

# CHAPTER 0

## When the Sun Always Shines

Now the animal fear drove her. The unseasoned heart in her chest pumped faster and faster still, adrenaline muzzling all conscious thought. Heaving breaths filled her lungs with mossy air and sweat chilled her skin. Each dig of her heels spattered mud over her legs as she ran. Overgrown hedges caged the girl's small frame in evergreen and shadow. There was no nightmare more hellish than that endless flight, searching for the place she belonged and finding nothing.

She tripped on a rock, pitching into a clearing, and her hands shot out to break her fall. The knees of her striped leggings tore. Auburn waves tangled against her face and between her lips. Pushing to stand, she winced and examined her bloodied palms.

The girl's surroundings were unfamiliar. This forsaken part of the gardens was long untouched by hands, human or otherwise. She fought back frustrated tears and turned her head to the midday sun.

Heuly always told her not to wander off, but helping Ailig about the gardens never held her attention for long.

She was all of ten years old, after all.

Heuly should have returned from the moldering castle on the hill hours ago, and the girl could not handle any more lessons about plants. Listening to Ailig's explanations about the medicinal uses of his treasured blooms was too much like being in school: tormentil for upset stomach, fireweed to stymie bleeding, meadowsweet to calm maladies of the mind. Following the will o'wisp seemed like more fun and now she was hopelessly lost. She curled her injured fingers in the sleeves of her purple sweater.

"Hello, little one. What brings you here?"

The girl turned toward the voice, gray eyes fixing on the stranger before her. He was tall, as tall as Heuly, with a pearly braid trailing down his back. He watched her with the cold scrutiny of a predator. Sleek armor of black and silver glistened like water, twisting and writhing around his body as he prowled toward her.

He threw back his hood and knelt before her, a placating smile on his face. "It is rude to leave a question unanswered."

She lowered her eyes. "I'm here with my friend Heuly."

"Heuly? How sweet," he said. "And where is your friend Heuly?"

The girl kept her gaze fixed on the ground, studying the flowers crushed underneath her feet.

"What is your name?"

She hesitated at the question. There were many rules in Heuly's world. One mustn't eat the food or drink the water or poke the pixies, and so on. She had already broken one by going off on her own. But the first and foremost rule Heuly had taught her was to never, ever tell anyone your name.

She glanced up. "I'm not supposed to talk to strangers."

Colorless eyes burned into hers. "If you tell me your name, then we will be strangers no longer."

"I think we'll still be strangers then."

"Aren't you a clever little one?" The stranger sneered and gripped her chin.

His lips peeled back from the barbed teeth crowding his mouth. She whimpered, making a futile attempt to break out of his grasp. His cruel hand clenched in her curls. The stranger stared down into her terrified eyes and deeper. He clawed through her mind, tearing at her thoughts and parsing out her secrets.

"I see. What a precious thing you are, Saoirse." His hold slackened, and he stroked through her hair like she might pet a cat. "Perhaps this is not so poor a bargain as I had anticipated."

"Release her!"

A wiry man rushed toward them, imposing despite his lean build. His eyes and hands glowed like an avenging angel. The sun lit him from within, golden hair flowing behind him. It took the girl a moment to recognize Heuly. Her friend had never looked so terrifying.

"Merely inspecting the chattel." The stranger shoved the girl into Heuly's arms.

He examined the child for injuries before speaking again. "You overstep, Calon. Attacking a guest of *Túatha de Samhradh* on castle grounds."

"Please," he scoffed. "Is that how you refer to your mortal bastards now?"

Heuly pulled the child behind him, and she buried her face in silks of cream and sage. "Mind your tongue lest you lose it, traitor."

Calon appeared unconcerned by the fury blazing in Heuly's eyes. "Hold onto her while you can."

He threw up his hood with a savage smile and sank into the shadows. Heuly's vacant eyes stared into that darkness for a time.

"Heuly?" Saoirse said, peering up at him in concern.

Her words brought him back to life. "Are you well, my child?"

"My head hurts. I want Mommy." She succumbed to frightened sobs.

"Oh, no, no. Do not weep. We will go see Mommy."

Heuly lifted Saoirse to his chest and her fingers curled in his shimmering mantle. He turned toward the entrance to the hedge maze as a squat figure appeared beneath the ivy-laden boughs. The girl's tears dried quickly at the sight of that familiar, weathered face.

"Please forgive me, My Lord!" Ailig stumbled in his haste to reach them, pitchfork in hand. "If I had known The Prince of the Windswept Tangles and Valleys was about, why I would have... I would."

"Be at ease, Ailig. She will recover. That coward has fled as he is wont to do." Heuly tucked his blond locks behind a long, elegant ear. "And do not refer to him by that noble title. No matter how he grovels at my brother's feet, he is no more than a disaffected exile of *Geimbreadh*."

Heuly and Ailig did their best to comfort the girl on their journey back through the gardens and the surrounding forest. The tallest of the three stopped every so often to point out nearby flora and fauna, pixies, will o'wisps, and even a troop of nymphs leaving their ash trees for a

quick bath. Heuly stroked her untidy hair as he carried her. Unbeknownst to him, his touch imparted calming visions of his childhood under the summer sun. The distant daydreams lulled Saoirse to sleep.

“Are you still taking her back there? Boston, was it? Strange name,” the brownie muttered with a shake of his head. “You know those bloodsuckers are taking over her homeland, and they go mad for the blood of the *daoine sídhe*.”

“She will be protected.”

Ailig rubbed a sun-browned hand against his prominent nose. “Not meaning to speak out of turn, of course, but would it be so terrible for her to remain here as your brother wishes?”

“She needs her mother, Ailig. It would be too cruel to separate them.” Heuly sighed. “Crueler still to barter her off to that... creature.”

“You speak true. But what of yourself? Will you not be punished for this?”

“It matters not. I refuse to sacrifice my daughter for his ambitions.”

Ailig nodded with a troubled frown. “It will be as it must be.”

They spoke no more until they reached the *áit tanaí* at the edge of the marsh. Heuly woke the girl, so she might hear Ailig’s goodbyes.

Saoirse and Heuly carried on alone. It was still morning, as though no time had passed since they entered the mists. Heuly set the girl down to walk on her own two feet.

“I am afraid it will be some time until I see you again.”

“Why, Heuly? Are you going somewhere?”

He carded his fingers through her hair and looked to the sky as though the answer might be up there somewhere.

“No, there are matters to which I must attend before you return.”

“You have to go to work?”

“Exactly.”

She glowered at him. “How long will it take?”

“This, I do not know.”

“But I want to keep playing with you.” Her lip pushed out in a stubborn pout.

He smiled at her gently. “I want that, too.”

“Okay,” she said as though the conversation were settled. “Let’s go see Mommy.”

“Just one more thing. And then we shall.”

“What?” she asked with no small amount of sass.

It had been a long and trying morning, after all.

“I need to do something to help you stay safe. But it may hurt a little.”

“Like a shot?”

His sky-blue eyes showed not one ounce of comprehension. “Yes. Like a shot.”

“I don’t like shots.”

“Neither do I, but it must be done.”

She went silent as she considered his argument. “Will I get a sticker?”

“Of course you will get a sticker,” he said.

Whatever Heuly did was nothing like a shot. He waved his hands through the air in peculiar motions, and his eyes again glowed gold. It was in her belly, not in her arm. Instead of a quick pinch, it was a lingering burn that misted her eyes.

After the pain came numbness like a curtain separating her from the rest of the world. Heuly apologized countless times while he did it. When it was over, he cried, too.

He carried the girl home, putting her to bed and pulling the covers over her fragile body. He knelt at her bedside, weeping silently. She sat up to put a hand on his shoulder.

“Don’t cry, Heuly. You’ll be done at work soon, and then we can play more.”

The girl’s bid to console him was not as effective as she had hoped. A defeated laugh passed his lips.

Wiping his eyes, he took her small hands in his. “Saoirse.... My freedom... I love you. Never doubt that.”

Her face crumpled in a confused frown. “I love you too.”

He kissed her hands and then let them go, taking a ragged breath. His unusual behavior was beginning to set Saoirse on edge.

“You’re not leaving forever like Uncle Liam, are you?”

“No! No. Be at ease, child. We will meet again.”

Heuly embraced her as though he would never let go. When they parted, he laid his palm over her forehead. He caught her as she slipped out of consciousness and rested her head on a pillow. He watched her sleep until he heard the rest of the household waking then stole away through her window. No one would know he had been there, including Saoirse, whose memories of her friend left with him.

The girl would not return to *Tír na nÓg* for a quarter-century. She lived out her childhood behind the shroud. That endless nightmare of unbelonging haunted her. And it was not the only demon that refused to release her.

# CHAPTER I

## When Time Stands Still

“I don’t know what else you want to hear. I killed him. I’m not sorry, and I’m glad he’s dead. That’s all I’ve got, okay?”

My voice was a whip crack in the otherwise silent room. A hot flush prickled up my chest in stark contrast to my pale skin. I pressed my palms against the plush chair and dragged in a breath. My gaze fixed between the brows of the man seated across me, so I didn’t have to look him in the eye.

He was unfazed like always. His eyes burned through my skull, manicured fingers steepled under his chin. When he spoke, he used my given name like we were family.

“Saoirse, we have discussed this.” His lilting brogue washed over me as he tried to lull me into compliance. “I ask you these questions only for your benefit. To support you in processing this unfortunate hazard of your work.”

“You mean the unfortunate hazard of my work where I shoot some guy eight times in the chest?”

I was being unfair and difficult and kind of a bitch. But maybe defiance and sarcasm would demonstrate my fitness for duty.

He clicked his tongue. “I want to help you, but you must be honest with me. I, for one, would feel much safer knowing you are supporting your fellows of the Boston Police Department. Help me help you to return to active duty.”

“Look, Doc. Doctor Somerled,” I amended at the quickly concealed annoyance in his hazel eyes. “I just...”

I stopped on a frustrated huff, running my hands over my face and through my auburn waves. Somerled stared down his aquiline nose at me. I tried to bring my eyes to his, but they skittered away at the last second.

Stalling, I surveyed the back office of his Beacon Hill brownstone. The room had one exterior door and a bay window. He was closest to both. The desk next to us was an impractical thing with a leather blotter over marble and spindled wooden legs. Painted floral designs twisted

across the glossy mahogany surface. Knowing the good doctor, it cost more than my car. A throne-like chair sat behind it, all tufted red-brown leather and brass nailheads. Dark damask wallpaper caged me in—suffocating.

His thin lips parted, ending my reprieve. “Perhaps we should attempt the visualization exercise again.”

“I... don’t want to.”

All bluster withered away in a wave of sick panic. Hands on the chair, I grounded myself and gasped in a stilted breath.

I didn’t meet the doctor’s eyes. I couldn’t.

Instead, I stared down at my nails, gnawed to the quick. I said nothing more and stood to peruse the biggest bookshelves I’d ever seen outside of a library.

It was just an excuse to put some distance between us.

The shelving was in the same style as his desk, with fussy trim and painted details. The one in the middle showcased a porcelain phrenology bust. His shelves were full but not cluttered.

Dr. Emrys Somerled, forensic psychologist, police consultant, and expert witness in whatever, wouldn’t consider allowing clutter anywhere within a three-mile radius of his esteemed person.

His collection was eccentric, made up of chunky, jewel-toned volumes spanning a variety of topics. One shelf was devoted to poetry and myth. The next held texts related to his field, including the most recent psychiatric diagnostic manual and several books about sociopathy and antisocial behavior. The third shelf contained antique tomes. Many of the spines were blank or marked with unfamiliar symbols. The first of the alphabetically filed texts was titled *Arbatel de Magia Veterum*. Farther down, I noted the leather-bound *Sixth Book of Occult Philosophy*.

What a totally normal and nonthreatening hobby.

Scattered around his extensive library were random objects the doctor himself would never refer to as knick-knacks—small statues, coins, crystal vases, the odd animal skull, and other things of bone. They were the types of trinkets my mother might offer to the faeries she believed tended her garden.

I made eye contact with the doctor and immediately regretted it. Nausea returned as his changeable amber eyes seared into mine. The words I planned to say fled from my mind. He offered no quarter.

“You were in quite a fragile state the last time we attempted imaginal exposure. I perhaps asked it of you too soon after the incident. It will likely be more effective now that you have the benefit of time and distance from the event.

“Avoidance is a safety-seeking behavior, a psychological defense mechanism, and certainly nothing of which to be ashamed. However, there is no further need to rely on this strategy, as you have several alternative coping options in place. To illustrate, you have done well with physical grounding on multiple occasions throughout our session.

“Saoirse,” he prompted, waiting for my eyes to meet his. “You are perfectly safe here. I will bring you back to me if you become overwhelmed.”

I didn’t feel safe around him. I never had, but I was usually packing a Glock 27.

Somerled was good-looking, traditionally speaking, with slick blond hair and golden skin. It was natural considering the amount of money he must spend on his wardrobe, haircuts, and whatever else. His gilded exterior was reminiscent of the Turkish rug under our feet, stylish but excellent at camouflaging bloodstains.

God only knew what the man and his blood-red carpet were hiding in the cellar.

There was something about how his eyes went flat and shark-like during interviews with suspects, like he was completely unaffected by their stories. It might be a coping method for him, compartmentalizing everything behind a detached stare. But sometimes there would be this little spark.

There had been when he and Murph debriefed me after the shooting.

Somerled watched me with a gleeful sheen in his eyes while I sat on the opposite side of a table at the District C-9 precinct. I was still covered in the blood of the Miller family, fists clenched in my lap to keep them from shaking.

He was a freak in more ways than one. Unlike everyone else I'd ever met, I never knew what he was thinking.

A handshake told everyone a little something. A firm grip communicated confidence. Too tight? They were overcompensating. But I saw more, not every time but most of the time.

I'm used to it now that I'm older. I don't cringe and pull away like when I was a kid. Sometimes the visions were nice, like the kiss Chloe got after her blind date. Sometimes they were not so nice, like after McCormack's ma died.

'Vision' was the word I used but it failed to accurately describe my experience. I heard myself sobbing. Salt and phlegm coated the back of my throat. I felt like I'd never be whole again.

Sometimes they were awful, like when I cuffed a man who beat his wife to death. I still wake from the occasional nightmare with the heat of blood spatter on my face and her screams ringing in my ears.

Touch was an unpleasant eventuality in my life. Sometimes, but not every time, my skin would come into contact with another's, or with their blood or bile, and I would see scraps of memory. Bits and pieces of their past would sputter through my mind. I might learn their secrets or I might learn nothing. I might come away unscathed or they might leave a shard of themselves rattling around inside my brain.

I couldn't control it and that was the scariest part.

The first time I remember doing it, I was in kindergarten. It was the first day of school. We were having 'circle time' or some shit. A kid tripped over their laces, landing on top of me. That time I saw something awful.

No one believed me. No one except my Uncle Liam.

But nothing like that ever happened with Somerled. He was a wild card. Touching him was peaceful in the way that drowning must be. It was frightening and beautiful at once, like a siren's song.

He couldn't be trusted, yet I had to spill my guts to him if I ever wanted to work again. Of course, if I told him what really happened, not being able to work would be the least of my problems.

What white room would I end up in, drugged out of my mind, if I told him about the visions?

It would be smart to refuse him and stuff that memory of the Millers deep down in the pit of my stomach forever.

“Sure.”

“Wonderful. I do appreciate this, Saoirse,” he said, like I’d agreed to drive him to the airport. “Sit. Close your eyes and picture yourself as you were on that day. It is the twenty-ninth of May. Detective Perez and yourself approach the Miller home. Tell me what happens next.”

It wasn’t a request.

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Bastian and I were in his Challenger, a silver sedan with spindled chrome rims that I knew for a fact cost him a whole paycheck.

Even I knew it was a good-looking ride.

He was ragging me about my age. I turned thirty-four two days before, which probably did seem old compared to his twenty-eight years. It was a beautiful spring day, sunny and clear. I remembered strange details like how the sunlight cast over Bastian’s deep, dark skin. The planes of his face glistened like a panther’s fur in the daytime.

It was a Tuesday, of course. Fuck Tuesdays.

We pulled up to the Roxbury address to question Miles Miller of 2A about a stabbing death one week prior. The flat-faced building had a row of small, square windows and a fire escape. It was not unlike my apartment building in South End. A green lawn spanned the front walkway, overlooked by a single oak tree.

We ran into a woman babysitting her grandkids on the first level. Mrs. Dorinda Young bragged about her daughter who worked at Mass General and, eventually, volunteered the location of the Millers’ unit. She knew right where it was because they often argued so loud she couldn’t hear her shows.

Bastian and I walked through the tired building. The walls had been white once, but the paint had yellowed with age and cigarette smoke. We passed a wall of mailboxes with surnames crossed out and scribbled in, leaving behind illegible layers of ink. A scream cut through the silence as soon as we hit the stairs.

We didn’t need to speak.

Bastian and I sprinted upstairs with guns drawn. The door to 2A was open. Deja Miller lay in the doorway with both hands at her abdomen, trying to stymie the flow of blood from multiple stab wounds.

She looked right at me, her terror dragging me in. “Bri...”

Bastian knelt next to her, placing one large hand over hers and radioed for help. “This is Perez of India eight-four-oh. Code nine nine at six-oh-one Shawmut Ave. We need an ambulance!”

I went inside. The living room was clear.



A man's voice, sinister despite the fondness of his tone, floated down the hall. I found them in a room that a glittery pink sign proclaimed was *Bri's Room Keep Out*.

Inside, Miles Miller held a kitchen knife with one hand and his daughter's neck with the other. "I love you, Bri. Love you and your mama so much. You know I love you. You forgive me..."

The girl just sobbed, beyond words. She looked at her father like she'd never met him.

"Mr. Miller," I said, "we're gonna figure this out, okay?"

I didn't even believe myself and I guess he didn't either.

His pupils were so black against the bright whites of his eyes. The silence was worse than anything he might have said. He stared back at me and I knew what he was going to do before he did.

Miller stuck the knife into Brianna's soft belly, dragging the blade across as best he could before I fired. I hit him once in the shoulder. Another shot missed, ending up in the wall behind his head. He released his child, and she crumpled to the ground.

He came at me.

I kept shooting until I ran out of bullets.

I rushed to Brianna's side as he fell. At least, I think that was what happened.

Time stood still.

It was like wading through the deep waters of the Atlantic, fighting the Gulf Stream current. Her red, red blood gushed out with each beat of her heart. I crushed my hands to her abdomen in some effort to make myself feel better because there was no fixing what he did to her. I wanted to say something to comfort her, but I was gone as soon as her blood hit my skin.

All I knew after that was her confusion and fear and agony. I went away for a while. I went away forever.

Bastian told me later the paramedics said I had some kind of panic attack. It was a typical response to a traumatic experience. I just nodded and went with it. Then he said some things meant to comfort me because, of the two of us, he'd always been the best at that.

Later—after Deja and Bri bled out at the scene, after Bastian and I went to the station, after I talked to Murph and Somerled and the union lawyer and fuck knows who else, after Miles Miller's lung collapsed and his chest cavity overflowed with blood—we realized he made us while we were talking to Mrs. Young. He was checking his mail as she chatted about her daughter and grandkids. When he heard us asking about him, he panicked and made sure we would never separate him from his family.

Miller died the same way my uncle did. At least he didn't leave anyone behind.

I understood Miller's thought process, not that it justified his actions. A cage of lies alienated both of us from the people we loved. No one wanted to be alone. I, too, felt the pain of separation and hoped to someday belong. But, unlike me, Miles Miller found a way out.

Murph took my gun, of course. I emptied my magazine into a living person. If he hadn't taken it, I wouldn't need to worry about guarding the secret of my visions from Somerled or anyone else. I wouldn't need to worry about being alone and unwanted. I'd never have to worry about anything ever again.

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I stopped talking and realized I was still looking into Somerled's eyes. My heart lurched in my chest. Hazel eyes glimmering with unsettling intensity, he leaned forward in his chair. I did my best to reel in my racing thoughts and control my breathing.

Somerled regarded me like a king does a supplicant or maybe the way God does an ant. "Carry on, Saoirse."

I stuttered to life, blurting out the first words that came to mind. "If we got in there five-ten minutes earlier, it might've mattered. But I didn't. I hate that I didn't, but I accept it. Next time, I'll be faster and... I'll just- I'll do better next time."

"The burden of guilt you carry is threefold. The guilt of Deja Miller's death. The guilt of failing to save young Brianna. And, finally, yes." He raised his hand to silence me before I could dispute it. "You feel guilt for ending the life of Miles Miller.

"This simply means that you are human. Shame may seek to overwhelm us like the swell of the Irish Sea did Manannán's Wave-Sweeper. But those same waters propelled his ship to ultimate success as Over-King of the Otherworld. Allow these feelings to carry you forward but do not be carried away by them. Let this be your motivation for personal growth."

His metaphors were as obscure as ever. Praying the conversation would be over soon, I nodded in agreement.

"I will provide you with a referral for ongoing psychotherapy." Somerled reached for a pad of paper on the desk. "And I will inform Captain Murphy that I find you in good form to return to duty."

I tried to keep the shock off my face as he pulled an ostentatious pen from the breast pocket of his equally ostentatious suit. Somerled wrote a name and number in a flourishing script. Then he handed me the referral with a soft smile that made me want to smack him over the head with his ironic phrenology bust.

"This may sound trite, but it will get easier." The doctor held the door for me with the courtly manners of someone with way more money than me. "There are three days until the eclipse, Saoirse. The blood moon represents rebirth. Set aside your fearful self-loathing, and you will overcome this."

His flowery words were little comfort. A man like him could never understand me.

Still, it would be unfair to pin the blame for Somerled's less than helpful therapy session solely on him. Talking to him might alleviate my guilt if I could be honest.

But that was my problem, wasn't it? I couldn't be honest with anyone.

I'd always be alone, crushed underneath the weight of my secrets.

There was another option, of course, and each loss drove me closer. I'd held on for years but, after the Millers, it was getting harder and harder not to take it.

I stepped out of Somerled's Victorian-styled office and back onto the streets of Boston, Massachusetts. My first order of business was to toss his crumpled-up referral into a barrel. Then I'd decide how to die.