

CHAPTER FOUR

It had been a long day for Barry, what with the introduction to Dun Ardmore, moving into the castle and unpacking. While the kitchen was no longer state-of-the-art, it was more than adequate and better equipped than his kitchen back in his Boston apartment. There was plenty of food and it had a microwave, which he used to cook dinner for himself. As he wandered from the kitchen to the living area to set his plate on the dinner table, he wondered how long it would be before he started visiting the local pub regularly. There was a certain air about a pub that appealed to him and besides, during his week in Ireland he had already developed a taste for Guinness and the camaraderie of the locals.

“Oh, excuse me!” a woman mumbled behind him. He glanced over his shoulder and saw a figure coming out of the master bedroom. By the time he turned around to look, all he could see was the bottom edge of a skirt that quickly disappeared into the master bedroom.

He turned and ran after the fleeting figure, charging into the bedroom only to find it empty. Confused, he checked the closet, under the bed and even behind the door.

“Must be my imagination,” he muttered to himself as he returned to his meal and a quiet evening in front of the tele, as they call television in Ireland. He soon discovered why pubs are still so popular in Ireland – the selection of shows was either re-runs of old American shows, boring British games shows, or in Gaelic, which he did not understand. Frustrated, he picked up a book about Ireland and began to read. Perhaps it was the beer he had with dinner or just the fatigue of the day, but soon enough he dozed off in the comfortable chair and was quickly sound asleep.



“What?” he murmured as a gentle noise awoke him. Suspecting a burglar, he feigned sleep but kept a barely opened eye on the doors to the room. Soon he spotted a face peering out of the master bedroom doorway, and although half-lost in the gloom of the darkened doorway, he could make out the face of a woman.

Who the hell could that be? he thought to himself as he watched her peering carefully at him. Then cautiously, like a cat entering a strange room, the woman emerged from the doorway and started creeping along the wall towards the door to the stairwell.

“Who the hell are you?” Barry shouted as he sprung from his chair and pounced on the woman.

Instinctively, she tried to recoil from his charge, but he was too quick for her and caught her arm. Then in a single motion, he ducked down and around and twisted her arm behind her back.

“AYIEEEE!” she screamed in sudden pain.

“Who the hell are you?” he demanded, pulling his grip tighter.

“You’re hurting me!” she screamed.

“Who are you?” he insisted.

“You’re hurting me!”

“I said ‘who are you?’”

“Let go of my arm! Please!” she pleaded. “You’re hurting me!”

“Not until you tell me who you ----” A flash of blue light cut him off in mid-sentence. His consciousness faded to black as he slumped to the floor.



Barry woke ten minutes later, lying on the floor of the living room. It felt like his head was lying on someone’s lap. Still dizzy, he painfully opened his eyes and as they regained their focus, he could make out the face of a very attractive blonde in her mid to late twenties. A moment later, he smelled her perfume, a very delicate scent that reminded him of roses.

He saw the concern on her face as she peered down at him while she gently stroked his face. It was then he realized that she was sitting on the floor with his head nestled in her lap.

“Are you alright?” she inquired solicitously. “I tried to get you to let go of me – you were hurting me, you know.”

“What did you do – electrocute me?”

“I had to stun you.”

“With what, 10,000 volts?”

“Probably more,” she replied softly, as she continued stroking his face gently. “‘Tis sorta like a taser, at least from what I have seen on the tele.”

“You almost cooked me medium well done.”

“I used the lowest setting,” she insisted firmly.

“I would hate being hit by the highest,” he groaned as he tried to lift his head.

“Stay still for a while,” she crooned, still stroking his cheek. “You’ll be dizzy for a bit. Best you just lay there and recover. And if I used the highest setting, I’d be sweeping you up with the dust pan.”

“Just who are you?” He focused his eyes the best he could on her face as she looked down at him.

“That is a very long story,” she replied quietly as she continued stroking his cheek. “This is not the way I wanted,” she added sadly. “Stunning someone is not a very good way to start a relationship. It causes misunderstandings. But you were hurting me.”

“I didn’t mean to,” he replied. “I thought you were a burglar.”

“I guess you are Barry,” she said softly, peering down at his face.

“You know who I am?” His surprise was evident in his voice.

“Sean told me months ago,” she replied quietly. “Sean said that was your name and that you were the only relative he had so he was leaving everything to you.”

“You knew Sean?”

“Very well,” she said. She paused before adding, “I’m one of the reasons he never had children.”

“You were married to him?” Barry questioned, wondering who she was.

“Not exactly,” she answered demurely. “Let’s just say we were good friends.”

“Then who are you?” he insisted, trying to raise his head.

She paused for a moment. Her hand stopped stroking his face as a puzzled look came across her face.

“Mrs. O’Toole calls me ‘Lady Fionnuala’ and at one time that was my name. But now I prefer being called ‘Fionla’.”

“Wait a minute,” he sputtered, recognizing the name. “You’re not that ghost everyone was talking about this morning?”

“Well, I certainly am not a ghost,” she exclaimed indignantly, “and as you can see, I be very much alive and flesh and blood.”

“But-t-t” he stuttered in confusion.

“Since you are already lying down, I guess I can try to explain,” she said as a smile crept across her face. “I am very, very old, at least in terms of Earth years. I am what the Irish call a *síofra* or an ‘elf’ in English.”

“How old are you then?”

She smiled coyly. “Let’s just say ‘hundreds’.”

“Then you are immortal?”

“No, not at all,” she answered firmly. “Elves, as you call us, are not immortal at all. Like you we are born to parents and we normally live for a very long time because we don’t age after the first twenty or so years and are immune to most diseases and infirmities. However, we can be killed in accidents and such.”

“So it was you who did all those things to the soldiers?”

“Yes,” she answered with a sad sigh. “I tried to get them to leave, but they wouldn’t. In the end I had to resort to violence, something I am not at all proud of. However, I had to protect my portals, they are very important to me, indeed.”

“But you did kill them?” he insisted.

“Just two – the leaders. Nothing dissuades a mob more than watching their leader being incinerated. Now so, do try to get up and see if you can stand. The stunning should have worn off by now.”

With that she helped him to get up, steadying him with her hands. Her grip was firm but gentle, much the way a mother helps her baby to stand for the first time.

“I think I should sit down for a while,” he suggested after trying to steady himself. Using the furniture for support, he staggered over to the couch and slumped into it.

He could see all of Fionla for the first time as she stood in the center of the living room. She was a stunning blonde of perhaps twenty-five, petite and dressed in a plum-colored sweater and long swirling skirt that came down to just below her knees.

“You are how old?” he inquired again as he held one hand to his aching head.

Fionla smiled coquettishly. “You should never ask a lady that question,” she teased, “or didn’t your mother teach that to you?”

“But you are ‘hundreds of years’ old?”

“I first came to Ireland in about 1245, and married Finn McCarthy,” she responded matter-of-factly. “We built the original castle on this site a few years later. Since then, it has been more or less my home. And yes, some of the stories you must have heard are true. I did kill those two fools who wouldn’t take my warning seriously. But outside of that, I try very hard not to cause problems. I’m here to study your people, not to harm them.”

Confused, Barry stared at her for a moment, both to study her as well as to take time to make sense of what she said.

“Ah, so you own this castle, at least in your mind?”

“Well now, that is a complex issue,” she began with an audible sigh. “Legally, this castle is yours, but morally it is mine. And besides, I need the portals located here. This castle was carefully located and designed by myself to take advantage of the nexus of portals located here. For example, the portal in your bedroom closet goes to my house on Belis, where I actually live. And one in the guard room goes to Grand Central, and another to New York City, and one goes to Paris, and another goes to Rome, or at least did until some fool built a building over the entrance in Rome. There are several others that go to places important to me, so it is vital that I keep access to them. That is why I defended this place over the years. I need it.”

“And if I throw you out?” Barry probed cautiously.

“I wish you wouldn’t say things like that,” she replied firmly. “It is a terrible way to start a relationship. Both your granduncle and Sean found real use for the portals, and I was hoping so would you.”

Barry sat on the couch contemplating Fionla. Clearly there was much more going on in Dun Ardmore than he had any real insight into, and now a woman claiming to be a hundreds-of-years old elf was blabbering about portals that go all over the place.

Instinct told him to run as fast as he could, but then again he was intrigued both by Fionla and the mysteries of the castle.

“Just what are these ‘portals’?” he challenged. “I have been all over this place and didn’t see any doors leading anywhere except to the next room. And there certainly are none in my closet.”

“That is because you don’t have a key to unlock the gate,” she explained, holding out her right arm and pointing to her biceps with her left forefinger.

“Without it, you just see nothing. ‘Tisn’t there. But with the key, you can go through to some other place far away as easily as walking through a door. Want to see?”

Fionla walked over to him and reached out with her hand. “Come on, let me show you where I live. ‘Tis just through the door of the closet.”

She took his hand and gently tugged, smiling playfully at him. “Come on, scaredy-cat.”

“Okay, given what has happened so far today, why not?” he acquiesced as he got up to follow her.