patrick had ventured off through the forbidden woodland one day after school. He wasn't in the mood to go home and face his parents after he'd failed another test Ms Flannigan had passed out that day. As usual, he hadn't done any studying at all. His mind couldn't seem to stay focused on schoolwork. Instead, he dreamed of wild adventures and wondered if he'd just grow up and raise potatoes like all his relatives had done, or if life held something grander in store for him.

First, he had to put his panic aside, and did his best as he approached the forest. Barry couldn't be persuaded to come along, so he was on his own and determined not to let his fear stand in the way.

The forest was damp and cool when he entered, having stashed his school bag behind a boulder close by. It was musty and almost too dark to see the narrow path between the twisted tree roots. He hesitated, gathering his courage, and then inched along, stepping over the enormous twisted sticks that crisscrossed the ground, leaving little space to place his foot. He learned early on the trees could talk when he accidentally stepped on a large root. Patrick was startled when he heard the groan. With wide eyes, he'd scanned the woods for other intruders besides himself.

"Get off! That's hurts! How would ye like someone walking on your feet?" The old tree twisted and shook as it tried to throw him off. He lost his balance and fell into a pile of molten leaves. Shocked, he had stared up as the old tree scolded him. Patrick ducked down and covered his head with his hands, to keep from being hit, as the tree swung its giant branches about while it spoke.

"Sssorry." He'd stuttered and scrambled to his feet, shaking loose the leaf debris that covered his clothes.

"I didn't know ye could talk." Patrick wiped a lock of hair off his forehead and tried to straighten himself.

"Of course I can talk." The old tree looked insulted.

"I'm sorry for steppin' on you." Patrick did indeed sound sorry.

"That's okay this time but watch your step."

"It's kind of hard ye know when the roots are everywhere, but I'll do my best." Patrick promised.

“What brings you to the faery woods anyway?” The tree eyed him curiously.

“I just wanted to meet one of the faeries. The storytellers in the village say they can tell the future, and I wanted to know if there will be any adventures in my life.”

“I see. Well don’t ye think it’s best to just let life unfold?” The tree sounded like the school teacher, always trying to be logical.

“Look are ye goin’ to tell me where I can find the faeries or not? I’d like to be on my way.” Patrick had grown impatient. He was there now and knew he had to be home before dark. He didn’t want to lose anymore time talking to this twisted piece of wood.

“Well if ye insist on knowing your future, ye can find the faeries at the spring on the other side of the forest. I wouldn’t advise it, but proceed with caution if ye must.” The old tree sounded upset and was through talking to this stubborn boy. It shook and settled back into place.

“But I had another question.” Patrick looked up at the knurled branches, but the wood was solid and sturdy and didn’t reply.

Looking down at the path ahead, he mumbled. “Well all right then. Be that way. I can see ye won’t talk to me again.” He started out on the narrow trail once more, which was hardly a trail at all. Carefully stepping between the roots, a snake among them hissed and slithered away. Patrick’s stomach had lurched nervously. *Better watch for more snakes. I wonder if they’re poisonous.* He could see light up ahead and quickly hurried that way.

Stepping out into the clearing, he heard the babbling of a small stream, so he walked toward it.

“Is anyone here?” He’d called out. His voice echoed off the walls of the canyon that surrounded the meadow. High rocks enclosed the whole area except for the forest that was at this back.

Finding the brook he heard, he’d knelt and dipped his hand in. The water was ice cold. Being thirsty, he’d longed to take a drink but wondered if he should. He’d looked around, then bent closer to the water and cupped his hands to gather some. After sipping, he’d settled himself on the flat rock close by.

“Is anyone here?” He’d called out again. All of a sudden a buzzing sound overtook his ears. It grew louder and louder, and to his amazement at least a dozen

faeries appeared. The beating of their wings was causing the loud, humming sound. He'd stared at the tiny creatures. Rainbow colors sparkled off them as they flew around the small bushes surrounding the stream.

"My name is Patrick." He'd called out.

Fluttering to a stop on the rock beside him, a faery lifted her slender hand toward him. "My name's Elianne."

The faery Elianne seemed to glow before him and Patrick couldn't take his eyes away from her shimmering form. The sheer iridescent wings were shiny and changed colors in the sunlight that streaked the meadow. The fine blue gown she wore floated with the breeze to settle around her slim body. Her hair was wild curls, the color of burnished copper. It flowed around her like a second garment. Green almond shaped eyes held his gaze. Some minutes passed before the faery spoke again.

"What brings you to this magic place Patrick? We don't see many humans here. Most are too afraid to venture into the woodland alone." Her voice and demeanor was pleasant and musical, putting Patrick at ease.

Looking upon her beauty, he almost forgot what it was he'd come for, and for a moment or two he'd just stared at her. He'd never seen a faery before that moment, and found it hard to believe he was there having a conversation with one. The village story tellers never said how pretty they were, and he'd always had the idea they weren't that friendly either. *Was this how they bewitched anyone that ventured to the land of faery?* Crazy thoughts raced through his head as he'd looked for the reason he'd come.

After some fidgeting, as he sat under the faery's gaze, he'd remembered what he wanted to know.

"I came to ask if I'll have any adventures in my life, or if I'll just carry on as a potato farmer like all my relatives before me. That's it." He'd given her a meek smile.

"So, ye want adventure in your life Patrick. Well sometimes adventures are where you're least likely to find them." Elianne had looked at him intently.

"What's that supposed to mean?" He didn't seem to understand what she was trying to say.

“That means sometimes ye don’t have to go very far away from home at all to find adventure. It’s just a matter of keeping an open mind, and being in the right place at the right time.” She’d smiled at him as he pondered her words.

“I don’t see what adventure I can find on the potato farm. My family toils in the field to plant and harvest potatoes.”

“Aye, I know. Ye live on the farm on the other side of the faery woods.” She’d shifted on the rock and stretched out her wings, as if sunning them. The stone they sat on was in full sun, but Patrick noticed the other side of the meadow was already in the early shadow of evening.

He’d returned his gaze to her. “How do ye know all that?”

“Faeries know quite a bit about everything. I think you’ve probably heard that, haven’t ye?” She’d looked at him slyly.

“Well aye, I suppose so.” Without warning, Patrick felt leery of her and had shifted to get up.

“Ye don’t have to go just yet do you?” She’d charmed him with her smile and moved closer, placing a hand on the knee of his trousers.

“I think I should be goin’. It’ll be gettin’ dark soon and my parents will be expectin’ me for supper.”

“You’re not afraid I’ll bewitch you, are ye Patrick?” She’d tilted her head and batted her eyes.

“Me?” Patrick shifted, gesturing with his hands. “Nay, I’m not afraid of the faeries or I wouldn’t have come here lookin’ to see if I could find one. I wanted to see if the old tales were true. And I thought if I did find one, I could ask them what the future held for me. That’s all.” He’d shrugged as he’d looked at that pint sized creature.

“Well I’ve told you what I can about your future for now. Why don’t ye stay here and talk to me awhile. We’d like to find out more about the humans.” She’d pulled gently on his tunic.

“We?” He’d managed to squeak out as he looked around. As if by magic, as soon as the word was out, three more faeries appeared around the stream.

“Oh there are more of you.” He’d spoken quietly, wondering how he was going to get out of the meadow and back home before dark.

“Of course there are more of us. We’re everywhere. Ye didn’t think I lived here alone did ye?” She’d begun to laugh, a soft melodious sound that got louder and louder. Soon the others joined in and he noticed faeries had appeared all over. They covered the rocks, and the meadow, and adorned the bushes nearby. The sound grew so loud; he’d clapped his hands over his ears thinking he would go mad.

Gathering his courage, he’d pushed her hand away and stood. “I really must go now but I’ll come and see you again.”

“Do ye promise Patrick?” Elianne had glared at him. Something in her eyes frightened him and he shivered.

Thinking quickly, he’d blurted out “Aye, I promise. Ye grant wishes don’t you? I think I’ll need a wish one day soon.”

“Of course we grant wishes, but remember everything comes with a price.” Elianne laughed again, softly, when she noticed his startled expression.

“That seems fair. Now I must go.” He’d run for the woodland trail as the sun dipped behind the rocks. The buzzing sound returned and he saw swirls of light all around the meadow as he’d taken one last look back.

Hurrying down the path, he’d kept a close eye out for snakes and roots as the darkness settled in among the ancient trees. He had scolded himself for even asking about wishes. *What had I been thinkin’ anyway?* He’d best be careful around the faeries.

After tripping several times, he’d never been so glad to see the potato field again. Luckily he was able to reach the house and slip inside when the rest of the family was in the root cellar. He’d quickly opened a book and was at his small desk studying when they came in carrying armloads of potatoes. *That was close. I must be more careful in the future.* Patrick’s heart beat faster as he thought about the faeries and the meadow.

Even now, in the privacy of his own room, he could feel his heart thumping in his chest, filling him with the charge he’d felt on his first visit to the faery woods some weeks ago.

Chapter Three



Patrick's Plan

The sun's brightness sparkled on the meadows with the coming of spring, and the hope for a good crop once again. Some of the potatoes would be set aside for family use, and Patrick's father would load the old wagon and take the rest to the market where he would buy staples with the profits. Every year was the same and Patrick wondered why he was the only one who grew bored.

When the family wasn't working in the field, they were putting new thatch on the roof or making other necessary repairs getting ready for the harsh winter to come, or as ready as they could be. The O'Sullivan's had to be pretty industrious to make do with what they had because there wasn't ever a pence to spare. Patrick didn't know which he hated worse, farming potatoes or going to school.

Sarah was good at school and enjoyed learning scholarly things while her brother Patrick cared little for school. They walked down the dirt road together everyday to attend their lessons, which were held in an old hut on the edge of the village.

School was taught by ole Ms. Flannigan, a spinster of such girth that her apron barely reached around her waist. Her hair was a dull shade of red, fading to gray, and she wore it back in a tight bun making her face look even more round than it was. Two long hairs protruded from a large mole on her chin, and nothing got past her dark beady eyes.

She took her teaching seriously, and carried a long, hickory stick to make sure everyone kept to their lessons while they were in her charge.

There was a rumor around the village that she had gone to some fancy school in Dublin, and was well educated in reading, writing, and arithmetic. Her family was well to do until they lost it all to back taxes they owed the king. Now, being an only child and never married, she was the last of her clan. After completing her education there was no reason to stay in the city, so she moved to Dovershire to teach school to the peasant children. In her mind, most of her talents were wasted on these lads and lassies that didn't seem to care if they learned anything or not. But as long as she was the teacher here, they would abide by her rules.

Students were expected to sit up straight, feet firmly planted on the old, wood floor, with notebook and pencil in hand. If one cut up in class, as kids will do, she would come lumbering back to your stool with that hickory stick slapping in her hand. If the stare of those eyes didn't straighten you right up, the sheer size of that woman swinging that stick would. Needless to say, the first prank was usually the last one.

Patrick, and his best friend Barry, had been model students since they put ole Ms. Flannigan to the test two years before. They would never forget that old woman's wrath when they had had the nerve to put a frog into her school satchel. She had marched them to the head of the class where they had to scrub down the floors in front of everyone, which included all the kids in the village old enough to attend school. Patrick had been mortified in front of his sister and almost all the children in the small community. As the boys went about scrubbing, under the close examination of Ms Flannigan, there were snickers from the entire classroom and some of the children had even called out some unkind things.

"Patrick I'm surprised at you!" Sarah shouted. This led to similar outbursts from Barry's sisters, as well, and then the rest of the class started in.

"What a stupid thing to do!"

"Ye two are an embarrassment!"

"What nerve!"

"Ye boys will never amount to anything!"

“How did ye think of that? I wish I would have.” The last heckler found himself alongside Patrick and Barry with a brush in his hand. He had smiled sheepishly at the older boys.

After that episode, Patrick was too embarrassed to go to school, but every time he decided to go and play instead he would hear his father’s stern voice in his head.

“It’s for your own good lad. Ye need to learn how to read, write, and do your numbers. It’ll give you a better life than me someday.” Patrick knew he was right. He tried hard to remember that every time he walked down the dirt road to the school house.

Patrick and Barry were almost inseparable and were always into some kind of mischief. Most of these adventures started with Patrick and his insatiable curiosity. The boy had heard some men, in the village, talking about an old, abandoned dungeon that used to be used centuries earlier to hold the prisoners that were waiting for the kings executioners to come around. This fascinated Patrick, so he hid behind a stack of barrels to listen to the men gossiping. He wanted to find out exactly where this place was.

“Ye ever been thar McGuire?” A rotund man shuffled his feet in the dirt, and grunted under the weight of his load, as he shifted the sack of potatoes to his other shoulder.

“Years ago my Pa rode out there. It’s some distance, ye know, if ye walk. I was with him but I was too young to really remember much about it. Everything `twas old and fallin’ down. I do remember that.” McGuire scratched a scruffy beard.

“How bout ye, Charles. Ye been out thar?” The plump man spoke again, snorting under the load of potatoes.

“Naw, not me. The place is probably haunted. They chopped off a lot of heads out there back in the ole days. I think the property was passed down to McGregor, but I don’t think he’s done anything with it. Don’t know what ye could do with it anyhow. It’s a bunch of ramshackle buildings now.” His eyes were huge and sunk deeply into his face. Just talking about this clearly frightened him, and he wasn’t about to go near any haunted place.

Patrick crouched behind the barrels holding his neck. Ms Flannigan told the class a little about the beheadings in school. *That must have been an awful time to live in.* Patrick swallowed hard, and then returned his attention to the men.

“Well ye won’t catch me out there, that’s for sure.” Charles was speaking again. “I think everybody should just leave the place be. Let the dead rest in peace.” He looked over his shoulder as he twitched nervously.

Patrick wondered if there was a churchyard out there too. He had visions of all sorts of old cairns and other grave markers, as well as prisoners being marched to the gallows or the guillotine. As his mind wondered, he lost his balance and fell against the barrels making them shake.

“What are ye doin’ back thar young lad?” The fat man dropped the sack of potatoes in the road, reached back behind the barrels and grabbed Patrick by the edge of his tunic, pulling him up and into the fine dirt that was settling back down again. The big man coughed and spat.

“Nothin’.” Patrick looked up wide eyed.

Ye done scare a person to death.” Charles added. “Ye should know bett’r boy.”

“Ye need to be gettin’ home son. Don’t let me catch ye spyin’ again, ye hear. What are ye spyin’ fer anyway?” The fat man’s face was red and contorted in an angry snarl.

“It’s never nice to spy on anybody, ye hear?” With a firm grip on his collar he twirled Patrick in the street, the boy’s toes dragging in the sandy dust.

“Aw, that’s enough Henry. The boy done learned his lesson now, haven’t ye boy?” Charles looked at him as he moved about nervously.

“Aye, Aye, I won’t do that again.” Patrick hollered out. “You’re chokin’ me.”

“Well I don’t know if ye learned yer lesson or not, like ole Charles here thinks ye done, but ye best not let me catch ye again. Now git!” The portly man gave him a shove as he let go of his shirt.

“Nay sir, ye won’t.” Patrick fell in the dirt coughing. He scrambled to his feet and ran off down the road. The boy thought he had enough information anyway to find the McGregor place. Now the problem was talking Barry into coming with him, and finding a horse to take them there.

As Patrick lay in his bed that night, he devised a plan that would get him into the village and out to McGregor's dungeon. It was time to harvest potatoes and the family always loaded up a batch in the wagon to deliver in town as trade for other supplies. This year he intended to deliver those potatoes. Now he just had to convince his father he was old enough to do the job.

In an effort to get more comfortable, Patrick pounded the straw enclosed in the muslin bag that served as a pillow. He couldn't get his mind off the old jail that housed prisoner's way before he was born. The boy imagined the old structures to be full of ancient, rusted implements, and chains used in the dungeons he only read about. He wanted to see first hand what the place looked like. Harvest season started next week, so he had time to go over his plan with Barry.