

In Hoc Signo Vincas

by Susan and Dana

Trixie hung up the phone in the study at Crabapple Farm and excitedly ran to the kitchen, where her two older brothers sat at the table eating well-earned Crabapple Farm Specials following their long afternoon of yard work.

“You’ll never believe what Di just called about!” the energetic young blonde exclaimed.

Brian looked up from his sandwich and smiled. “I’m sure we’ll find out very soon, though. You look ready to burst.”

“I am! We’re going to Ireland!” Trixie blurted.

Mart and Brian stared at their sister in stunned silence. “What are you talking about? Elucidate, squaw!” Mart finally demanded.

“I’ll try. Apparently, Di’s dad has a business interest in Ireland, a castle they’re turning into a hotel or something. Before he decides to invest, he wants all of us to go check it out, like when we went to Mead’s Mountain,” Trixie explained.

“Really? When?” Brian asked, a spark of interest lighting up his chocolate brown eyes. During the Bob-Whites’ previous trip to the British Isles, he had had to stay in Sleepyside to work. This time, though, he had just finished his summer job as a camp counselor and didn’t start back to school for another two weeks. A glimmer of hope arose within him. Maybe he would get to go this time.

“Day after tomorrow,” Trixie answered. “And Mr. Lynch already talked to Moms and Dad, and they said we can go. The Wheelers and Regan have already approved of Jim, Honey, and Dan going, too, so it’s all set! Since the twins are coming, even Bobby’s been invited this time. We’ll be gone a week, so there’s plenty of time before you start back to school, Brian.” Her eyes sparkled as she thought of the adventure ahead, thrilled that all of the Bob-Whites would get to travel to Europe this time. “Gleeps! With everyone coming, we’ll have a full complement of Bob-Whites plus the younger generation to confuse museum guards and cause mayhem!”

Mart let out a whoop. “Ireland, here we come!”

“I know!” Trixie said, her mind already jumping ahead ten steps. “Wow, there’s so much to do before we leave!”

Brian stood, his sandwich forgotten. “Well, let’s get started,” he said eagerly. “I get to go this time!”

Mart, never one to leave unfinished food behind, hurriedly finished his own sandwich and said, “Glad you’ll be along this time, old chap. This time you can keep Trixie safe from pickpockets and fake Scots!”

Trixie rolled her eyes, but she was too excited to take Mart’s bait. Instead, she stuck her tongue out at him and went to find her mother.

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Just over forty-eight hours later, the Bob-Whites and the Lynches were landing on Irish soil after a layover at London’s Heathrow Airport. They arrived in Belfast and rented two minivans to travel to Donegal Castle in County Donegal, a scenic two-and-a-half hour drive from the airport. Soon, the Bob-Whites and the younger Lynches were ensconced in the vans, Di’s parents at the wheels. Trixie, in the van with Mr. Lynch, Honey, Jim, Di, and Mart, sat and looked out the window at the rolling, pastoral scenery. It reminded her a lot of the drive from London to Stratford—minus the annoying Scotsman. As

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her eyes roamed the Irish countryside, her mind wandered idly, half-listening to Mr. Lynch explain his business deal to Jim, who sat up front, and tuning out the flirtatious giggles emanating from the backseat where Mart and Di sat. Honey was in the other middle bucket seat, also staring out the window. Trixie wondered if her best friend was also reminded of the drive to Stratford in the car the Bob-Whites had christened the “maroon saloon”. She also wondered how Brian and Dan were faring in the van filled with small fry.

“And you said the castle was built in the fifteenth century?” Jim was saying to Diana’s father.

Mr. Lynch nodded. “By a family called O’Donnell in 1474. The castle’s Gaelic name is Caisleán Dhún na nGall, but I think I’m going to stick with calling it Castle Donegal, as its commonly known,” he said with his jolly, infectious laugh. Trixie smiled—she loved hearing that laugh. “Its correct name is O’Donnell’s Castle, but no one seems to call it that anymore. The O’Donnell family lived in the castle until 1607, when they fled to Spain to avoid persecution by the English. They severely destroyed much of the castle so it couldn’t be used by the English against the remaining Gaelic clans. The castle was granted to an English captain, who renovated it and introduced some Jacobean elements, like gables and a large manor-house wing. After several generations, it fell into ruins, and changed hands several times. Eventually, the then-owner donated it to Ireland’s Office of Public Works in 1898. The OPW has the castle open for tours for a few months out of the year and was in the process of turning it into a hotel when their investor had to back out. Not uncommon in these times, unfortunately.

“Anyway, the OPW began researching families that had even a distant connection to the castle to see if any had the means or an interest in investing in the remainder of the planned renovations. Apparently, the sister-in-law of the earl who was the head of the family at the time of the flight to Spain is distantly related to me. It turns out I have the means to help them finish their renovations, so we’re all here to determine whether I have the interest,” he finished with a grin.

“So the original family never made it back. That’s too bad,” Trixie commented.

Mr. Lynch glanced into the rearview mirror at Trixie and nodded before turning his eyes back to the road. “It is a sad story,” he agreed and then continued his narration about the castle. “One complete wing has been renovated so far and is ready for guests, but plans to renovate a second wing of more rooms and the main ballroom and several smaller rooms to be used as meeting rooms have been stalled in this economy. The goal is to make it a premier place to hold weddings and meetings. Because we’re going to be staying there this week, the castle tours are being suspended.”

“Getting married in an Irish castle with such rich history would be so romantic,” Di said dreamily from the back seat.

Mr. Lynch pretended to look at her sternly in the rearview mirror. “But not for a very long time, young lady. Like when you’re forty.” His eyes shifted back to the road and then to Mart. “Remember that, young man.”

Mart gulped. “Yes, sir.”

Di, however, just laughed and squeezed Mart’s arm. “Oh, Daddy! Stop teasing Mart. You’ll give him a complex.”

Trixie smirked at Mart’s plight, but Honey tactfully said, “The history of the castle is fascinating.”

“And it’s really neat that your family has a connection to it,” Trixie added.

“I thought that was neat, too,” Di said.

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Mart grinned. "A centuries-old castle, a tragic history, a family abandoning its rightful domicile...you know what that means, right?" As the other Bob-Whites stared at him blankly, he gleefully said, "A ghost! There's gotta be a ghost. Maybe lots of ghosts, even."

Di shivered. "Don't even joke like that, Mart. I've had more than my share of supernatural run-ins, thank you very much."

Trixie smiled, but she also suddenly felt the hairs rise on the back of her neck and a chill run up her spine. What did that mean? Would the Bob-Whites experience another ghostly presence during this trip? Trixie couldn't wait to find out.

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The BWGs were awestruck as the vans approached the castle. It was smaller and less fortress-like than Warwick Castle had been, but it was still impressive, nonetheless. Castle Donegal had been restored to its fifteenth-century glory, and its mixture of dark and light grey stones looked as though they could have come out of the quarry five days, not five centuries, ago. The long, low-lying middle section of the castle looked to be three stories high, with square tower-like wings on either end. The roof line was a series of gables, on both the center portion of the castle and the towers. Three stone arches were cut into the main section of the castle.

A representative of OPW was waiting for them as they entered the front door of the castle, an impressive structure of thick, dark, English oak. He introduced himself as Sean O'Keefe and led them through the wide entry hall, which Trixie thought might be large enough to fit Crabapple Farm inside. Tapestries hung on the wall, some of them showing coats of arms, others woven with ornate scenes, and Trixie recalled Mrs. Lynch remarking that she couldn't wait to see the priceless French tapestries on display. Where there were not tapestries, threatening-looking medieval weapons hung. The requisite coats of armor stood in two of the corners of the room. An iron chandelier hung from the ceiling three stories above their heads and supported by large oak beams. Four large wooden chests sat in various places along the walls, their wood darkened and worn with age. Couches, chairs, and tables were positioned in a grouping on a Persian rug, and although the furniture was not strictly from the fifteenth century, its gothic style fit very well into the mood of the castle. Trixie correctly assumed that this would act as the main lobby when the hotel was eventually opened.

The group followed Sean up a flight of wide stone stairs and entered a hallway, decorated much like the entry way with tapestries, coats of armor, and weapons hanging from the rough-hewn grey stones. As they walked, their guide explained that the smaller, original wing of the castle had been renovated first, with a suite on each end of the hallway and four standard rooms in the middle. The Bob-White girls would occupy the suite at the far end of the hallway, and the Bob-White males would be near them, Mart and Dan in a room with a king-sized bed and Brian and Jim in a double. The Lynches would occupy the suite closest to the stairway, with the younger kids near them. The younger set of Lynch twins, Tracey, and Stacey, would share a room with a king-sized bed, with Larry, Terry, and Bobby sharing a double.

"The other wing targeted for renovation is much longer. It's the wing that Sir Basil Brooke, the English captain awarded the castle following the O'Donnells' exodus, added in the early seventeenth century. Because we don't have to use the first floor of that wing for common areas, like the kitchen and banqueting room, like we did for this wing, we can use both floors for lodging. The plans include four suites, four king-sized rooms, and sixteen doubles. Our capacity will grow from our current ability to house twenty-eight guests, not counting rollaway beds, to 132 guests at one time."

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Sean looked at the group politely listening to his discourse and gave a sheepish grin. "But surely yer tired from yer long trip, and you don't want me ramblin' on about sleeping space. It's all in the prospectus, too, Mr. Lynch, as I'm sure yer aware. I know it's past the dinner hour, but have you eaten?" He looked at the group expectantly.

Mrs. Lynch answered. "We stopped at a charming pub on our way and had a lovely dinner."

"Brilliant. I know how long journeys can be, though, so I'll put some snacks out in the banqueting hall for ye. Feel free to get settled into yer rooms and then come on down for some refreshments." He gave them quick directions to find the banqueting hall and made his leave.

Mart grinned. "A man after my own heart," he said as everyone moved to find their rooms.

The girls' square-shaped suite consisted of a bedroom with two double beds with rich emerald coverlets, a separate sitting room, and a bathroom. The sitting room held two sofas, which could be converted to double beds, and a low table made of the same oak that furnished the castle. In the corner sat a desk and its corresponding x-chair, each made from a wood stained very dark. The rough-hewn grey stones that made up the exterior of the castle also made up the interior walls of their room, just as in the entry hall and the hallway. The paintings that decorated the walls were Irish sea- and landscapes and portraits of people whom Trixie assumed to be long-ago inhabitants of the castle. The large bathroom was the only nod to modern times, and Trixie was relieved to see the modern shower stall and sunken Jacuzzi tub.

In the bedroom, Di stared transfixed at a portrait of a young woman with flowing auburn hair. She looked to be in her twenties, with sharp, commanding features belied by delicate porcelain skin. Her midnight blue eyes stared penetratingly from her place on the wall. Trixie and Honey barely gave the portrait a second glance as they began to settle into the room. Di, however, felt a compelling need to gaze intently at it. She noted the medieval clothing that the young woman wore, but it was the eyes that captivated her. She was sure the piercing blue eyes were staring straight into her soul, and Di felt goose bumps form on her arms. She felt...she felt as though the woman had a message for her...

"Di?"

The sound of her name broke Di from her reverie, and she turned to see her two friends staring at her quizzically.

"You with us?" Trixie asked, somewhere between amused and concerned.

Di nodded. "Yeah. I don't know where I went just then." And I don't want to know. That was freaky!

"Which bed do you want to sleep in?" Honey asked.

"I think I'll take the one under this painting," Di said, unsure of why she so suddenly and adamantly felt the need to sleep under the portrait.

"Okay, that leaves Honey and me the bed by the window," Trixie said, and then, her eagerness to explore trumping any tiredness she might have felt from their long journey, she asked, "Are we ready to go explore?"

Honey grinned. "You're not going to let us say no to that, are you?"

Trixie gave her friend an answering grin. "Nope!" she said as she and Honey headed out of the bedroom and toward the door of their suite. At the door, they both turned and realized that Di was still in the bedroom.

"Coming, Di?" Trixie called with a concerned look at Honey.

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"Yep," Di answered, and with one last long look at the portrait, she followed her friends.

Di followed the other two girls out of the room and down the hallway, feeling a strange, reluctant lethargy as she did so. "Snap out of it, Lynch!" she whispered harshly to herself.

Trixie peeked her head into the room Brian and Jim had been assigned. The same emerald spreads were the only bright colors in the otherwise stark medieval-looking room. Generally, the room seemed a twin to the bedroom that the girls had just left. The boys' suitcases were neatly stowed up against the wall, but no sign of either of them could be seen. She then turned to the other girls with a grin. "They must be in Mart and Dan's room."

Loud laughter burst from Mart and Dan's room, and the three girls quickly hurried across the hall to join the boys. Mart lay across a rich, wine-colored bedspread on the huge king-sized bed that took up the majority of the room, his blue eyes sparkling with glee. Dan sat cross-ways in one of the x-chairs in front of the small desk near the window, his legs dangling over the edge of one of its arms, a wicked grin on his thin face. Brian and Jim, both laughing, leaned up against a massive dark armoire that faced the bed.

"What's so funny?" Trixie demanded immediately as she came into the room and walked over to stand near Jim. She looked suspiciously at each male Bob-White in turn.

The young men exchanged glances of mirth, but didn't answer her. Mart got a particularly smug, superior look on his freckled face.

Honey entered the room behind Trixie and sat down on the other side of the bed from where Mart was lying. "I don't think we'll get it out of them, Trixie. They have that look about them." She rolled her hazel eyes at her friend, her lips twitching.

"It's a guy thing," Mart said with an airy wave of his hand. "You wouldn't understand."

Trixie snorted. "I probably understand way more than I want to. What is it? Another one of your lame dirty jokes?" She raised an eyebrow at Jim and Brian, who immediately both took on identical expressions of indignation.

"Don't look at Saint Jim or Brian. Mart's the one who likes the dirty jokes," Dan said with a sly look at his best friend.

"Oh, and you don't?" Mart retorted. "I'll have you know..."

Brian interrupted his brother, looking from Trixie to Honey with a frown. "Where's Di?"

Trixie and Honey then both glanced at the door, but Di wasn't standing near it as they expected.

"She was with us just a minute ago!" Trixie exclaimed. She immediately strode to the door and headed back out into the hallway. "Di?"

Diana was standing at the end of the hallway, looking out a large window. At Trixie's hail, she didn't even move, standing transfixed.

Mart had followed his sister, concern on his freckled face. "What's going on?" he demanded of Trixie as he joined her.

Trixie shrugged helplessly. "I don't know. She's looking out the window. I thought she'd followed us into the room, but apparently, she got distracted."

"What did you say to her?" he said in a low voice, his blue eyes narrowed in suspicion.

"I didn't say anything!" Trixie protested. "Why do you think I said something nasty to her?"

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Mart didn't stay to listen to her, but hurried down the hallway toward Diana.

"What's going on?" Honey asked, putting her arm around Trixie.

"I don't know," Trixie admitted. "I called out to Diana, but she's ignoring me." Trixie gave her friend a troubled look. "You don't suppose she's mad about something, do you?"

"I can't think what she'd be mad about," Honey said, shaking her head. "She's been in a good mood all day. Maybe she's just looking at something really interesting outside."

"Oh! Yes! That's true!" Trixie's look of worry vanished and excitement gleamed in her eyes. "I did say I wanted to go explore. Maybe Di just got started ahead of us!"

"What goes on?" Jim asked as the others joined them in the hallway. "Is Di all right?"

"She's looking out the window at something," Trixie replied with a vague gesture toward Diana's still figure near the window. "Mart's gone to go get her." She grinned up at Jim. "Maybe she's seen something cool outside. We'll have to go explore after we have some of those refreshments Sean talked to us about."

"Mart was rhapsodizing about that a few minutes ago," Dan said in a dry voice. "Maybe we ought to beat him to the punch and get down there and get some before he gets a chance to. Otherwise, there might not be anything left for us."

But refreshments were the last thing on Mart's mind as he walked up to Diana. "Di?" he asked softly. "Is something wrong?"

Diana was staring out the window, her slender fingers gripped so tightly to the windowsill that Mart could see each digit's individual creases.

"Di?" He frowned before he put a freckled hand on top of hers. His eyes widened as he felt the unnatural chill of her hands. "Geez! Your hands are like ice! Diana? What's going on?"

Diana didn't respond. Instead, she continued to stare out the window. Mart stepped up closely behind her and hugged her from behind, trying to warm his body with hers. "What the devil are you looking at?" he demanded.

His gaze followed hers to an open, very green area below them. It was as picturesque a scene as one could imagine for Ireland. The rich emerald grass waved gently in the breeze, the blades caressing the stark gray beauty of large broken stones that Mart assumed must have been a portion of the castle long ago destroyed. But as he peered closer, he noticed in the center of the ruins a very symmetrical pattern to the stones therein. Each one seemed to be equidistant from the others, forming, from his vantage point, a rectangular shape along the ground. *Graves?*

Mart looked down at Diana and saw, to his dismay, that tears ran down her cheeks. With a muttered oath, Mart pulled her backward, finally forcing her hands to release the windowsill. "Diana?" he demanded. He whirled her around to face him, his blue eyes staring into her grief-stricken ones. "Sweetie, answer me!"

The others, having milled near the entrance to Mart and Dan's room waiting for Mart to return with Diana, had noted his physical struggle with her and then had flooded down the hallway toward them, concern on all of their faces.

"What's wrong?" demanded Trixie, worry in her blue eyes.

"Diana, talk to me," Mart said in a low voice. He grasped her hands, willing his warmth into her.

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Honey put a hand on Diana's face, her hazel eyes widening. "She feels like ice!"

"What was she looking at?" Dan asked, not even waiting for Mart to answer as he strode over to the window. "There are just ruins out here," he called back. "Stones and grass. I can't see anything that would make her so fascinated." He returned to where they all stood, an anxious look on his face. "Why is she crying?"

"Let's get her out of this hallway. She needs to get warm," Brian said, his voice quiet, but commanding. "They're bound to have coffee or something warm downstairs in the banquet hall."

"Right," Jim agreed. "Let's do it."

But Mart and Honey had quite a struggle to get Diana to walk with them down the stairs. Each step she took was slow and unwilling as if she were being pulled backward by some unseen force, and tears continued to flow in a silent stream down her face.

Honey exchanged a frightened look with Mart, who kept prodding his girlfriend forward. "Come on, sweetie. Another step. Yes, that's right. Keep going."

When they reached the end of the long stairway down, Diana blinked a few times and then took a deep, shuddering breath.

Mart's grip on her hand grew tighter. "Di?"

"What...what happened?" she asked in a low, rough voice.

Mart's arms went around her in almost punishing force. He kissed the top of her head. "Where did you go?" he demanded, his voice catching.

The other Bob-Whites, who had reached the bottom of the stairs long before Mart, Honey and Di had, clamored around their friend in concern.

"Di? Are you all right?" demanded Trixie.

"What happened up there?" Dan asked.

Di loosened her grip on her boyfriend, but Mart's arm still stayed wrapped protectively around her shoulders. "I'm sorry," she said huskily.

"No need to be sorry," Brian said gently. "Just tell us what happened."

"I don't know exactly," Diana said, sending a frightened glance up the stairs she'd so recently descended. "It all started with that portrait."

"What portrait?" Jim asked.

"In our room," Diana said with a shiver. "There's a portrait of a woman with red hair there. And I felt...I don't know...like something was drawing me to it."

"You were looking at that portrait for an awfully long time," Honey agreed.

"And when I went out in the hallway, I couldn't make myself follow Trixie and Honey. I tried, but I kept feeling this...I don't know...force? Compulsion? Something pulling me toward the window at the end of the hallway."

"I don't get it, though," Dan mused. "I looked out the window and I didn't see anything. Just stones and grass."

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"The stones made a pattern," Mart said in a voice that was taut with tension. "Maybe they're graves or some sort of pagan ritual site."

"Graves?" Honey asked in a trembling voice.

"What made you cry?" Brian asked Diana, looking at her with worry on his handsome face.

"Cry?" Diana asked, a blank look on her face. "I was crying?"

"You looked..." Honey shivered. "Oh, the look on your face, Di. It was awful. Tears and more tears. And you didn't make a noise at all. Just those awful tears."

Diana ran her hand over her cheeks, surprised to find the streams of moisture there. "I don't know!" Her violet eyes widened. "I'm not sad. I've been all excited about this trip and going to Ireland. I've been in a good mood all day. Why would I be crying?"

The others exchanged uncomfortable glances. Jim ran a hand uneasily down the back of his neck. Brian looked wearily resigned. Finally, Mart leaned down and kissed Diana's head and said gruffly, "I think it's your turn for the haunting this year, sweetie."

Diana stared up at him for a moment and then her face crumpled. "Oh, no. Oh, *no!* I don't want to be haunted!"

Brian gave her a crooked smile. "Believe me when I say I understand how you feel, Diana."

"You ought to give Mart a good old slap aside the head," Trixie advised. "Wasn't he the one talking about possible ghosts in the van?"

"Oh, that's right," Honey said with a nod.

"Looks like he conjured one up," Dan said wryly.

"Hey!" Mart exclaimed, a scowl on his face. "I was just joking. I wasn't being serious!" He gave Trixie a reproachful look. "I wouldn't wish whatever Di just went through on any of us."

"Maybe instead of beating each other up about who did what," Jim said lightly, "we ought to find out who the woman in the portrait is and what she wants. The sooner we deal with her, the sooner she'll leave Di alone."

"Yes, let's do," Di said with a shiver. "Please."

"Maybe Sean will know something," Dan offered. "It certainly won't hurt to ask at any rate."

"Better than standing around here jawing," Brian agreed.

With quick efficiency, Jim ushered the group toward the banquet hall. Mart and Diana brought up the rear, Mart's hand laced through Diana's in silent solidarity and wordless comfort.

It was a somber group that entered the banqueting hall on the first floor. Both sets of twins and Bobby were hungrily feasting on the snacks that Sean had so thoughtfully provided. Although some of them were very traditional Irish snacks, such as oatcakes served with butter, cheese, and honey, Sean had also included American snacks such as popcorn, a snack mix, and sodas. Sean himself was sitting with Edward and Elise Lynch explaining that the banqueting hall had been created from the original first floor of the castle by the English captain that had taken over the castle after the O'Donnells abandoned it. The captain had even added a Jacobean fireplace with his family's coat of arms.

Edward looked over and saw the Bob-Whites arrive, smiling jovially until he noticed the grave looks on their faces. His smile vanished as he arose from his seat.

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“What’s wrong?” he demanded gently, hurrying over to his daughter. “Di, you look as if you’ve seen a ghost. You’re as white as...well...a ghost.” He took her into his arms and looked at her friends inquiringly.

“I’m okay, Daddy,” Di said, but she made no move to leave her father’s comforting embrace.

By this time, Sean and Elise had arrived by Diana’s side.

“Darling, what’s wrong?” Di’s mother wanted to know. “Are you okay? Are you hurt?”

Di shook her head and reluctantly stepped away from her father. “I’m fine, Mummy. Really. I just had a...scare.”

“You don’t sound so sure about that,” Elise observed.

“Well, the truth is, I don’t know exactly what happened,” Di admitted. “There’s this portrait of a woman in my room, and it’s kind of...affected me.”

Trixie’s sharp eyes did not miss the look on Sean’s face at hearing Di’s words. “Do you know something, Sean?”

Sean jumped a little, startled by Trixie’s observant nature. “Well, there has been talk throughout the years about the woman in that portrait. But I’ve never experienced anything.”

Mart’s eyes narrowed. “Experienced anything like *what?*” he asked, clearly not happy that their *de facto* host had apparently knowingly placed his girlfriend in a potentially perilous situation.

Sean took a deep breath and glanced over to where the younger kids were laughing and enjoying their snacks, unaware that anything was amiss. “Well,” he started, “you know the basic history of the castle, that the O’Donnells left abruptly and never were able to return.” At their nods, he continued. “The lady in that portrait is Siobhán O’Donnell, wife of Maghnus O’Donnell and sister-in-law of Rory O’Donnell, the first Earl of Tyrconnell. Rory was in charge of the family when they fled to Spain. Maghnus also fled, but Siobhán was left behind, as were many of the other wives.

“Legend has it that she took the abandonment worse than anyone, and she appeared as though she were in mourning for the rest of her life. She had once been a lovely, high-spirited Irish lass, but after the flight, she was morose and guilt-stricken.”

“Guilt-stricken?” Dan asked. “Over what?”

“Nobody knows. Nobody is even sure she *was* guilt-stricken. ‘Tis just what legend has handed down over the centuries.” He paused, as if unsure he wanted to divulge the rest of the story, but then he reluctantly continued, “Legend says that she never left the castle.”

“She died here?” Honey looked horrified and sad all at once.

Sean shook his head. “No, she moved into town like the rest of the O’Donnell wives and other members of the household who did not travel to Spain. What I meant was...” He took a deep breath and looked unhappy. “What I meant was that after she died, her spirit stayed with the castle.”

Honey shivered. Trixie looked intrigued but also cast worried eyes at Di. Mart put his arm protectively around the black-haired beauty.

“Why do people say that she’s still here, haunting the castle?” Brian asked.

“Visitors have reported seeing a lovely woman with red hair appear and then vanish. Others have reported hearing a lady weeping where there is no one to be seen. Things like that. Nothing menacing,” he hastened to reassure them. “The sightings are relatively few and far between. Usually they only take place in August and September.”

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“What’s the significance of that time of year?” Dan wanted to know.

“The Flight of the Earls took place on September 14, 1607. The appearances seem to increase around that time of year and then cease right after.”

“That’s only a few weeks away!” Trixie exclaimed.

“And the Flight of the Earls was a big deal?” Jim asked.

Sean nodded vehemently. “Aye, that it was. It was a major turning point in Irish history. The ancient Gaelic aristocracy was permanently exiled, further entrenching the English and their hold over the land.”

“Did the earls ever try to come back?” Honey asked.

“The plan was to go to Spain, an enemy of England, and seek support. What the earls did not know when they fled was that the Spanish fleet had recently been destroyed by the Dutch in the Battle of Gibraltar. The Spanish could not help them, and they stayed in exile in Spain and died there. Their line still lives on in Spain. Don Hugo O’Donnell, Duke of Tetuan, is the heir apparent to be Prince and Chief of the Name of O’Donnell, head of the clan.”

Sean took a breath, seeming to enjoy talking about Irish history now that the topic had—for the moment—steered away from ghostly talk. “As a matter of fact, the Flight of the Earls was such a significant event that the 400th anniversary was recently celebrated throughout the county.”

The Bob-Whites stood silent as they took in the tragic history. If Siobhán had been left behind, that could explain her depression. She had lost her family, her loved ones, her way of life. And the uncertainty of not knowing whether they would return must have been maddening. But where did guilt enter into the equation, if in fact, the legend was accurate on that account?

Suddenly, a thought struck Di. Or, rather, it was almost as though it was whispered into her consciousness. She shivered again.

“Sean?” she asked hesitantly, unsure of whether she really wanted to know the answer to her question but feeling that strange compulsion again she continued. “You said that Siobhán married into the O’Donnell family?” At his nod, she continued. “What...what was her maiden name?”

Sean suddenly looked as though he had been struck by a thunderbolt, and every Bob-White felt their unease increase on seeing his shocked expression. He stared at them for a moment and then said the name so quietly that they had to strain to hear him.

“Lynch.”

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Di slipped out of bed quietly, careful not to wake Trixie and Honey. She softly padded into the main room of their suite and crept through the door into the dimly lit hallway. She stood for a moment, allowing her eyes to adjust. Once she could see relatively clearly, she did not hesitate. Some unseen force was guiding her, and she knew exactly where she was going.

She turned to the left and headed toward the curved stone staircase. Once on the main floor of the castle, she turned to the right. She and her friends had not explored the first floor when they had arrived, but she knew exactly where she was and exactly where she needed to go. Di didn’t stop to think about how she had acquired this information. It didn’t matter. This bone-deep knowledge was a part of her now, to her very core.

Diana reached a large door of English oak. She quietly unfastened the lock, and before she knew it she was on the other side of the portal. The full moon above lit the night sky enough that the young woman

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had no trouble seeing her surroundings. She went forward, down the stone steps onto a stone pathway. She followed the pathway to a point, and then left it. The grass was soft and wet beneath her bare feet, but the cool sensation did not even register to Di's brain. She moved among the gravestones that surrounded her until she came across a moss-covered curved headstone bearing the name Aodh mac Maghnusa Ó Domhnail, the letters grown shallow over more than four hundred years of being exposed to the elements, and Di just knew that this was Rory O'Donnell's father, also known as Hugh O'Donnell. And again, she didn't stop to think how she knew this.

Above Hugh's name was a series of strange symbols, and Di stared at them transfixed. These symbols were important. These symbols was the key to everything. These symbols would help right the wrongs of the past.

A sudden movement behind the gravestone made Di look up. Violet eyes met midnight blue ones. A lovely woman with flowing red hair and porcelain skin stared at Di pleadingly. She reached a delicate hand out toward the young woman.

"Help," she said.

And then she vanished.

Di screamed at the top of her lungs.

"Di!" Trixie's startled voice echoed in Di's ears. Her heart was pounding, and she realized that she was sitting upright in her bed.

It had been a dream. Just a dream.

Di looked over at her concerned friends, who had leapt out of their bed and were already hurrying over to hers.

"Are you okay?" Honey asked, sitting next to Di and reaching out to give one of her hands a comforting squeeze. "Di," she said in amazement, feeling the dampness of her friend's hand. "You're all clammy!"

"What happened?" Trixie asked, taking a lead from Honey and grasping Di's other hand.

Di's breathing gradually slowed, and she told her friends about her dream.

"It was so *real*," she finished. "It was the most vivid dream I've ever had in my life."

"It was just a dream, though," Honey comforted her. "Just a dream."

Trixie looked thoughtful. "It *is* interesting that Di keeps being drawn to the cemetery. Maybe there's more to it than just being a dream." She squeezed Di's hand. "Tomorrow—or rather later today—we'll go to the cemetery, and we'll see if we can find that gravestone. If we do, then maybe we can help Siobhán, and she can rest."

Di nodded. "The thought that it might be there is scary, but I really feel like I need to help her. I feel like I'm not going to get any rest until she is able to rest." She turned troubled eyes toward Trixie and Honey. "We *need* to do this."

"We will, Di," Trixie promised. "We will."

Di felt a little more cheerful in the morning as she sat with the others around the huge, stately table that dominated the banqueting room. Beautifully intricate tapestries covered the rough stone walls and a matching chandelier to the one in the entry way hung many feet overhead. Sunlight streamed in from the floor to ceiling windows along the back wall, and the conversation was fast, furious and so blessedly *normal* that Di found herself relaxing.

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Edward and Elise had taken Sean up on his offer to show them the village near the castle to better get an idea of amenities and transportation nearby. Bobby and the twins had opted to accompany them, leaving the Bob-Whites finishing up breakfast in the formal banqueting room.

Diana had just leaned back against her chair after finishing a full Irish breakfast of bacon rashers, sausages, fried eggs and black and white pudding. She was about to take a sip of her tea when she met Trixie's intense blue stare over her teacup.

"Di," Trixie began.

And as if peace had never been, tension crept up Di's shoulders. She took another long sip of her tea before she set the cup down, wincing as her hand rattled it against its saucer. Before she could say a word, though, Mart gave his sister a frown.

"Leave Di alone," he said shortly.

Trixie's eyes widened. "What? All I said was her name."

"I know that look." Mart's voice was abrupt and his blue eyes narrowed as he glared at his sister. "Di isn't a mystery to be solved."

"I didn't say she was," Trixie retorted.

"Pax, you two," Honey said. "Trixie probably just wanted Di to tell you guys about the dream she had last night."

"What dream?" Dan asked as he put another forkful of eggs into his mouth.

Di hesitated before she said, "About the ghost—the woman in the portrait."

Six pairs of eyes were immediately riveted on her. Di shifted uncomfortably in her seat before she gave them a rueful smile. "Okay, so I guess I *am* being haunted."

Mart grabbed her hand in his and squeezed it. "You're in good company, sweetie."

"Tell us about the dream, Di," Jim urged. "Maybe if we figure out what she wants, we can help her get rest so that she'll stop haunting you."

Di took a deep breath and nodded before she began to recount her still-vivid dream of the night before. "It was just all so real, you know?" She shivered, grasping Mart's hand a little more tightly. "I hadn't been to any of the parts of the castle in my dream, but I knew where I was going. No question in my mind at all."

"It's a creepy feeling," Brian agreed, his handsome face warm with sympathy. "Especially when you feel like you don't have any control."

"Yes, exactly," Di said, nodding vehemently.

"I'm really curious about this symbol you saw on the gravestone," Trixie said, her eyes gleaming with a familiar light. "You said that the woman indicated that that was the key to all of this."

"Maybe we should go out to the cemetery and have a look?" Dan asked after he'd drained his breakfast tea. "It ought to be less eerie out there in all this sunshine."

Di blew out her breath and then nodded. "I don't think I'm going to get much sleep until we go look," she said in a quiet voice.

"Then what are we waiting for?" Mart asked. He pushed back his chair and helped Di rise. The two of them were already near the large entry way to the main hall by the time the others got to their feet.

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Trixie scurried after them with Jim and Brian following at a more leisurely pace. Dan waited while Honey sipped the last of her tea and then joined him. Dan gave her a flash of his grin. "I think that boy is a bit smitten with Lady Di," he said.

Honey grinned back at him. "You think?" She pointed at Mart's deserted table setting. "He still has food left on his plate. If that isn't devotion, I don't know what is."

Dan chuckled as they walked into the hallway where the others stood impatiently, waiting for them. He glanced at Di and raised his eyebrows at her. "Lead on, Lynch. Where do we go from here?"

Di bit her lip, trying to remember all the details of the dream. "Well, I came down the stairs." She pointed at the stone staircase that led from the second floor. "And I turned..." She hesitated, let go of Mart's hand and then walked over to the bottom of the stairs to reorient herself. "I turned this way." Di turned right and then began walking down a corridor to the right of the stairs. Mart quickly caught up with her and grabbed her hand again. The others followed behind, passing a series of closed doors, all looking very similar, etched into the stone walls.

"Not out the front then, Di?" Dan called out.

"No. The door led out to the cemetery in the back," Di said as she walked briskly down the hallway, not paying any attention to the myriad of ancient ancestors looking haughtily down from their portraits that hung along the wall. Finally, she reached the large door of English oak that she remembered from her dreams. Upon reaching it, she came to a halt.

"Sweetie?" Mart asked in a low voice, his blue eyes full of concern.

Again, Di felt the cold rush of her control whipping away. She couldn't respond to Mart. In fact, she didn't even *see* him after a while. All she could do was respond to the urgency that pulsed through her. *Must...help...them...*

The metal of the door latch felt warm against her suddenly cold hand. She pulled her other hand out of Mart's and used it to turn the lock and then she pushed the door open.

The sunlight made her blink after the shadowed darkness of the hallway, but it did not deter her from stepping forward. Again, Di followed the stone steps down to the winding stone path, followed it for a short period of time and then veered off of the path, walking with direct, sure steps through the weathered gravestones to Hugh O'Donnell's ancient stone.

Mart and Trixie hurried to keep up with Di. The others followed behind at a slower pace, troubled looks on their faces.

"Is she possessed again?" Brian said under his breath to Jim.

Jim gave him a grim look. "It sure looks like it, doesn't it?"

Brian let out a long breath, shaking his head. "I don't like it."

"What else can we do?" Jim demanded. "You couldn't stop those visions you were having, could you?"

Brian's lips tightened before he replied, "Di hates this stuff. She's never liked ghosts and ghouls and specters. Why does this ghost have to pick on her?"

"Didn't you hear Sean yesterday?" Honey asked, Dan and she having joined the two older Bob-Whites. "She's a Lynch. That's why."

"There are six other Lynches here," Brian said stubbornly. "Why couldn't she pick on one of them?"

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“She has the most sympathetic vibrations?” Dan asked. “Or she’s closest in age to the dead girl?” He shook his head. “We’re talking ghosts here. Who even knows why? Maybe it’s just because we tend to attract the paranormal. You know we’re all kind of ripe for this sort of thing.”

Brian didn’t respond to Dan’s comments as they’d reached the place where Di was. She knelt on the ground in front of a moss-covered gravestone. Trixie was examining the stone with a great deal of interest. Mart was more concerned about the glassy look in Diana’s eyes.

“Di, sweetie?” Mart asked again, grabbing her hand in his. “Talk to us, will you?”

Di blinked a couple of times before her eyes cleared and she tightened her grip around Mart’s hand. “Where are we?”

“In the cemetery,” Trixie replied, trying, but failing, to hide the eager look in her eyes. “Did the ghost kind of...well...take over again?”

Di closed her eyes, running a tremulous hand down her cheek. “I—I guess so,” she whispered. “I don’t remember much after I started walking down that hallway.” She opened her eyes again and glanced at the stone in front of her. “This is the gravestone that she led me to.”

Dan crouched down next to Di and fingered the carved letters as he read off the stone, “Aodh mac Maghnusa Ó Domhnail.”

Diana looked up at him in surprise. “That’s very good,” she said. “I didn’t know you knew Gaelic.”

He shrugged. “A little. Mom spoke it, and Uncle Bill still knows a bit.” He gave her a sheepish look. “And I might have taken a class in it in school.”

“Well, I’m impressed,” Jim said, his tone light. “I’m lucky if I can remember the little bit of Spanish I had in high school.”

“What does it mean in English?” Trixie asked.

Dan shook his head. “I’m not sure. I think it’s a name, though.”

“Aodh is a Celtic god,” Mart offered as he stared at the stone. “And a very popular name for Irish men. In English, the name is...”

“Hugh,” Diana supplied. She traced the longer name in the middle with a slender finger. “If what I’m remembering from the dream is correct, this is Siobhán’s father-in-law.”

Brian squatted down, squinting at the gravestone with a frown on his face. “What do you suppose she wants you to do with this grave?”

“He’s been dead a long time,” Honey said thoughtfully. “Was he murdered? Maybe she wants us to avenge him?”

“He probably died of some illness or disease,” Mart pointed out. “Most everyone did back then.” He shook his head. “I can’t imagine why she’d be so heartbroken over this guy.” He gestured at the gravestone. “And he died long before all this mess with the earls.”

“It’s not him,” Di said slowly. “It’s the stone.” She carefully pulled some of the overgrown moss away from the top of the stone. At the top were some rough-hewn slashes in the stone. “She wanted me to see these.”

“What are those?” Trixie asked, her short fingers running over the slashes as she peered closely at them.

“Some sort of code?” Honey suggested.

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“Or a Celtic language of some sort?” Jim asked.

“Maybe,” Diana said. She looked at the others, a determined light in her eyes. “I think we need to talk to Sean and find out.”

“But Sean might not be back for *hours!*” Trixie wailed.

Her almost-twin rolled his eyes. “The nearby town isn’t *that* big, Trix.”

“They said they were going to explore some nearby areas as well,” Trixie retorted.

“There’s bound to be a library in the castle somewhere,” Honey interjected quickly. “We can explore the castle and check out the library for clues.”

“Exploring the castle is something I wanted to do anyway,” Brian said eagerly. “I didn’t get to explore Warwick Castle with you, remember?”

“Neither did I,” Dan stated as the group moved through the small ancestral cemetery back toward the castle. “And my ancestors are from here. I’ve been very excited about this trip ever since I heard about it. Mom always wanted to visit Ireland, but she never got the chance.”

Trixie swallowed her impatience at Dan’s words. This trip meant a lot more than a mystery to the other members of the Bob-Whites—to those who had wanted to go to England and couldn’t and to those who were making a sort of pilgrimage in memory of loved ones no longer with them. She smiled softly at Dan.

“I’m glad you’re getting to honor your mother this way, Dan,” she said. He smiled warmly in return.

Jim, who had noticed the exchange, put his arm around Trixie and leaned to whisper in her ear. “You’re a good sport, Trixie Belden.”

At Jim’s words, Trixie’s soft smile turned radiant, and she beamed up at him.

Once inside the castle, the group bantered back and forth, debating the advantages of splitting up or staying together to explore the castle. In the end, exploring together was deemed the winner, and the group of seven began to look behind the doors that they had passed on their way out of the castle to the cemetery. The rooms behind the doors appeared to be areas that would be used by staff of the castle when it was running at full capacity—a couple of offices, a gleaming industrial kitchen, closets full of hospitality items, and so on. It was the public areas on the other side of the entry hall that were more interesting.

The entry hall, which during the time the O’Donnells occupied it would have been referred to as the great hall, was just as impressive on second look as it had been on the first. To the back of the hall was the lords and ladies chamber. The OPW had recreated what the chamber would have looked like in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and there was a placard explaining that at the time of the O’Donnells, the lords and ladies chamber was located off of the great hall and was used for privacy for the lord and lady of the castle. When the English captain expanded the castle, the fashion was to place this chamber in the second floor in a suite of rooms called the solar, and this is precisely what the captain had done.

“We must be sleeping in the solar,” Jim commented. “It says that the solar suite was expanded to include not only the lords and ladies chamber but the wardrobe, which was a private storage room for the lady of the castle, and the bower, used as a private withdrawing room for the lady. There was a sitting room for the noble family to use as well. Sounds like the place where our rooms are fits the bill.”

Also located in the great hall was a balcony that overlooked the area. A placard below the balcony indicated that this was the minstrels’ gallery, where the lord’s musicians performed. On the other side of

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the entry hall was the second wing to which Sean had referred the night before. The first room off of this hallway was a chapel, where the noble family would receive services. Farther down from the chapel was the ballroom, stalled in the early stages of renovation. Currently, it was a large, plain room decorated only with tapestries on the walls. One feature made the room stand out, though. In the center of the opposite wall, between two large windows, was a mosaic, its colorful tesserae depicting what the group took to be a coat of arms. The Bob-Whites crossed the room to look at the image more closely.

The predominant colors were red and gold, the gold shield depicting a hand holding a red cross. Below the shield were the words *in hoc signo vincas* and below that the name Ó Dómhnaill. Above the shield were two crossed swords. One of the blades bore a series of black slashes.

“Amazing,” Mart murmured.

“It really is a work of art,” Honey agreed.

Di interjected, a look of wonder on her face, “But this shouldn’t be here.”

Trixie looked at her friend, wondering whether she was under the spell of Siobhán once again. Di saw the look and smiled.

“This I know from my art classes, Trix, so don’t worry. Mosaics were common throughout Italy, eastern Europe, and the Middle East, but their popularity never really made it this far west or into the late fifteenth century. I certainly don’t recall any being included in medieval castles. It’s weird.”

Trixie stared at the mosaic. *Weird?* she asked herself. *If this is “weird”, then maybe it means something.* Trixie filed this knowledge away and followed the rest of her friends out of the room, gazing at the mosaic for one last long moment.

Beyond the ballroom was a series of doors, all leading to rooms that would be renovated as meeting rooms. Finally, behind the last door lay the room that Trixie had been anxious to find—the library. Although medieval castles had not included libraries, the OPW had decided to create one as a reference area for all things Irish and medieval. The Bob-Whites perused the shelves, finding numerous books devoted to Irish history, Irish folklore, Irish ghost stories, Irish genealogy, Irish music, the Gaelic and Celtic languages, medieval castles, medieval times, travel guides for Ireland, and a plethora of other related topics. Trixie headed for the books about ghosts, Dan went straight for the genealogy tomes, Honey chose Irish folklore, Jim and Brian split Irish history, and Mart delved into books on the Gaelic language. Meanwhile, Di’s gaze wandered around the room for several moments, taking in all of the volumes before her, and then she decisively headed for the section on ancient Druid languages.

She reached confidently for a book and said, “They’re oghams.” Her words, spoken so matter-of-factly, startled everyone in the room, including Di herself.

“They’re what?” Trixie said, staring at the book Di held.

“The marks on Hugh O’Donnell’s grave. They’re letters from an ancient Druid alphabet,” she explained, even though she hadn’t yet opened the book that she held in her hands. In fact, she barely seemed aware that it was even there. “We need to figure out what it says.”

Mart returned the book he had been holding to its spot on the shelf and took the book from Di’s hands. “Okay,” he said, trusting completely what Diana said, even if it unnerved him that she had all of this knowledge that she shouldn’t. “Then let’s borrow this book and take it out to the cemetery and see what we can determine.”

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“Red earth?” Trixie said fifteen minutes later, after the Bob-Whites had compared the symbols on the gravestone to the book Di had chosen. The first symbol was five parallel diagonal lines with a horizontal line drawn through them. It corresponded to the letter *ruis*, which the book indicated had origins in the Old Irish word for red. The second symbol, three parallel vertical lines with a horizontal line drawn through them, was *úr*, with its origins in the words earth, soil, or clay.

“Well, the more modern meaning of *úr* is heather,” Brian said as he paged through the book, “and fields of heather are common here in Ireland. But heather isn’t red. It’s purple.”

“I think we should stick to the more ancient meaning, since we’re talking about something carved hundreds of years ago,” Dan said. “Plus, I would think that fields of heather would be more transient than red earth. If there’s an area of red clay around here, it’s probably still here. I wouldn’t count on a field of heather from five centuries ago to still be around, though.”

“Or it could mean the initials *R.U.*,” Mart reasoned. “*Ruis* is the equivalent of the letter *R*, according to the book, and *úr* is *U*.”

“Maybe we should try to see if there was anyone in the family with those initials?” Honey wondered aloud.

At that moment, the Bob-Whites heard car engines and saw the Lynches returning to the castle in one of the mini-vans. Sean followed behind in his ancient blue Opel Corsa saloon. The Bob-Whites made their way over to the long driveway and waved hello.

Bobby and the two sets of twins piled out of the mini-van after Mr. Lynch had parked it and excitedly described the little town of Donegal, including its location near several attractive, sandy beaches. The younger set was thrilled with the opportunity to spend some time on the beach and swim in the ocean on the *other* side of the Atlantic. Mrs. Lynch reported on the cute little shops she had encountered, telling the girls that she couldn’t wait to take them to a quaint little café she had seen called the Blueberry Tearoom, and Mr. Lynch told the Bob-Whites they must visit the ruins of the Franciscan abbey, also built by the O’Donnells in 1474.

“It has a very interesting history,” he finished. “And Sean tells it so well.”

Sean smiled. “I’m glad ye’ enjoyed the telling. I’m proud of my hometown and its surroundings. The site of the abbey is beautiful, right near the mouth of the Eske River where it flows into the Donegal Bay.”

Trixie seized on this as an opening. “You must know a lot about the area, having grown up here, Sean.”

“I know a fair amount,” the young man said modestly. “Is there anything in particular ye’ be wantin’ to know?”

“Well, Jim and Brian are very interested in geology,” Trixie began. “Everywhere we visit that might have some interesting geology finds them looking for rock specimens. They found some beauties while we were in the Ozark Mountains back home. Do you have anything interesting like that around here? Maybe some red earth even? Something like that?”

Sean shook his head ruefully. “Nothing out of the ordinary that I can think of. Most of the geology around here is limestone gravel, granite, and slate. There are some good granite and mica species in the Rosses, about an hour or so north of here, but probably not so unique it’s worth that drive. I’ve already told Ed, here, that if yer going to drive anywhere, ye’ really need to see Slieve League, some of the highest sea cliffs in all of Europe. They’re quite a sight.”

Trixie tried not to look disappointed so that Sean and the Lynches would think her question casual, but she caught Di’s father staring at her curiously.

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She immediately smiled brightly and punched Jim's arm. "Guess you're going to have to bring back some other sort of souvenir this trip."

"I guess so," Jim said, his lips curving into a deceptively relaxed smile. "But those sea cliffs sound really great."

"Did ye' explore the castle?" Sean asked. "Or the grounds? It's probably too gorgeous of a day for ye' to stay cooped inside."

"We explored a lot of the first floor," Brian told him. "We didn't make it up to the second floor of the other wing."

"Or the dungeon," Dan said.

"Well, the second floor of the other wing not only isn't very exciting, but it's closed to visitors until after we renovate it into guest rooms." He gave them a wicked grin. "Aye, but the dungeon, that's somethin' ye'll be needin' to see."

Honey remembered the dungeon in the Tower of London and wasn't at all sure that she needed to see it, but she smiled politely at Sean.

"We'll leave you to your exploring," Mrs. Lynch said as the adults headed inside. Bobby and the twins had already scattered. "I believe that Sean said lunch would be served in an hour."

Sean nodded. "When we open the hotel, we'll hire a full kitchen staff and head chef, so of course the banqueting hall will be open all day for the guests' convenience, but as yer the only ones staying here, right now we're catering all meals from a nearby restaurant."

"Breakfast was wonderful," Di said, "so we look forward to a yummy lunch. We'll definitely be in the banqueting hall in an hour."

The Bob-Whites did return to the banqueting hall at the promised time, disappointed from a fruitless search of the grounds for anything resembling red earth, red clay, red soil, or even heather. Mart and Di had returned the book on oghams to the library and then some spent time perusing the genealogy books. Unfortunately, no one associated with the initials *R.U.* had popped out in their research.

Despite their disappointment, the seven friends were cheerful at lunch. They listened eagerly to what Bobby, Larry, Terry, Tracey, and Stacey had been up to and enjoyed the tales of Irish folklore that Sean shared with the group. Trixie silently applauded Honey as she tactfully steered Sean's discourse toward O'Donnell family history without him seeming to realize it.

"The O'Donnell Clan was one of the most ancient, famous, richest, and powerful families in Irish history, and really shaped Ireland, particularly this part of the country. The original ancestor was baptized in the early fifth century by St. Patrick himself," Sean said. "St. Patrick struck the shield of Conall, the founder of the clan, inscribing a cross as he did so and telling him that with that sign he would be victorious. The Latin equivalent of the phrase, *in hoc signo vincas*, became the family motto."

Trixie stared at the Irishman, the bite of shepherd's pie on its way to her mouth completely forgotten. "We saw that in the ballroom today—on a mosaic with the family coat of arms."

"That's not actually the true O'Donnell coat of arms, not the official heraldry version, anyway. But that shield was used to represent the O'Donnell family from the very beginning," Sean explained.

"What about the swords above the crest?" Dan asked.

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Sean shook his head. “No one has ever understood those. They weren’t part of the original shield, and swords didn’t become part of the coat of arms until after the castle was built. And even then, they weren’t included in that manner. ‘Tis weird, ‘tis.”

Trixie finally placed the bite of shepherd’s pie in her mouth and chewed thoughtfully. *Weird*. There was that word again. Two anomalies in one mosaic? Trixie didn’t believe in coincidences, and she was willing to bet that this *wasn’t* a coincidence.

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As Di had expected, the dungeons of the castle were depressing. She understood, on an intellectual level, the odd fascination that people had for places like this, but she certainly didn’t understand the appeal on an emotional or personal level. Why would anyone want to see the dismal and gloomy surroundings where people were imprisoned and tortured? Usually without a fair trial. *No, thank you*, she thought.

But everyone else wanted to explore down there—well, except for Honey—and she certainly didn’t want to be left alone elsewhere in the castle with Siobhán lurking about, waiting for her. So, Di went. As she made her way through the winding corridors past tiny cells, she tried not to let the fact that there was no natural light in the dungeon bother her, let alone the miniscule size of the rooms in which prisoners had been kept.

Diana trailed behind the others. Usually, she could count on Mart or Honey to keep her company. Mart always seemed to understand when she needed him without her having to say a word. She loved the bond they shared. Unfortunately, in this case, Mart was too fascinated with his surroundings and in the conversation in which Dan had engaged him. Di listened to him tell his best friend about the dungeons he had seen during his previous trip to England.

Honey, on the other hand, was engaged in a lively discussion with Jim about a Shakespearean play that they were going to see at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin before they left Ireland. Elise had felt bad that Di had missed out on the previous trip to the United Kingdom, and, on this trip, she wanted to provide her daughter with some of the things she had missed. As one of those was a Shakespearean play, she had arranged to include one in their itinerary, even though it meant a longer drive and flying out from a different airport than the one at which they had arrived. It might not have been put on by the Royal Shakespeare Company at the Swan Theatre in Shakespeare’s hometown, but it was at the world-renowned Abby Theatre in relatively close proximity to Stratford. Di knew that Honey was covering up her discomfort by chatting with Jim, but she fervently wished that her tactful friend would come and comfort her with some of that distracting chatter.

And then it happened. The dungeons no longer bothered her. It was as though she had been accustomed to them her entire life. She knew these halls—knew exactly what she would find when she entered a corner cell as the rest of her friends made the turn and continued to move forward down the other hallway, leaving her behind. But none of that mattered. She wasn’t scared, and she had a mission to accomplish.

It was there, in the corner. A red clay tile. Among the dark, dingy, grey stones that comprised the rest of the dungeon, it stood out like a beacon. Di crossed the tiny cell and stared at it. This was the next step.

This time, when the red-haired woman appeared before her, she did not scream. This was not a dream. She could not wake up from this, but it didn’t matter. Siobhán didn’t want to hurt her. She wanted—needed—to *help* Diana. The woman again pleaded for help and then disappeared. Di didn’t scream, but she did call out, her melodic voice echoing through the damp corridors.

“Ruis úr,” she cried. “Red earth.”

Her words served their purpose, and the Bob-Whites came running. The cacophony of their various questions did not disturb the peace that Di felt, and when they joined her in the tiny cell, she merely pointed. This simple act quieted her friends.

It was Brian who spoke first as he stared down at the ogham carved into the tile beneath Di’s pointing finger. “Okay, three straight lines with a line connecting them from underneath. Let’s go look it up in that book in the library.”

Ten minutes later, Trixie declared, “I know where the next clue is.”

Six pairs of eyes immediately swiveled toward the blonde sleuth, some of them flickering with worry that she was now possessed with the ghost of Siobhán Lynch O’Donnell.

Trixie grinned, reading her friends’ thoughts. “I’m no more possessed than Di was when she talked about the history of mosaic earlier. I did notice, though, that both she and Sean used the word weird when describing that mosaic. Weird to me says there’s something significant about it.”

“Okay,” Mart said, drawing the word out in a way that clearly meant that he was trying to hurry his sister’s explanation.

“Patience, my dear Watson,” Trixie said loftily, plainly enjoying the upper hand over her sometimes-tortuous almost-twin. “Brian just looked in the book and found that our latest ogham is tinne, which means iron or weapon in the ancient tradition. There are two ‘weird’ swords, which could presumably be made of iron, depicted in the ‘weird’ mosaic. And, if you recall, there were slash marks on one of the swords,” Trixie finished triumphantly.

Mart stared at her in amazement. “Well, then, what are we waiting for?” he blurted and led the charge to the ballroom.

Moments later, Brian was thumbing through the now-treasured book trying to identify and decipher an ogham with four parallel diagonal lines crossed horizontally. “Straif,” he reported. “It means sulfur, or perhaps chief of streams, depending on the kenning you believe.” The Bob-Whites had all learned early in their research that kenning meant a figure of speech, which gave rise to the pronunciation and meaning of each of the oghams.

“Okay,” Mart said, “sulfur is yellow. Maybe it has something to do with all of the yellow in the clan crest?”

“Could there be a sulfur mine around here?” Trixie asked.

“Is sulfur even mined?” Honey wondered.

“Sulfur is related to volcanoes, isn’t it?” Dan asked.

“Ireland isn’t a volcanic island, though, is it?” Jim said.

Brian said. “Sulfur is important for medications, but they wouldn’t have known that centuries ago, would they have?”

Six of the Bob-Whites continued to hash out their theories. Di, meanwhile, stood transfixed. The voices of her friends began to sound distorted, and her vision blurred. A grey mist surrounded her. Everything was becoming hazy, and the castle and the six other Bob-Whites seemed so far away...so very, very far away. The walls disintegrated before her eyes, her friends vanished, and she found herself standing in a field of green. A bright blue sky surrounded her from above, and the cerulean waters of the Atlantic gently met the Eske River in the protected waters of the Bá Dhún na nGall below.

In Hoc Signo Vinces

Crumbling ruins surrounded her, gravestones dotting the idyllic green countryside. She turned to her companion.

"I don't understand," she said.

Siobhán smiled sadly. "Ye will." A gentle breeze stirred the woman's luxurious red hair. The same breeze blew Diana's black locks into her eyes, and when she brushed them away, Siobhán was gone.

Di blinked and instantly found herself surrounded by the solid walls of Donegal Castle. She shook her head to clear the vision and realized that the Bob-Whites were staring at her in concern.

"Di?" Mart asked, reaching for her hand.

"It's okay," she said, squeezing Mart's hand gently. "I know where to go. I know where the final ogham is."

After a quick word to her parents, Di led the others out to where the mini-vans were parked. She climbed into the driver's seat without a word and started up the van.

The others looked at her, startled, for a moment before they all clambered into the van. Usually, the girls were happy to let one of the boys drive to the places they were going to, but Di felt the same strange urgency that she'd felt several times before. She *knew* the way to the last ogham, and she didn't have the patience to explain how to get there to one of the others.

When Dan got into the back and closed the door behind him, he settled into the seat behind Di and leaned forward, a look of concern on his thin face. "Everything okay, Lynch?"

She nodded briskly. "I'm fine. Just eager to get there." Di put the van into gear and began heading away from the castle. "And we've got a bit of a drive to go."

Trixie, as usual, was focused on the mystery. She was sitting between Brian and Jim in the back seat, pitching ideas for what "sulfur" could mean in a medieval Irish context.

"Perhaps it has something to do with the chief of streams meaning," Jim interjected, a thoughtful look on his face.

Honey leaned around the seat, offering a local map she'd picked up from the brochures that had littered one of the tables in the entry hall. "Maybe there are some streams listed on this?"

Trixie grabbed the map from Honey and unfolded it, nearly whacking Brian in the eye with the unwieldy map. She giggled as her brother gave her a startled, "Hey!"

"Sorry!" she said quickly before she returned her gaze to the now open map.

"What road are we on, Di?" Jim called out.

"We just got on R251," Mart replied. "Going west."

The three Bob-Whites immediately combed the map, looking for the road and found it. Jim finally looked up from the map, a hesitant question in his emerald eyes. "Di, I don't see much up this way in terms of water. It's all mountains. Are you sure..."

"Trust me," Di replied. "The rivers run much lower than the mountains do." Her voice had an unfamiliar lyrical Irish lilt to it, which made all the others shift uneasily.

"Siobhán's back again, I gather," Dan said in a low voice as he turned around in his seat to face the others.

In Hoc Signo Vincas

"I guess," Brian said in a dark tone, looking worriedly up at Di, who was driving through the mountain ranges blithely as if she'd done it every day of her life.

"I sure hope we find whatever it is this woman is looking for. I want Diana back," Jim said in a low voice.

"You and me both," Honey replied in a quiet, vehement tone.

Trixie sent a troubled look at her brother, whose blond head she could see over the front seat. He hadn't turned around to look at the others since he'd climbed into the front next to Diana. "We all want her back," she said simply. "Let's just do what we can to help her *get back*."

After a beautiful, scenic drive through the mountains for an hour or so, Di turned on to a small, winding road.

Brian, Trixie and Jim, who had been following her turns with the map, looked in puzzlement at the its maze of colored lines. "What could she be going to up here?" Jim asked. "There isn't much..."

"The abbey!" Trixie exclaimed in excitement. "Donegal Abbey!"

"Didn't Sean mention the abbey when he was talking to us earlier?" Dan asked.

"Yes," Mart piped in from the front. He finally turned around in his seat, his blue eyes blazing in excitement. As usual, he had a guidebook in his hands. "The Donegal Abbey ruins are on this road. Near to the mouth of the Eske River." He gave the others a triumphant smile. "And there used to be a tunnel to the abbey from the castle."

Trixie whooped, her whole body wriggling in anticipation. "That must be where Siobhán wants us to go!"

"We have to have been driving for an hour," Brian said in wonder, shaking his head. "They built a tunnel all the way from the castle up here?"

"There are underground tunnels all over the place up here. They're called souterrains. I think they were used for defense purposes against the Vikings and other marauders." He grinned at them. "And a lot of them were marked with ogham stones."

Di pulled the car to the side of the road and shifted it into park. Without a word to the others, she opened the door and slipped out.

"She's off again!" Trixie exclaimed. "C'mon, everyone! Quick!"

The other Bob-Whites hurried out of the car, Mart grabbing the keys that Di had left dangling in the ignition.

Di strode across toward the ruins, not even noticing the rich emerald lushness of the grass contrasting with the stark grey stones that littered the shell of the Franciscan friary. She stooped to enter the ruins, ducking her head under one of the rounded archways, her sneakers crunching against the stones littered along the path that made its way back toward the graveyard beyond.

Near the very back of the cemetery was a weathered column, near to a pile of crumbled stone. With a small cry of distress, Di hurried over to the stone, muttering under her breath, "*Mo stór, mo stór.*"

She began lifting the stones away from the pile, growing more agitated as she worked.

The others soon joined her, their six faces united in dismay. "Di?" Mart asked softly.

"*Cuideachadh!*" The word sounded as if it were wrenched from inside of the young, dark-haired woman as her violet eyes met Mart's blue ones in agonized entreaty.

In Hoc Signo Vincas

Mart exhaled sharply, almost as if she'd hit him in the stomach. As was always the case with him, he was helpless to resist anything Di asked of him. Without a word, he knelt down near her and began to help her lift the stones.

"What is she saying?" whispered Trixie, her blue eyes wide.

"It's Gaelic," Dan said in a low voice. "I don't know what it means, though."

Brian scowled. "I think this Siobhán really is going too far. I don't like this at all."

"Well, whatever she wants is obviously here," Jim pointed out. He glanced from Brian to Dan. "Let's help them get these stones out of the way. The sooner we do that, the sooner we'll be done with this all together."

Jim, Brian and Dan all joined Di and Mart in moving the stones. Trixie, meanwhile, had her attention fixed on the stone column near to the pile that the others were working on. She noticed several of the now familiar slashes on the column and grabbed Honey's hand in excitement.

"Honey," she whispered. "Aren't those more of those oghams?"

Honey turned her troubled gaze from Diana to the gray pillar with some effort. "I...why, Trixie! Yes!"

Trixie fumbled with the book on oghams that Brian had brought with them to the abbey's site. "There are a lot of slashes on this column, Honey. Maybe while they work, we can translate."

After several minutes, the girls had translated the eight oghams. "Caislean," Trixie said, her voice hesitant and unsure. Then her face brightened. "Oh! *Caisleán!*" She grinned at Honey. "Castle!" Her eyes widened. "Oh! Honey! The passageway to the castle! That's supposed to be around here, isn't it?" Before Honey could answer her, however, both girls' attention was diverted to what was happening with Di and the others. Trixie turned and then gasped in surprise.

The stones the others had been removing had been covering a dilapidated entrance to an underground tunnel. Crumbling remains of stairs led down to the darkness beneath.

A second gasp came from Honey, but she was not looking at the passageway. Instead, she was riveted by the sight of Mart struggling with Diana, who appeared to be stubbornly insistent on going down into the dark chamber below.

A long spurt of lyrical sounding Gaelic burst from Diana's lips. Her eyes blazed as she wrestled with Mart, trying to free herself.

"Gleeps!" Trixie breathed.

Jim turned around at her exclamation and gave the two girls a brief, pinning glare. "Don't you even think about going down there," he said sternly.

Trixie held up her hands. "I didn't say a word!"

"Diana, listen to me," Mart begged as he tried to contain her without hurting her. "You cannot go down there. Di, please. It's too dangerous."

It was Dan, however, who got Diana's attention. "*Fuirich ort!*" he snapped.

Diana stopped struggling suddenly, giving him a suspicious look.

"You aren't helping your cause, Siobhán," he said in a furious, harsh voice. "We aren't going to let you harm her with this idiocy of yours."

In Hoc Signo Vincas

At her indignant intake of breath, Dan held up his hand. "You tell me where it is, and I will get it for you. She *isn't* going down there."

Diana's rough, ragged breathing was the only noise in the silent graveyard for several moments before she slowly nodded. "*Mo stór,*" she said finally, her shoulders slumping in defeat.

"What does that mean?" Mart demanded.

"I don't know," Dan admitted. "But I'll probably find one of those stones with oghams carved on it down there."

"Dan, that tunnel has got to be some 20 miles long," Brian protested. "Who knows where this thing, whatever it is, could be?" He scowled at his friend. "And I'm sure large portions of the tunnel are caved in. You could get trapped."

"I'm not going to go very far," Dan said quietly. "If I don't find it quickly, I'll turn around and come back." He tilted his head toward Diana. "If whatever she is looking for wasn't close to the cemetery, she would have had us stop somewhere else." He pointed out toward the water that they could see from the clifftop where they were standing. "The last ogham clue said 'chief of streams'," he reminded them. "It's got to be close by here, because the water is here. We didn't see much water before we got here, remember?"

"Do you want me to go with you?" Jim asked quietly.

Dan shook his head. "Just one of us should go," he said. "More help on top if something should happen down there." With a deep breath, he gingerly climbed down the broken stone stairs. "Here goes nothin'!"

"Be careful," Mart said grimly, his arms still very firmly around Diana's shoulders.

"Aren't I always?" Dan asked with a flash of his grin. Within a minute or two, he had disappeared from sight.

Honey covered her face with her hands. "I can't watch," she whispered. "I can't watch."

~~**~**

Fear of enclosed spaces was a slight phobia that Mart had developed after his disastrous experience with an avalanche at Mead's Mountain. Dan didn't share his best friend's fear, but even he had to admit that the dank, dark tunnel that was barely tall enough for him to walk upright in creeped him out.

Hesitantly, he pulled out the small Maglite flashlight he kept on a keychain and turned it on. Jim insisted that the Bob-Whites always carry a flashlight and a pocket knife on their person. And Dan was glad, that day, for his friend's insistence on his being prepared.

Dan shone the flashlight around the inside of the tunnel, looking carefully at the remaining stones that made up the wall. The gray rocks had been worn smooth after their years of being underground. Some moss grew around a few of the stones closest to the opening to the graveyard above.

The thought of the cemetery made Dan shiver, and he firmly put it out of his mind. "Forget about the ghosties, Mangan, find this thing and get out of here!"

He walked a little farther down the passageway, carefully shining his flashlight on to the stone walls, but still, he didn't find anything. With a repressed sigh, Dan continued on down the pathway until he stopped abruptly.

Crumbled rock, dirt and other debris filled the passageway, barring his further travel.

In Hoc Signo Vincas

“Damn,” he muttered, wondering how Siobhán-possessed Di was going to react to *this* turn of events.

Before Dan turned to head back toward the surface, he shone his flashlight over the remaining parts of the tunnel’s walls that were visible. And suddenly, the beam of his flashlight caught a stone very close to the edge of the cave-in with some scratches on its surface.

Gingerly, Dan climbed over a couple of large stones to reach the one pressed into the dirt of the wall behind it. Sure enough, the stone had the now-familiar etchings in it.

Only half of the stone, however, was visible. The other half, apparently, was stuck behind the caved in portion of the tunnel.

Dan hesitated a moment, eyeing the wall of debris to his left, before he pulled out his pocket knife and slowly began slowly etching around the edges of the stone.

“Dan?” Jim’s voice sounded very far away.

“I’m fine,” he called out. Then, he turned his attention back to the stone in front of him.

The work was laborious. He didn’t want to dislodge too much of the wall next to him, and the pocket knife only went so far around the stone.

A few drops of dirt crumbled down onto his shoulders as he persisted in trying to free the stone. Impatiently, Dan brushed them off and continued.

“How’s the air down there?” Brian called out from the mouth of the tunnel. “Dan?”

“It’s fine. No problems,” he yelled back.

The problem was the wretched stone.

Finally, after his knife blade had broken in half and he had emitted several curses while tugging sharply, he managed to free the stone.

An ominous rumble shook the earth above him. Dan’s intake of breath was swift, his hands even swifter, as he reached blindly into the earth and closed his fingers around what felt like a wooden box.

Another shower of dirt rained down over his shoulders as he yanked the box out of the hole in the wall. He managed to stumble forward, clutching the rock and box to him as he ran for the exit.

His dark head poked out into the light just as he felt the whoosh of air mixed with dirt as the tunnel behind him collapsed.

Jim and Brian, standing on either side of the entrance, grabbed Dan and heaved him upward.

“Oh! Oh!” shrieked Honey. “Has he been killed?”

The Bob-Whites clamored around Dan, with the exception of Mart and Di, who still stood a bit apart from the others, Mart still clutching Di’s shoulders to prevent her from joining Dan in the tunnel.

“Are you all right?” demanded Brian.

Dan coughed several times and wiped his face with Jim’s proffered handkerchief before he slowly nodded. “Whew, boy, that was close!” he exclaimed.

“What happened?” demanded Trixie. “Did you find whatever it was Siobhán was looking for?”

“Give him a minute,” Mart snapped at Trixie in exasperation.

In Hoc Signo Vincas

Dan held his hand up. "I'm okay. I'm fine." He gave the others a weak grin. "The stone that had the oghams on it was really close to a caved in portion of the tunnel. My fooling with it caused the rest of the tunnel to cave in." He shot a dry look at Mart. "Remind me not to do that again."

Trixie crouched down near Dan, brushing off a few stray bits of dirt from his t-shirt. "You'd definitely better *not* do that again. We like you in one piece, Daniel Mangan," she scolded him.

"Well, I must admit I prefer myself that way, too, Trix," Dan retorted.

The two friends grinned at each other, their smiles a mixture of teasing and relief. Trixie's blue eyes then noticed the stone in Dan's hand.

"You found the stone?" she said excitedly, crouching down near Dan.

He handed her the stone, and Trixie immediately scurried off to where she'd left the book on the oghams.

Brian, in the meantime, checked his friend over for cuts, bruises and bleeding. "Does anything hurt?" he asked anxiously. "You didn't break anything or get hit on the head with a rock, did you?"

Dan gave Brian a gentle smile. "I'm fine, Brian. Really. Just a little shaky."

"Mostor!" Trixie cried out triumphantly. She hurried back to Dan. "It says 'Mostor'."

"*Mo stór*," Di interrupted, her voice peevish.

The other Bob-Whites looked at her in surprise. Trixie then shrugged and said, "Okay, *mo stór*." She grinned, then, and continued, "I still have no idea what it means."

"You got the stone out," Jim said, "but no time to look to see what else was there, huh?"

Trixie then shot a dismayed glance at Dan. "Oh, no! All this way and that close and..."

"Hold your horses, Miss Antsy," Dan said with a chuckle. He then pulled out the old, weathered, very fragile box from under his arm. "This is what caused the cave-in."

Di, upon seeing the box, immediately recommenced her struggle. Another long spurt of apparently very uncomplimentary Gaelic burst from her lips as she wrestled with Mart to be let go.

Dan glanced over at Di and his face hardened. He held out the box to her and said, "I sure hope that whatever's in here was worth it to you, Siobhán."

Di finally wrenched free of Mart and rushed over to Dan. The box, however, was taken gingerly—almost reverently—from his outstretched hand.

She sank to the ground and opened the box, setting the lid down on the grass next to her. Inside was what appeared to be the remains of a leather pouch. Carefully, she removed the fragile pieces of leather to uncover several curled pieces of jewelry, each a beautiful, brilliant purple.

Honey took in a sharp breath as Diana held up one of the necklaces.

"Gleeps!" Trixie exclaimed.

Diana turned her violet-eyed gaze to Dan and said in a beautiful Irish lilt, "*Go raibh maith agat*."

The harsh look on Dan's face softened as he replied, "*Tá fáilte romhat*."

And with that, the strange, focused look in Di's eyes disappeared, and she blinked rapidly several times before she looked from one to the other of the Bob-Whites. "She's gone," she whispered.

In Hoc Signo Vincas

“Good riddance,” Mart said in a low, gruff voice. He crouched next to Di and gave her a quick but thorough kiss, almost to reassure himself that his girlfriend really had returned to him.

“Glad you’re back,” Brian said softly.

Diana smiled a bit tremulously. “Me, too.” She glanced over at Dan. “Thanks for doing that for me. I—I don’t know if I’d have made it out of that tunnel if she’d gotten me in there.”

Dan grabbed Di’s hand and squeezed it. “She’d never have gotten you in there.”

“Not with us around,” Jim agreed with a firm nod of his head.

Honey, sensing Di’s discomfort, knelt down next to her in an attempt to look more closely at the jewelry. “What all is *in* there, Di?” She tentatively reached for one of the pieces in the box. “It sure looks like you’ve found some buried treasure there.”

“Not buried, thanks to Dan,” Di said with a smile. She held up another of the necklaces. “I think these are amulets. And, oh!” Di pulled another one out of the pile. “I think *this* one is an intaglio.”

“What’s an intaglio?” asked Trixie.

“It’s a piece of stone that has something carved into it—sort of like a cameo, but the carving goes into the stone rather than being raised up.” Di twirled the amulet dangling from her fingers. “Often times, intaglios were used as seals for documents and the like.” She held out the intaglio to Trixie. “This one is the crest of the O’Donnells.”

“That’s a pretty amazing find, Di,” Jim said in wonder.

“It is, isn’t it?” Di said. “They certainly are beautiful pieces.”

“But I wonder why Siobhán wanted to find them so badly,” Trixie asked, looking at the intaglio in her hand. “Was she going to sell them to get money?”

“Amulets were considered protective back then,” Mart interjected in a quiet voice. “People wore them for good luck and to ward off evil.” He leaned around Di and picked up one of the beautifully crafted amulets. “I’ll bet she thought these might help them fight off the English.”

“But she never got there in time,” Honey said sadly.

“Twenty miles is a long way to go to get them,” Brian said. “And there’s always the possibility that there was a cave-in in the tunnel long before this point.”

Mart nodded. “There was some sort of gunpowder explosion here at the Abbey not too long before the Flight of the Earls. Maybe that did some damage to the tunnel as well.” At Trixie’s incredulous look, he said impatiently, “What? I read the guidebook. What of it?”

“Well, thanks to Dan, they’re rescued now,” Di said, her violet-eyed gaze on the amulets in front of her.

“What do you think you’ll do with them, Di?” Jim asked.

Di’s head shot up. “Give them to the family, of course.”

“But didn’t the family end up in Spain after the Flight of the Earls?” Brian said, doubt in his voice.

“The people at the OPW did a ton of genealogy to find Di’s family to get some help doing the restoration of Donegal Castle,” Mart pointed out with a slowly growing smile. “I’m sure someone knows who the head of the O’Donnell family is—whether they live in Spain, Ireland or anywhere else.”

“Exactly,” Di said firmly. “I’m *not* an O’Donnell, as far as I know, so I can’t keep these.”

In Hoc Signo Vincas

“But, technically,” Jim said a bit uneasily, “wouldn’t these belong to the Irish government? Shouldn’t we say something to them?”

“No,” Di insisted stubbornly. “They belong to the O’Donnell clan, and I’m going to make sure they get them.”

“That sounds like a plan to me,” Dan said lightly. And with that, he got to his feet, brushing off some of the dirt that still clung to his black t-shirt and jeans. “And I hope you all don’t mind, but I’d really like to get back to the castle. A bath and supper sound really good to me right now.”

The other Bob-Whites quickly agreed. Di carefully returned the amulets back to the box and closed it while the young men returned the pile of stones to the top of the tunnel to keep anyone from trying to enter into the fallen passageway.

Trixie picked up the stone with its carved oghams and handed it cheerfully to Jim. “You guys can fight over who gets this stone for your collection.”

Jim glanced at Di before he said, “Maybe we should just give the O’Donnell family the whole works, stone and all.”

Di rewarded him with a brilliant smile.

~~**~**

That night at dinner, Sean answered the Bob-Whites’ questions about the O’Donnell family with good grace and a smile, seemingly gratified at their interest.

He supplied the Bob-Whites with a name of the *Tánaiste*, or heir apparent, to the O’Donnell prince and chief, a Don Hugo O’Donnell, the Duke of Tetuan of Spain.

The evening’s conversation diverted from talk of the O’Donnells to other things. The Bob-Whites excitedly began to make plans for the exploration of the town of Donegal for the next day.

Not long after, the Bob-Whites trooped upstairs to go to bed. As the girls got dressed for bed, Di’s gaze kept traveling to Siobhán’s portrait. No longer did she feel that strange, odd compulsion—that lack of control—that had so dominated her feelings before. But she still did not feel at rest—Siobhán’s quest was not quite yet complete.

“I’m going to ask Daddy something,” Diana said as she headed toward the door to the sitting room. “I’ll be back in a minute.”

Di picked up the wooden box from where it rested on the desk in the sitting room and then headed out into the hallway. She reached her parents’ suite, knocked on the door, and in answer to their hail, walked in.

“Diana?” her mother asked, looking up from her book that she was reading as she lay on her bed.

“Where’s Daddy?” Di asked.

Edward came out from the bathroom, still dressed in his comfortable khaki pants and short-sleeved polo shirt. “What have you got there, darling?”

Diana took a deep breath, set the box on the bed near her mother and opened it. Pulling out one of the amulets, she dangled it from her fingers and said, “How would you like to make a detour to Spain on the way home?”

The End

In Hoc Signo Vincas

Dana's notes: I'm a broken record—I know—but this yearly story with Susan is a dream! I never have so much fun writing a story as I do when I am writing with Susan. I love Trixie and the gang, I love the paranormal, I love brainstorming with Susan—really, it doesn't get any better than this.

We hope you enjoy Di's haunting, which came about partly because of a comment by MountainHawk—she always seems to make an observation that spurs us on for the next year. Thanks, Leigh! Your enthusiasm every year warms my heart. Truly.

So, seeing as how Susan and I are not expert in any of the things we talked about (except for our Ph.D.s in BWG), you can imagine that there was *a lot* of research that went into this story. Below is a list of a small fraction of the websites we used. Lesser quality ones that repeated a lot of the information on those listed below are not included.

That said, we did take a few liberties. *g* Donegal Castle can be toured, but (as far as we know), there are no plans afoot to renovate it into a hotel and conference center. There were precious few pictures of the inside of the castle, so any internal descriptions came about solely from our imaginations (except for the fireplace with the coat of arms in the banqueting hall; that's really there). Thank you for willfully suspending your disbelief!

Bá Dhún na nGall translates to Donegal Bay.

Hoppy Halloween!!!!

~~**~**

Susan's notes: I absolutely love working on these stories with Dana. I tell you—it is just so much fun to go back and forth, sending each other pieces of story and tidbits we've found out, commenting on characters' behavior (*grin*)...We really do have a good time doing this. And this year, I even got Dana doing a partial spooky reading of one of her sections in my car! How cool is that?

We did a lot of research (which really made me just want to hop on a plane to Ireland, darn it!). Dana's listed the different sites we found and used. Ireland's history really makes for quite fascinating. Mart recommends you go read about it. *grin*

Maglite is a trademark of the company who makes Maglite flashlights. No profit being made off its use here.

And, oh, yes, Don Hugo O'Donnell is a real, living person, a Spaniard of Irish descent, the Duke of Tetuan, and the actual *Tánaiste* of the Irish O'Donnell clan title.

Hopefully, the Gaelic translations are all correct. If they're not, well, attribute that to the non-Gaelic speaking authors. *grin* (And my Irish ancestors hopefully will not haunt me as a result. *G*) For your reference, however, here are the rough translations of the Gaelic used in the story (that are not proper names):

Mo stór: My treasure

Cuideachadh!: Help!

Caisleán: Castle

Fuirich ort!: Wait! or Hang on!

Go raibh maith agat: Thank you very much.

Tá fáilte romhat: You're welcome.

Tánaiste: Heir apparent

Hope you all enjoyed our Irish tale. We'll be seein' you again next year!

Happy Halloween!

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