

Hunted

The World of the Changelings

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One

I heard a wild cry echo through the mists, as though hounds howled against the night.

The Plain, Mag Mell, was empty – stripped of all lore, all magic and life – and Niamh Golden Hair’s curses still rang in my ears.

I would rue the day I had turned from her cause, she had said.

As the sound caused dread to prickle my skin, a part of me laughed. There is a reason Niamh is the Fae’s greatest spell weaver and seer, though not many risk the king’s ire to say so.

The mists pressed down upon me. They started to dance. So wrapped up in my own misery – my own hot denial of her visions – was I, I did not see their grasping fingers twine ‘round my legs.

And then that cry. That hideous, desperate cry.

The king - Nuada Silver Arm. It had to be.

I carried a sword, gifted to me by that same king for wining his war, but it’s blade mattered little. Nothing crafted by man can harm the Fae. Once it was said they could be killed – that the Fae feared man’s iron – but I knew it was a fairy tale.

The cry which rent the air told me I was hunted. It is always so for those who can travel between the worlds. Why did I think I would be any different? The war I won for Nuada Silver Arm had been over for an age – man had forgotten it as they sped beyond us.

I was a man outside of time, beyond the help of kindred, and I had just turned my back on the last of those who cared.

A haunting wail pierced the air, adding anguish to the wild cry of terror. We sang in tune, my hunter and I, and when he ripped the world from beneath my feet, I nearly wept with relief.

Two

“What do you remember?”

Dubh Súile mac Alasdair lifted his eyes to the red-haired man standing over him. He looked smart in his pilot’s uniform. He was young, yet his green eyes spoke of many battles.

Every day it was the same question.

Every day he said the same thing.

“Nothing.”

It was a lie.

Each of the 1200 years I had lived among man and Fae spread out before me – loves and lives lost taunted me whenever I closed my eyes.

Each moment of the war which had torn me from the world of men screamed at me in dreams, and the memory of magic, which had once been my reward, still lingered on my skin.

But that was not what the young man meant.

A broadsheet included with this day’s breakfast declared it was 1 March 1944. The narrow bed in which I lay belonged to the Queen Mary Convalescent Auxiliary Hospital just outside London, England.

I had not been in London for nearly 400 years. Metal-clad machines prowled the streets, their growl replacing the clatter of horses’ hooves on the cobbles.

It had been one of these—these things, which looked more like the monsters reserved for the unknown realms at the map’s edge than something man should ride within, which had put me at the mercy of the white-capped ladies of Queen Mary’s in the first place.

The only thing that remained the same was the endless war – only this time it wasn’t with the French.

“Nothing at all?” Pale eyebrows arched to etch lines of disbelief in the sergeant’s face.

“I remember nearly cracking your skull, even as I cracked my own.”

Not my finest moment, but Nuada Silver Arm had not meant it to be. In fact, I was fairly certain the king meant it to be my last moment.

“You and the cab came out of nowhere – if you hadn’t rolled me out of the way, I might have been hit by the bloody thing myself. Your reflexes are sound, at least.”

“Physically, perhaps,” I admitted. “My memory before that black cab is a little dim, however.”

“And yet, the doctors tell me the memory loss is a protective mechanism – depending on what it’s protecting, I would say that reflex is also quite good, soldier.”

My left eyebrow raised of its own accord and the sergeant finally cracked a smile.

The sergeant’s smile turned into mock surprise. “What’s this, no retort? No denial? I call you ‘soldier’ and you simply accept it?”

I answered his smile with a wry twist of my lips. It was about time. At turns solicitous and stern, the sergeant had been trying for two days to uncover my identity.

“I have been a warrior – among many things – all my days. I could no more deny it than willingly stop breathing. And yet, I do not know for whom I fight.”

“For Queen and Country, that’s who,” the sergeant snapped. “I had a thought you were from one of the Highland regiments. A lad from the Black Watch had gone missing on his way back from the front. Deserter, they thought.”

Deserter.

The word slithered through the air, now sharp and sour. The sergeant’s eyes had turned to flint as he waited for me to twitch, blubber, or show any other sign my memory loss – amnesia the doctors called it – was a ruse.

I stared placidly at him, and waited for him to continue. My mortal record – all my mortal records – had been lost to time for centuries, but creating an identity from whole-cloth was foolhardy at best. No longer did man rely on a messenger who might take days, if not weeks, to reach his destination. In 1944, a command from a faceless man half a world away could move – or halt – an entire army.

“A Corporal Doyle McAlister, late of Dingwall? I sent up your photo. Captain there says it was blurred – don’t know how that bloody happened – but it’s close enough.”

Breathing was suddenly difficult. My family name – and the name of my home – had changed only slightly. Was this more of Nuada’s machinations, or some other agent of fate?

I took care with my words. “The names feel familiar, sir, but I can’t say for certain I am your man.”

“That will do enough for me.”

It was my turn to smile. “Why in such a hurry to tag a name to me, sir?”

“Because amnesia or not, you’re a canny one, Corporal. You watch, you wait and you keep your own counsel. I have need of a man with your skills.”

“And?”

If I was being tested, the matching grin on Sergeant O’Malley’s face said I’d passed.

“And I was only granted two day’s extra leave. I’m due back at 8 Group tomorrow. So, unless you would prefer to return to the front with your regiment...?”

O’Malley left the question hanging, but I didn’t leave it there for long. I’d seen the mechanical monstrosities man had made – and I had no desire to experience them any closer than I already had.

“You’ve cleared this with McAlister’s commanding officer, Sergeant O’Malley?”

“Indeed, Corporal McAlister, I have. How do you feel about aeroplanes?”

Three

“So, what do you think of her, Corporal?”

“She’s beautiful, sir.”

“You’re a funny sort, McAlister – you talk like you’ve never even seen a plane before.”

And so I hadn’t, but I wasn’t about to tell that to Sergeant Patrick O’Malley.

The twentieth century was rife with oddities, but aeroplanes were the most fantastic contraptions I had yet seen. Growing up, the Christian monks had claimed their god ruled the heavens, but now it seemed man had invaded even that domain.

I had always been a warrior, a worshiper of the land, and student of the unseen things between worlds. Never had I dreamed to exist so high, with only the clouds and birds for company.

I tore my eyes from the twin-engine beauty called a de Havilland Mosquito to look at the young man who was now my commanding officer.

Pat’s red hair was bright in the spring sun and freckles stood out boldly on his pale skin. He was twenty-four – a good ten years younger than me, had I cared to count the number of mortal years to take their toll on my body.

“Keen for a bit of flying, Corporal?”

Jamie – Sergeant James McAndrew – nudged me in the ribs and gave me a rakish grin. He was always teasing someone, but his best friend, Sergeant Patrick O’Malley, was his favourite target. Considering they had been friends since their days at boarding school, and co-pilots for six years, he had the right.

Both men could have become officers – had they taken the offered break between their tours of duty and attended officer training. They were natural leaders and had the respect of any crew who worked with them.

Instead, they had gotten married and spent a brief leave in Scotland, at Jamie’s family home. Being reassigned to the Path Finder Force of 8 Group, under Air Vice-Marshal Bennett had been their reward. Together, the men had survived four tours of duty – two of them with 8 Group.

“You can’t take him up, Jamie,” Pat said now. “It’s against regulations.”

“Ever since they graced you with an aide, you’ve been all over these ruddy regulations.” There was laughter in Jamie’s voice and a merry twinkle in his blue eyes to take the sting from his words.

“Ah sure, and didn’t they offer you the same thing? You’ve more need of an aide than I do – your desk is a disaster.”

“Don’t tell me he has you filing papers while he’s dazzling the lasses doing loop-de-loops in the sky.”

“If anyone would know about that, sir . . .” I graced the black-haired Scot with a wry grin and Jamie barked a surprised laugh.

“The tongue on you – Pat did well to bring you on,” he said as he clapped me on the back. “Not that anyone will tell you anything, but I’m sure you have ways around their reticence.”

“Enough, Jamie,” Pat warned. “You’re not supposed to know about that, either.”

No one was supposed to know I had been brought on to provide cover for the reconnaissance flights into Germany. There was some talk that 8 Group had a mole, and it was my job to find him – or her – and plug the leak before a big offensive set to take place later in the month.

On the train from London, Pat had explained the Intelligence Services had tapped him for work in 8 Group headquarters. He was not keen on the new role. He was still a pilot at heart, which was why he had enlisted me as his aide, and had “Corporal McAlister” transferred to the Administrative and Special Duties Branch. This way, Pat could take to the skies while I watched and listened on the ground.

Jamie nodded at his friend, but wasn’t done trying to get me in the sky. “Come on, Pat. The laddie here has been through hell.”

Pat looked between us and a small smile started at the corner of his mouth. “Ah, you’re worse than my nannie, God rest her.”

“Och aye, I’ve one of those myself.” Jamie grinned. He had won. “Just don’t tell Aunt Margaret I said so – she’d have my head for talking about her like that!”

* * *

I had no idea what it took to prepare oneself to fly, and was forced to stand by, helpless as a babe, while Jamie helped me pull up the jumpsuit, and strap on the helmet and parachute.

“Just in case,” he said with a wink and a mock-annoyed click of his tongue.

Seated in the plane, my palms began to sweat.

I had fought naked in hand-to-hand combat. I had crossed the sea between Scotland and Ireland in a tiny boat of leather hides. I had faced the boiling masses of a Fae army, which could not die, but when the ground fell away, all was noise and rattling sensation that gnawed at my bones.

The sky bent around us in stunning shades of blue as the plane soared.

My heart eased from my throat and my hands relaxed of their own accord. My soul filled with something resembling peace – fleeting and precious.

For the first time in a thousand years, I knew I could close my eyes and allow the gifts of the Goddess – gifts I had honed for years in the Druid grove and had forgotten at Nuada’s command – to flood my heart and make me whole.

I kept my eyes open.

There was too much to see.

* * *

I tried to hide my trembling legs by leaning up against the wood and canvas hide of the Mosquito which had been my chariot for the last hour.

Jamie wasn’t fooled.

“Aye, it has that effect. Did you know the first time I went up, I was green the entire time? Tossed my lunch, I did.”

I grinned at the young pilot. “Well, it’s a good think I missed lunch today, then.”

Jamie clapped me on the shoulder “Indeed? We’ll have to remedy that. To the pub, aye?”

* * *

I stared at the high-walled nooks filled with laughing men, and at the smoke-darkened beams which spanned the width of the low-ceilinged room. It was deceptively large, this cosy pub.

Cosy – and more to my style. The draught may have changed some, and the method of delivery, but a fire flickered merrily along one wall and men still gathered over drink to tell tales. Here I could be at home.

Here I could, most likely, fulfil Pat's command to unearth the double-agent who plagued 8 Group.

Pat ordered our supper and lagers with a shake of his head after I stared helplessly when asked what I'd like. Until Pat had wrangled my release, I'd been prisoner to the victuals deemed healthy by the good matron of Queen Mary's Hospital.

As we ate, Jamie attempted to play spymaster himself. He peppered me with questions about the man I was supposed to be, despite Pat's rolling eyes, and I deflected by asking him about his family – about both their families.

“Well, the girls share a cottage just outside Carrickahowley – easier with the two babes. Jamie's aunt has been after them to come back to Scotland, of course, but Kathy's mam is ailing. She's not going to last the summer, and she wants to be on hand.”

I nodded – the names meant nothing to me but Pat's eyes were shining bright in the pub's muted glow.

“Maureen's a bit of a terror – running already when she should just barely be crawling, her mother says.”

“She devils my boy something terrible,” Jamie added with a shake of his head at his friend. “But Sean's devoted to her – or so Mary says.”

I grinned and let their chatter wash over me. The big offensive at the end of the month was their last for this tour, and every ounce of me wanted to find the mole and let them go home – these men who still had a home to go to.

“Speaking of Aunt Margaret – Corporal, do you know Edward McAlister of Dunn Ussie? I went to nursery school with his son, Colin, back in Dingwall – are they relations to you?”

I choked on the hunk of bread and cheese I'd stuffed in my mouth. They still called the keep Dunn Ussie? After all this time? And if Jamie had gone to school with a child of that clan, could he be—?

Pat clapped me on the back and I took a steadying breath.

“Distantly, sir – I believe? The names certainly feel familiar.”

Jamie laughed. “See Pat – told you I could surprise him. You're a good one, Corporal. Welcome to the team.”

Four

“You’re telling me the Germans just let them go?” Pat sounded like he didn’t believe a word Jamie was saying.

Jamie shrugged. “That’s the news coming over the wire.”

“Something isn’t right.”

Dubh looked between the two men, hunkered over their lagers. Thick smoke filtered the pub’s weak light, and cast shadows over its patrons. One of the newly-arrived American pilots was complaining bitterly about it as he waved a bulky contraption he called a camera.

“What do you think, Doyle?”

“Pardon?”

“About the trade - have you not been listening, man? What is it – is Delia over there giving you the eye again?” Jamie asked with a wink.

I snorted. If Delia was giving anyone the eye, it was Jamie – not that the pilot would notice. He’d shown off the pictures of his lovely wife and son so many times they’d been worn thin with wear. It didn’t stop some of the younger Women’s Auxiliary cadets, or nurses, from swooning over his rakish smile.

Pat rolled his eyes. “He’s been listening, Jamie – he listens to everything. Did you know, according to our good Corporal McAlister, Johnny Hardwick snitches five paperclips a week from the supply office. And while that may seem sinister, it seems he’s building a replica of London Bridge.”

“Is that so?”

“Indeed,” I snorted. “And as you can see, Hardwick’s paperclip ode to British engineering has no bearing on your mole. You need someone in Germany, not Castle Hill House.”

“Are you volunteering?”

I hesitated, but only for a second. “Yes.”

There was nowhere else for me to go – the lands of Faerie were closed. I had tried to call the mists, to access the places where the veil between worlds was thin, to no avail.

The world was at war, and if going to Germany would help, then so be it.

Pat stared at me.

“Have you any German, then?”

“Mein Deutsch ist sehr gut. Außerdem bin ich begabt, wie Sie gesagt haben, mich gut einzumischen.”

Jamie burst out laughing and I gave him a droll stare.

“I know it is not that simple.” I kept my voice low but emotion crept into it anyway. “Yet, if by donning the armour of the enemy I help keep more of our boys safe to come home to wives and sweethearts such as Mary, I am more than willing to do it.”

Pat put a hand on my shoulder. I had only spent a month with these men, yet through their stories of home – of their infant children, their wives and boyhood exploits – I had come to love them as much as I had loved any brother-in-arms before. They were ten years my junior, but in

every way, they were my superior. They had lives for which to fight – and I would do what I could to ensure they could go back to those lives.

“We’ll talk about it after the run tomorrow night.”

“Then again, the war might be over after our run tomorrow night.”

Pat shook his head. “As much as I wish it so.”

His voice trailed off and he slipped a bit of paper from his pocket. It was a letter to his daughter. He wrote a new one each week.

He stared at the words scribbled on the page end then back at me. “You’re certain?”

“What is the point of a man with no memory hiding away, safe in the country while everyone else runs pell-mell into the enemy? I’ve told you – beyond your everyday rivalries and daydreamers hoping for home, there is nothing amiss here. My gut tells me my place is there.”

“And is your gut often wrong?” Jamie asked around a mouthful of lager.

I grinned. “In recent memory, I cannot say – yet I suspect it has rarely failed me.”

“Then tell us, oh great magician who can see into men’s hearts, what is our fate on the morrow?”

I stared into the dark blue eyes before me. Patrick made noises for Jamie to leave off but I wasn’t listening to either of them.

Static filled my ears and tiny flashes like miniscule bursts of lightening etched jagged lines before my eyes.

“Dubh – Dubh!”

I shook my head, but it would not clear. The noise of the pub had ceased. Jamie and Pat, their hands wrapped around their pints, were still.

“Dubh Súile mac Alasdair!”

“Niamh Golden Hair.”

I spoke her name out loud without fear. The magic of Tír na nÓg had stopped time.

“Thank the gods we have found you – what possessed you?”

“Possessed me? Dear lady, I feared perhaps it was your magic which had done this to me – in retribution for my failure to harken to your cause.”

“You are a fool, Dubh Súile, if that is what you think.”

“I have been called worse by you, my lady.”

“Do not bandy words with me, Druid. You were exiled, as well you know, and not by me. I have found a way to bring you back.”

I tried to keep the incredulity out of my voice and failed. “Bring me back? For a price, I’ll wager?”

“Do you still hold onto your foolish notion that Nuada’s ways are just? That he has not changed and sullied the magic, which was his duty to protect?” Her disgust with her king and father, Nuada Silver Arm, was almost palpable. “He sent you there to die.”

“And I shall make the best use of the time I have here. These men need me more than you do, Niamh.”

“Those men’s lives will be nothing if Tír na nÓg falls to him.”

“You speak of things you do not know. They know nothing of you or your kin – their lives have meaning all their own.”

I thought I heard her snort, and I couldn’t keep the grin off my face. I had missed our banter.

“So, you will not return?”

“Not until I have ensured their safety.”

“I cannot keep they gateway open forever, Dubh Súile.”

“Certainly, a day will not matter to you, Niamh Golden Hair.”

She laughed outright. “A year then, for you? I will see what I can do. If he suspects anything, I will have to close it, and you will be trapped there.”

“Perhaps it is as it should be – perhaps I should grow old and die, as is the fate of all mortal men.”

Niamh paused for a moment; when she spoke again, her voice was barely a whisper.

“Not your fate, Master Druid – not yet. We have need of you.”

The murmur of premonition crawled along my skin, and I shuddered.

“Good day to you, Master Druid. Should you have need of me, summon the mists. I will be watching.”

The noise of the pub came rushing back, drowning my senses in a heady wave of clanking glasses and the scrape of wood on wood. I gritted his teeth. Jamie and Patrick were looking at me, expectant smiles on their faces.

“Well, what is it man? What is our fate?”

“Ah, I do not deal in men’s fate – yet for you I see a great legacy. Your children will grow to do good things in your name.”

“Well, that’s all a man can ask for, I suppose.” Pat grinned and went back to his letter while Jamie sauntered up to the bar to order another round.

I watched the two men and wondered why my own words sat heavy in my heart.

Five

Despite that I was Sergeant O'Malley's aide, I was not allowed in the radio control room while my friends flew over Nuremberg. Only those with clearance - far higher than mine - were allowed, but they could not stop me from camping outside the door and chatting up anyone who would stop.

The news was not good. The Germans had been ready for the raids. As the night wore on, and more and more planes went down, and more names I knew were whispered as missing or dead, my dread deepened.

They would make it, though – they always had before. Four tours. It was unheard of. They were blessed by the angles, as some of the other pilots said.

I kept telling myself that, but as men trickled in with tales of being lit up by the German lights, of being hounded by the Luftwaffe, my heart clenched around the knowledge that Pat and Jamie's blessings may have run out. Neither angels, nor the gods themselves could keep them from the fate of all men, it seemed.

But I had defied fate, part of me reasoned as dawn broke. I had not allowed time to march on, nor the hand of death to take me. If I could do it, so too could they - these men who were better than me by far.

But even my blindness to reality could not change facts. The sun was nearing its apex. No one had returned in over an hour. Anyone still out there would have been out of fuel by now, and forced to land – if they could even manage it – in enemy territory.

I gritted my teeth and took myself to Vice Air-Marshel Bennet. To my surprise, his aide announced me straight away.

"I was wondering when I would see you, Corporal McAlister," Bennet said as he waved my salute away. "Sit. I have news."

Bennet took a deep breath and even though I wanted to protest – wanted to deny the words I could see in the other man's eyes – I did as I was told.

"Sir, may I ask if there has been news of—"

"You know what's happened, or you wouldn't be here."

"Sir, I—"

"I was waiting for a confirmation report, but I can say with some confidence that Sergeants O'Malley and McAndrew were shot down. They're dead. I'm sorry, Corporal. I know O'Malley was responsible for your post here. He thought quite highly of you."

I had no words to defend myself against the sudden emptiness which opened in my chest. My hand slid to my heart.

I had lost comrades in war. I had been forced to watch my father's murder. I had lived through more battles than I cared to remember, but it did not make their passing any easier.

Pat's letter to his infant daughter crinkled in my chest pocket. He hadn't the chance to mail it and had asked me to keep it safe until he returned.

"Are you sending anything home, to their families, sir?"

“The telegrams have already been sent to Home Office. Someone will deliver the news to their wives later today.”

My face flushed and I welcomed the anger - welcomed the ability to speak without thinking.

“Sir, forgive me, but how can you just—just dismiss them? Telegrams? They deserved better.”

Bennet sighed and rested his hands on the papers which littered his desk. I had no business speaking to him like this, but I didn't care. It was the truth. They had deserved better.

“You have to understand something, Corporal. Their wives are in Ireland – things being what they are there, Pat is a traitor.” Bennet ground out the last few words and two bright splotches of red had appeared on his cheeks. “Us showing up and giving them honours will only make things more difficult for Kathy and Mary.”

He took a breath and flexed his hands which had turned to fists. The man was angry - furious even - but not with me.

Pat had explained – Ireland was neutral, to a point. Those who had been enlisted in the Irish Army and left to join the British in the war were now traitors. While Pat had never been a member of the Irish Army, but many would – and did – see his wartime activities as an act of treason.

“The girls were stationed with the Women's Auxiliary back in '40. They met here, you understand? I gave them leave so they could marry. If Kathy and Mary were smart, they would go to Cloak Tower. There at least, they'd have a place, and I know Jamie's aunt has been asking for them. But I also know they won't go. Ireland is their home, and the girls are stubborn – and brave. Always have been.”

He looked me straight in the eye. “Let's not make this worse for them.”

I straightened and nodded. “No, sir. I understand.”

“I knew you would. Can I count on you, too, to continue the Sergeant's plan to infiltrate the German line?”

“Sir?” The sound of our plans – made only the night before – on Bennet's lips made the hairs on my neck stand on end.

“Sergeant O'Malley stopped by my office before he flew out.” He showed me a slip of paper with my name on it. It was a requisition request.

I relaxed, but only slightly. All through the night, all I could think was that I had been wrong, that there had been an informant in 8 Group, and I had lost him.

But even as the fear nipped at my heels, I knew for certain no one had exploited the secrets so rife at Castle Hill House. Not in the last month, at any rate. The informant had left before Pat brought me on.

And I would make sure the traitor was paid in kind for his treachery.

“I see, sir. In that case, yes. As soon as it can be managed.” I would honour their memory by finding out who had leaked the information about yesterday's raid. I would honour them by helping to end this terrible war.

“Good – you leave at 0800 hours tomorrow. Captain Hardwick will make sure you're kitted out.”

Bennet stood and I saluted him.

“Thank you, sir.”

“You'll make them proud, Corporal. I know you will.”

* * *

“Hey, Corporal, wait.” It was Jack, the American pilot with the camera.

I turned and watched the man jog up to him with a mixture of curiosity and impatience. The car tasked with taking me to the harbour was waiting, as was the boat which would deliver me across the sea to occupied France, and from there, Germany.

“I thought you might want to have this.” Jack was faintly breathless when he reached my side, and he waved a bit of glossy paper in my face. “I took it when you boys were in the pub on Wednesday night.”

I was silent as I plucked the paper from Jack’s hand. It was a photograph. I had seen them, of course, but that did not lessen my shock at seeing my own face – or part of it – stark against the gloom of the pub. Jamie and Pat were on either side of me at a table littered with cigarette butts and pint glasses. Pat had a pen in his hand and under a protective hand was his letter to his daughter.

I slipped the picture into my pocket – next to the same letter. I bit hard on the flesh of my cheeks, but whether to stem tears or the rising tide of rage, I was no longer sure.

“Thank you, Captain. I appreciate it.” I saluted the American and the other man nodded smartly.

“Good luck, Corporal. Give ‘em hell.”

Six

Faerie whispers had been chasing me for weeks, and for weeks, I continued to throw myself at the wolves of Germany. Sometimes I caught those who followed me – those who I had rallied to my side with calls for resistance and freedom – looking at me as though I was crazed, or perhaps damaged.

Maybe I was damaged, but they followed me regardless.

The traitor, the man ultimately responsible for the deaths of my friends, the man whose information had effectively ended the aerial war on Germany, had been captured.

When I saw him, I insisted I alone interrogate the prisoner. A glitter of silver haunted the man's eyes, and he'd been filled with delusions of grandeur. Whispers of Nuada's doing lingered on his lips and I knew the king's dark power had turned this man's heart.

Why? Had exile not been enough? Had the king wanted to crush my soul as well?

The traitor was mad, my men said.

I agreed, but I stayed their hands when they would dispatch him - leave him in a ditch where none would find him.

We would not become those men, I said.

The war was almost over. I could taste it in the air, feel the shuddering sigh of a world brought to the brink of destruction only to pull back.

Actions taken in these final days would stay with us.

It was March again, and still I pressed on.

I had honoured Pat and Jamie's memory, yet those who struggled and died to bring freedom to the world of men called out to me. The beacons of their hope lit my dreams and haunted my waking hours.

I would bear witness to their fight, so we trudged on, my men and I, and we fought or liberated where we could.

And so, the whispers of Faerie followed me as I hovered at the edge of my despair. My year was up. Niamh was looking for me, begging me to return to Tír na nÓg.

That she knew of my pain I did not doubt, yet I refused to listen until my company was safe. I led them back into a liberated village on the French-German line, and gave them to the commanding officer there.

That night, I slipped into the fields and howled at the moon as I called the mists.

The world fell away and I vowed then, I would enter it no more.

I sat in the grove of my own creation and stared out at a world and a people descended of mine own. As I watched, trees gave way to stone and the Many lost their claim to the priests of the One.

Then the wheel turned. The sacred trees grew around my effigy of stone and the Many came out of hiding. I sat in my grove and watched a world outside my imagination, willing it to see.

She saw. She saw me with uncanny green eyes – the green eyes of my mother and her mother before her: witch's eyes.

Joy rose in me. It was time – time to join the world after years of solitude, time to act after centuries of stillness.

I closed my eyes and reached across the barrier, to touch my future and my past.

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About the Author

Descended of pirates and revolutionaries, Katie Sullivan is a lover and student of all things Irish. Born in the States, she is a dual US/Irish citizen, and studied history and politics at University College, Dublin – although, at the time, she seriously considered switching to law, if only so she could attend lectures at the castle on campus. She lives in the American Midwest with her son and two cats. Find out more about Katie and her forays into fiction at [The D/A Dialogues](#).

The World of the Changelings

Changelings. They were the descendants of Man and Fae. They walked between worlds – as healers, mystics, even kings – but no more. He thought he was the last, alone and lost, until the day he saw them.

Dubh Súile mac Alasdair – Warrior, Prince, Druid. Dubh Súile was born in 690, second son of a Pict king. When war separates him from all he loves, he travels between the worlds to discover the myths he once sang at the fireside are not only the truth, but have the power to destroy all he has come to know.

Nuada Silver Arm – King, Myth, God. King of the Fae, Nuada swore he would protect the Fae from the machinations of men who would deny their existence.

Maureen O'Malley and Sean McAndrew – Changelings. Born at the close of World War Two, Maureen and Sean are orphans in Ireland's desolate west coast. Discovery of the gateway between the worlds leads them on a wild adventure through time, but ends in tragedy at Nuada's keep.

They are Changelings, and they have magic in their blood – magic, which will rekindle a centuries-old war that threatens to tear the very fabric of time.

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