

Mc Namara's Ghost



Angelique Armae

MCNAMARA'S GHOST

"I can't leave you, Hugh," said Julia. "I would rather die than live without you."

Her words no longer held meaning with him. "There's a tunnel beneath the tavern, under the stairs. It's the only way for you to escape. Now go. If we both die, Alex will win. He'll have the right to claim the Oghma. You can't let that happen."

A trap door opened from under the middle of the stairs. A man wearing a tricorn hat and carrying a musket emerged from the tunnel. Hugh raised his head and nodded to the man. "Save Julia, Samuel."

The man reached for Julia and pulled her toward the secret tunnel. She fought him, using both her hands and legs. But the man had a firm grasp on her. "I'll come back, Hugh," she cried. "I'll come back to you if it's the last thing I do on this earth. I'll come back..."

Julia's voice faded into the distance. Fire now consumed almost the whole of the tavern. Hugh began to cough. The air grew thin, his breath short.

A dark shadow emerged from the smoke and brushed past him, rising to the ceiling above.

The snapping sound of a breaking beam sliced through the fire's roar. Hugh looked up and saw a large wood plank shift from its place on the ceiling. The beam headed straight down toward his paralyzed body. In an instant, Hugh McNamara's world faded to black...

ALSO BY ANGELIQUE ARMAE

Come The Night

MCNAMARA'S GHOST

BY

ANGELIQUE ARMAE

AMBER QUILL PRESS, LLC

<http://www.amberquill.com>

MCNAMARA'S GHOST
AN AMBER QUILL PRESS BOOK

This book is a work of fiction. All names, characters, locations, and incidents are products of the author's imagination, or have been used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons living or dead, locales, or events is entirely coincidental.

Amber Quill Press, LLC
P.O. Box 50251
Bellevue, Washington 98015

All rights reserved.

No portion of this book may be transmitted or reproduced in any form, or by any means, without permission in writing from the publisher, with the exception of brief excerpts used for the purposes of review.

Copyright © 2002 by Josephine Piraneo
ISBN 1-59279-068-2
Cover Art © 2002 Angelique Armae

Rating: R

Layout and Formatting provided by: ElementalAlchemy.com

PUBLISHED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

DEDICATION

*This book is dedicated to the spirit of those
who have passed on,
but who will never be forgotten:
My ancestors, the ancient Irish Celts;
my ancestors who settled in the Schoharie Valley
during the mid 18th century;
and last but not least, to my late neighbor,
Mr. Craig Cole, who passed from this life while I was
writing McNamara's Ghost.*

CHAPTER 1

1778—McNamara's Tavern—Northkill, New York

He was a prisoner in his own home. And he hated the fact.

Hugh McNamara silently admitted to his fall, but doing so irked him more than did anything else. He was a high witch, an immortal soul who'd long ago earned the title the Unconquerable McNamara. How had his world come to this? How could he have fallen to his own brother's vile wrath?

He twisted his wrists against the rope and bit his tongue. Pain stung his already-raw flesh and made his skin burn like fire. He had to free himself. The idea of surrendering to a killer's mercy was not an option for the Unconquerable McNamara. He wouldn't allow it.

With arms raised above his head and hands bound by rough rope, Hugh sat slumped against the tavern's main staircase. He couldn't move his legs. The wound in his thigh was worse than he'd thought. He slouched back and watched helpless, in agony, as his captor paced the

MCNAMARA'S GHOST

floor, preparing to carry out the next move in his sick game of revenge. Hugh's leg burned.

Until now, he hadn't realized just how much his half-brother Alex actually hated him. But seeing the anger in his captor's dark glare confirmed the age-old rumors. Alex Caldwell was a vile Warlock who would stop at nothing to get what he wanted—even if that meant killing his own kin. And being at odds with the angry warlock was no place Hugh cared to be.

Alex crouched down next to him and offered a sly grin. "You've met your match, brother," he said. "After all these years, I've finally managed to conquer the Unconquerable McNamara. What have you to say for it?"

Hugh didn't answer; he refused to.

"Ah...the silent protest," said Alex. "You always were the righteous one, weren't you?" Caldwell rose to his feet and retrieved his sword from the floor. He turned his back to Hugh. "To this day, I can make no rhyme or reason as to why mother married a righteous witch by taking up with your father. She would have fared far better with a Warlock.

"You have no idea what life was like for me at that point. I was a Warlock—proud and vengeful like my grandfather before me. A soul more vile than anyone could imagine, and there I was, a boy of nine, forced to live under the roof of a good witch and his repenting wife. Do you know the agony I suffered?"

"I was sole heir to the Sage of Oghma Castle, sole heir to the powers of the darkest Warlock ever to walk this earth. And you took it all away from me."

"We make our own choices in life," said Hugh. He struggled to raise himself to a more comfortable position. "You're not a boy anymore. Don't damn your soul like this, Alex. I'm your brother, for God sake!"

Caldwell offered a slight laugh. "A brother I hate. From the day you were born I detested having you as my kin. You were different." He

MCNAMARA'S GHOST

paused. A dark, sinister look crossed Alex's face. "You were a disappointment. Never once did you live up to grandfather's dark name. But still, once you're gone, I will probably find myself missing our little wars over good and evil. You were always such good sport, brother. And for that, I shall repay you."

Hugh twisted once more at the rope tied around his wrists. The abrasive, rough threads burned his skin, but he didn't care. He had no desire to take part in whatever Alex was cooking up next.

The sound of Caldwell's boot heels rang out like thunder amid the tense air of the tavern. Hugh watched in silence as his brother made his way across the room. Alex turned around, folded his arms across his chest and leaned against the fireplace. His black, fathomless eyes looked like endless pools of darkness, thought Hugh. He wondered just how much evil his brother actually had in his soul. The thought made him shudder.

"You would've made a good Warlock, Hugh. Not as evil as myself, of course, but I imagine with proper training you'd have excelled in the black arts as did our dear grandfather."

"Grandfather disowned me," said Hugh. "I could never have been like him, and he knew it. He set me free of the family's curse. I can do the same for you, Alex."

An evil laugh echoed through the tavern. Caldwell glared at Hugh. "Free? Free me from my dark gift? I think not, brother. It's the one thing that sets us apart and I have no intention of ever giving up that upon which I thrive. It's the very reason I've brought you here. You're the one soul who stands in my way. The sooner I kill you, the sooner Oghma Castle, and all its glorious powers, will be mine."

"Do you really believe that?"

"It is my destiny," said Alex. "Grandfather had one child, and mother had two. You and I are the only souls who can inherit the powers of Oghma. And I was born first."

"The order of birth never factored into the inheritance of the

MCNAMARA'S GHOST

Oghman.” Hugh took a deep breath and tried to ignore the pain. His lungs ached, as did his arms. He was tired. And Alex’s teasing only prolonged the misery. He inclined his head back, and rested against the banister. “Besides, to make use of the powers, you need the blessing of the Daughters of Danu, and today, their identities are seldom revealed.”

Alex stared at him. “Ah...but that’s where your death will come in handy.” He leaned in closer and grabbed Hugh by the neck. “I am well aware, brother, of the true identity of your little colonial wench. So you see, I’ve already found a Daughter of Danu. And when you’re gone, Julia will bestow upon me the sacred blessing she already gave to you.” He let go of Hugh. “And she’ll warm my bed besides.”

“You’ll never have her. Julia would never give her soul to a Warlock.”

An evil grin crossed Alex’s lips. “I wouldn’t be so sure of that. When faced with death, people do the strangest things, including agreeing with a Warlock.”

“You wouldn’t dare,” said Hugh.

“Ah...but you wound me, brother. After all these years together, I’d have thought you knew me better than that. How can you think so little of my evil character? I am a master at my game and Julia is but a pawn. I have raided many houses searching for your wench. Burned many innocent victims. And to think all I had to do was confront my own kin. I’m most disappointed in you, Hugh.”

“So you were behind the raids.”

“I’m surprised it took you this long to figure that out. War is a glorious time for a soul such as myself—very rewarding. You already have two enemies, antagonists hungry for a viable reason to engage in combat. The baron and his chief were most easy to persuade. Burning the valleys was an easy task.”

“You’re a sick bastard, Caldwell.”

“Thank you, I know.”

“Leave Julia out of this,” pleaded Hugh. “You can have my power.”

MCNAMARA'S GHOST

I give it to you freely. But spare Julia.”

Alex shook his head. “I’m afraid not,” he said. He rose to his feet and drew his sword. “Your little whore is already under my spell. All that is left for me to do is kill you. The Oghma will be mine.” He jabbed the point of the blade into Hugh’s thigh.

A hot flare of unbearable pain shot through Hugh’s leg, but he refused to scream. He wouldn’t give in to his brother, not even in death.

Alex withdrew his sword in a slow, teasing manner.

Hugh stared at the torn flesh peeling from his leg. Blood-soaked stains marred his white breeches and dotted their way from his thigh down to his knee. He cursed to himself. He wouldn’t fall to Alex; he couldn’t.

A soldier entered the room. “Sir, Captain Patrick’s men have been spotted in the vicinity.”

Alex turned to Hugh. He crouched down to meet him at eye level. “Your time is up, brother. I can no longer stay and play.”

“If you kill me,” said Hugh. “You’ll pay a high price. Even a Warlock is not immune to the wrath of the gods.”

“When I kill you, I’ll rise above the gods. With the power of the Oghma, I will control the sacred scripts of the gods—the language of our people. I’ll rewrite the rules.”

“You’re madder than I thought.”

Alex rose to his feet. He turned to the soldier waiting in the hall. “Secure the tavern. Shutter the windows, and bolt the door.”

The soldier stared at Alex. All color drained from the young man’s face. “But, sir...he is your brother.”

“Sedition is punishable by death,” said Alex. He leaned in toward the soldier and whispered, “If you see fit to disobey me, then you must also see fit to disobey the King. Are you rebelling against the crown, as does this...traitor? For if you are, I have rope enough for two.”

The young man backed away. He stared at Hugh, then made his way out of the tavern.

MCNAMARA'S GHOST

The sound of wood shutters slamming against the house sent a thud through the air. Alex called for a flaming torch to be brought to him inside the tavern. He turned to Hugh. "In the name of the gods, I curse you, Hugh McNamara. May your soul know no rest."

"Don't do this, Alex," said Hugh. "For your own sake, don't do this to me."

With a careless toss, Alex threw the torch across the room. He turned and left the building without so much as a slight show of remorse.

The crackling of fire gnawing at dry wood grew louder by the second. Hugh struggled with the ropes at his wrist. He twisted and pulled, and twisted again. The burning pain wrenching his torn flesh soared.

He gave a final tug at the ropes and broke free. His arms fell to his sides in relief. But flames licked at the walls around him.

"Hugh! Are you here, Hugh?" A woman's voice called out among the fire. A soft hand caressed his face. "My God, what has he done?"

"For the love of God, Julia, what are you doing here?" A flash of shiny metal caught his eye—Alex's crest. Hanging from a silver chain around Julia's neck dangled the Warlock's insignia; a curse written in old Irish, woven into the intricate knot work of a Celtic beast's body.

His heart sank. Alex used the crest as a means of marking his women—souls who had fallen under his spell; souls whom he had bedded.

Alex had taken everything from him, even his beloved Fairy Witch. Hugh didn't know which betrayal was worse, his brother's or Julia's.

Hot, crackling flames spewed into the hallway and inched their way down the corridor. The intense heat warmed his skin. He tilted his head toward Julia. "You have to get out—now."

Hugh reached up and grabbed hold of the banister. He tried to raise himself up, but it did little good. His legs wouldn't move.

"I can't leave you, Hugh," said Julia. "I would rather die than live

MCNAMARA'S GHOST

without you.”

Her words no longer held meaning with him. “There’s a tunnel beneath the tavern, under the stairs. It’s the only way for you to escape. Now go. If we both die, Alex will win. He’ll have the right to claim the Oghma. You can’t let that happen.”

A trap door opened from under the middle of the stairs. A man wearing a tricorn hat and carrying a musket emerged from the tunnel. Hugh raised his head and nodded to the man. “Save Julia, Samuel.”

The man reached for Julia and pulled her toward the secret tunnel. She fought him, using both her hands and legs. But the man had a firm grasp on her. “I’ll come back, Hugh,” she cried. “I’ll come back to you if it’s the last thing I do on this earth. I’ll come back...”

Julia’s voice faded into the distance. Fire now consumed almost the whole of the tavern. Hugh began to cough. The air grew thin, his breath short.

A dark shadow emerged from the smoke and brushed past him, rising to the ceiling above.

The snapping sound of a breaking beam sliced through the fire’s roar. Hugh looked up and saw a large wood plank shift from its place on the ceiling. The beam headed straight down toward his paralyzed body. In an instant, Hugh McNamara’s world faded to black.

CHAPTER 2

Present day—Northkill, New York

Juliann Moss entered McNamara's Tavern and froze. She had waited over two centuries to return to the place where Hugh died, but crossing the threshold made it seem like only yesterday. Her heart still ached, and her powers still remained captive by Alex's curse. Even a new life couldn't take away the pain harbored in her soul.

A burning sensation warmed the hollow of her neck, and heated her flesh like the searing prongs of a red-hot branding iron. Alex Caldwell controlled her from beyond the grave. He still cursed her. She still hated him. Julia reached up and wrapped her fingers around the pendant suspended from the chain around her neck. The pain dissipated in an instant, having served as nothing more than a cruel reminder of her centuries-old defeat.

She turned her attention to the stout woman standing at her side.

"Well," said the realtor. "This is McNamara's Inn, Miss Moss."

MCNAMARA'S GHOST

"Please, call me Julia."

The short woman nodded her head in acknowledgment. "The grounds are lovely this time of year. The leaves are turning and everything is so colorful," said the realtor. "The property includes an extensive flower garden, an herb garden and numerous species of lavender, including newer varieties that bloom year round, such as the French lavender. Do you like flowers, Julia?"

"Yes."

"Then let me start by showing you the gardens."

The realtor led her out the back door, and down a winding path. Irregularly shaped slate blocks formed a trail through the yard, leading up to a gated flower garden.

"The last owner revived the gardens so they matched in placement, to the original plans that date back to the 18th century. There are several species of..." The realtor's voice trailed off into a slur in Julia's mind. She was only half-listening, her thoughts wandering to the past, and to a world unseen by man.

Orange and yellow leaves crunched under Julia's feet as she made her way through the backyard. *Fall*. She loved this time of year more than any other season. The air was crisp, the wind roamed the night and the veil between man's realm and the otherworld was slowly diminishing. Irish Fairy Witches lived for this time, for autumn, for the moment when their true world and man's could be one. A sudden rush of sentimental emotions swarmed through her heart.

On the instant, Julia remembered the gardens of the mother's world. The Irish Fairy Witches were one with nature, and made their homes among the trees, stones and streams. She longed for her homeland, her people. But Julia Moss was a strong soul who would abide only by her own rules—even the one about self-imposed exile. She wouldn't go back until she returned to Hugh.

"And around this bend we have an herb garden. What do you think of the grounds, Miss Moss?"

MCNAMARA'S GHOST

"Lovely. They're very lovely." She hoped her wandering mind wasn't as obvious as she feared it to be.

The woman eyed her with a curious stare. "Perhaps we should do this another day. I'm free on weekends, including Saturday mornings."

"No," said Julia. "I want to see the house today."

"Very well, let's go back inside."

They reentered the house through the same back door. Julia followed the woman through the hallway and on up to the front entryway.

"This is a big house," said the realtor. "There are six bedrooms and three bathrooms upstairs, and eight rooms downstairs. A ballroom sits at the back of the house, just off the main hall."

"The size of the house doesn't concern me."

The realtor looked puzzled. "Are you married, Miss Moss?"

Julia shook her head. "No."

She toured the dark, cold rooms, following the realtor from doorway to doorway and upstairs. Hugh would never approve of such a place. He liked a warm home. A place where his heart and soul could both rest and play. The present inn felt more like a ghostly tomb.

She entered the master bedroom. A cold, crisp wind blew in from the open window and fluttered the blue drapes.

"Oh, my," said the realtor, her hand trembling at her neck. "I suppose the last people to look at the house left the window open." The woman offered a faint smile. "I'll just close it. Nothing to worry about, I'm sure."

"I'm not alarmed," said Julia. "Should I be?"

The woman shut the window and fixed the drapes. Julia noticed her hand still trembled. "This is a large house," said the realtor. "I have others more suited for a single person. Why don't you let me show you those, then you can decide."

"No," said Julia. "I want this one."

The realtor shook her head and crossed the room. Julia followed her

MCNAMARA'S GHOST

into the hallway and back downstairs to the kitchen.

"There are better houses, Miss Moss."

"I don't want to see any other."

"But..." The realtor paused in the kitchen. She bit her bottom lip and fidgeted with a stack of folders clenched in her arms. She set the papers down on the counter top.

Julia sensed the woman's tension.

"You see, Miss Moss, this house is... Well...McNamara's Tavern is...is haunted."

"Then all the more reason for me to buy the place. Is it extra for the ghost?"

A look of shock crossed the realtor's face. "Excuse me?"

"I'm a parapsychologist," said Julia. "Ghosts don't bother me."

"I've never known anyone to purposely look for a haunted house. Perhaps I should tell you the house's history. Then you can decide whether or not to make the purchase."

Julia eyed the realtor. The short, red headed woman was getting to be more than a bit annoying. "If you must, but I can guarantee you, no matter what you have to say, I won't change my mind."

"By law, I'm obligated." The woman searched her folders and took out a yellowed sheet of paper. "According to local records, the original house was burned in 1778 during the American Revolution. The colonial innkeeper—the builder of the house—was locked inside and burned to death. In 1779, a new house was built on the site by one of the man's relatives. The property was eventually abandoned and later sold. Every owner since has been scared off by what is believed to be the innkeeper's ghost."

She had the story wrong, thought Julia. Hugh would never scare anyone. And besides, he wasn't a colonial. Hugh McNamara was loyal to the gods and to the gods alone. "I'll pay cash," she said. "I want the closing date set as soon as possible."

"The ghost really doesn't bother you, does it?"

MCNAMARA'S GHOST

"No. He doesn't."

Julia turned around, walked past the realtor and made her way back to her car. She abandoned Hugh once before, she didn't intend to do so again.

* * *

The refreshing scent of a sun-kissed field teased his nose and beckoned his soul. A joke, thought Hugh; nothing more than a cruel, painful joke. He ignored the call. Life was no longer his to enjoy.

The irony of the matter made him laugh. An immortal witch stripped of his immortality. The thought brought to mind his sordid vision of Fate sitting at her wheel, mocking him, laughing at him. He hated being trapped in time, faring no better than a mere ghost. He wasn't born to linger on the ethereal plane like gods of old—watching man, observing man. No. Hugh McNamara had a zest for life, and a zest for living that life while his soul rested in a body of substance. This ghost business was not for him in the least bit.

The intoxicating scent returned.

Fate taunted him yet again and he didn't like it. The tantalizing fragrance that invaded his space grew stronger, and left him with a yearning for more. He gave in to Fate's little joke. Being a good sport, Hugh took a deep breath and filled his lungs to the point of bursting. In his mind, he mentally dissected the perfume's fragrant notes. Lavender—English lavender. The familiar scent stirred his heart in a way it had not been touched for centuries. And much to Hugh McNamara's displeasure, it also jarred his memory.

He woke on the instant. Rising from his ethereal captivity, Hugh focused his energy and pushed his soul and ethereal body as near to man's realm as was possible.

He took another deep breath.

He closed his eyes.

There was no mistaking the scent. It was her scent—the scent of Julia, daughter of Danu. Memories of his beloved Irish Fairy Witch

MCNAMARA'S GHOST

came flooding back to him—long black hair, deep violet eyes, soft, alabaster skin, and a body made to warm a man's bed. His Julia was a goddess if ever he knew one.

He longed to hold her once again, to touch her. Oh, what he would give to caress her soft, flawless skin. To make love to his Julia as he did on many a night in the open fields of the Fairy realm. The passionate longing surprised him. And it hurt him. A dull ache twisted in his heart.

He remembered her betrayal.

He chided himself.

He didn't need what he could no longer have.

Hugh refused to allow such nonsense to disrupt his peace again. *No*. He checked his powers and halted the memories. For more than two centuries, he'd suffered. The constant agony of reliving his life's most tormented moments played out in his mind on a daily basis. And now he had had enough.

No other soul would have made him wait this long.

"Julia." The name stung his lips like a searing burn.

No other soul would have made him suffer.

The only satisfaction in it all was one fact. Nothing lasts forever—not even the powers of a Fairy Witch. Hugh smiled to himself. Revenge would be sweet, especially after all these years. He had one chance at returning to the mortal world, and one chance only. But to do so, he needed a soul to take his place. He needed a soul to balance the scales in the ethereal plane.

And according to the rules of the Oghma, the only soul who could change places with an immortal witch trapped in time was a soul who could wake the dead. And his once-beloved Julia had just stirred him to life.

CHAPTER 3

Julia reached for the last of the boxes to be unpacked. She scanned the room and counted the open cartons. For a soul who had lived centuries, she didn't accumulate much. Then again, she wasn't the sort to get attached to things. Hugh mattered to her more than anyone, and since his death, she'd found herself roaming aimlessly through life, waiting for the moment she could make good on her centuries-old promise. Inanimate objects seemed to matter little in the bigger scheme of things.

She sorted the remaining boxes and picked up a small carton marked bedroom. She opened the box top. A musty, damp smell teased her nose. Clumps of scrunched-up newspaper sat wrapped around trinkets inside. Julia reached in and withdrew the first item. She unrolled the paper on the night stand. A small gold frame glistened in the lamplight. Hugh stared back at her.

She tried to remember the last time she'd looked at his portrait—a year ago, a century ago? She didn't remember. Sam had saved her from

MCNAMARA'S GHOST

the fire, pulling her to safety through the secret tunnel. Her life since then was nothing more than blurring memories stitched together by empty fragments of time.

Pain, combined with guilt, tormented her heart. Julia reached for Hugh's picture. She turned the gold frame toward the window, so it sat away from her view. Hugh deserved a better life than what fate had dealt him. He deserved a better life than what she'd allowed him. Her mother Danu was right. Julia had failed her people and she did so in a most horrible way.

As an immortal Fairy Witch, she had, within her powers, the ability to bestow upon righteous warriors the sacred blessings of her realm. And the Unconquerable McNamara had earned her blessings, but she was too late. Alex beat her to Hugh, and he did so because of her inability to see past his scheme. In a fit of anger, she'd divulged her secret to Alex, telling him Hugh had earned her blessings and he had not.

Those words had cost her dearly. The blessing of Danu was never to be spoken by her kin except when bestowing the sacred gift upon a deserving soul. She had broken a sacred vow, and her powers had been diminished instantly, leaving her vulnerable to Alex's ability to curse her and take from her whatever he could.

She'd regretted that moment ever since. She should have known better. Alex Caldwell was a cunning Warlock known for being cruel and ruthless.

Julia fell back upon the bed and closed her eyes. For centuries, she lived in self-imposed exile away from the Irish Fairy Witches; away from her mother's kin. Alex had taken everything from her, even her high powers. She had no one and nothing, save for her memories – a faint vision of the golden-haired Hugh McNamara.

She thanked the gods for the night. The stillness of the dark hours sometimes helped to freeze a moment in time, and allowed the pain to subside temporarily. In dreams she remembered the better memories,

MCNAMARA'S GHOST

the happier times.

Alone and in silence, Julia drifted to sleep...

A cool, crisp breeze forced its way through the room, pushing open the balcony doors with a deliberate hand. Julia opened her eyes. She knew the faint touch of an immortal's spirit; there was no mistaking it. Goosebumps dotted her flesh. The hair at the nape of her neck stood on end. Motionless, she remained on the bed, waiting for her night visitor to materialize. A dark shadow emerged from the night's breath and stood at the foot of her bed. Slowly, the murky looking figure took on a defined form.

First came the body—rugged, hard, a frame built of sinewy muscle. Then came the face—a square jaw line, thick, wispy golden-brown hair, and large hazel eyes. There was no mistaking her visitor, thought Julia. He returned to her, as he usually did, to torment her, tease her, play with her mind.

“Hugh McNamara,” said Julia. To her amazement, she whispered the name with ease. An odd sense of comfort filled her soul.

He offered her a seductive gaze, his eyes traveling the length of her body. “You’ve kept me waiting a long time, Julia.” A faint, yet deliberate smile edged his lips. “Centuries.”

She didn’t move.

A cold, ghostly hand reached out for her, and tugged at the silk sheets.

The soft caress of fine fabric skimmed her body. She remembered the moments of stolen passion she’d shared with Hugh. Moments now lost forever.

Julia took a deep breath and closed her eyes. Cold, moon-kissed air enveloped her flesh. The weight of Hugh’s body fell across her like a warm, heavy blanket. The tender touch of his hand cradled her cheek.

“Come back to me, Julia.” He whispered in a seductive tone, his voice soft like velvet.

A searing kiss scorched her neck.

MCNAMARA'S GHOST

“Help me.”

A sudden panic filled her soul. Alex Caldwell's evil laugh echoed in her ears...

Julia woke in a pool of sweat. Her cotton nightshirt stuck to her body like a tight glove. She swallowed hard. Nightmares and the realm of dreams were once her forte, but it had been years since she'd last worked in that field.

A loud crash echoed from downstairs. The house shook as if it were suddenly falling apart. In fear, Julia rose from her bed and made her way into the hallway. She headed down the stairs at lightning speed, her feet skittish against the bare wood. Sounds of breaking timber emanated from the room to the right of the main hall. At the bottom of the steps, she froze.

Cautious of what she might find, Julia stepped off the stairs and held her breath. She approached the living room in silence, fearful of stirring the night's spirits. The room was dark, void of any visible activity. She bit her bottom lip and entered the living room.

Nothing.

She let out a deep breath and began to breath evenly again. Just her imagination, she told herself. Nothing more than her overly vivid imagination. *Or was it?* Julia eyed her surroundings. She recalled the original layout of the tavern in 1778. If memory served her right, the main staircase would have been where the living room stood today.

She reached for a lamp on one of the end tables and flicked on the light. A secretary sat to her left. Julia walked over to the large wood cabinet and tugged at the top drawer. It opened with a creak. Scattered papers fell to the floor. She bent down and retrieved a sealed, cardboard tube.

Julia opened the container and pulled out the contents. A rough sketch of the original floor plan sat paper clipped to a copy of new blueprints. She scanned the two sets for comparisons in design. Her memory had served her well. The present living room had been built on

MCNAMARA'S GHOST

top of the tavern's main hall. The sudden realization sent her stomach twisting in knots. She opened her hands and dropped the plans.

This was the room where Hugh died.

A sunken feeling gnawed at her soul. "*Help me.*" The words from her dream came back to haunt her once more. Hugh didn't rest in peace and she needed to find a way to solve his dilemma. But she couldn't do it alone.

Julia walked back into the hall and reached for her cell phone sitting on the marble center table. She turned on the phone, hit the automatic dial button and waited.

"Hello." A craggy, sleep-dazed voice answered her call.

"Samuel, I need your help."

"Julia?"

She knew her sudden appearance in Samuel Caldwell's life wouldn't be openly welcomed. It never was. "Please, Samuel. I have no time to explain. I just need your help."

"Where are you?"

She hesitated. Sam Caldwell had risked his life for her and she'd repaid him by slipping away under the cover of night over two centuries ago. Over the years they'd kept in touch, but she'd never once ever mentioned that night or Hugh. "I'm at the tavern," she said.

He didn't respond.

"And I've found Hugh. I know he's here."

"Wait a minute," said Samuel. "Give me a second to sort this out. I thought you were through with magic."

"I was. But lately, I've had a strong urge to return to the tavern and make sure Hugh rested in peace. I've had these dreams, Sam. Dreams I can't explain. Something's wrong and I need your help."

Silence prevailed. Julia knew this wasn't going to be easy.

"You're an Irish Fairy Witch," said Samuel. "I'm only a Warlock's son. Wouldn't you be better off going to your mother?"

"No, I can't." Her relationship with Sam was in worse shape than

MCNAMARA'S GHOST

she'd thought. "Hugh needs your help. If you won't do this for me, then do it for Hugh."

"I didn't say I wouldn't help you."

Julia held her breath. "Then you'll come to the tavern?"

"Look, I can't make it up there until tomorrow. If you can't wait, I can't help."

"No," she said. "That'll be fine. Hugh's waited this long, another night can't hurt him."

"Julia..." Samuel paused.

Julia sensed his apprehension. "Sam? Are you still there, Sam?"

"Yeah, I'm still here. Look, I'll see you tomorrow."

"Fine." She didn't get a chance to say goodbye. The phone went dead on the other end.

Julia leaned against the wall and slowly sank to the floor. When she'd bought the house, she'd expected to come across some remnant of Hugh's spirit. After all, this was the home he'd loved. He built the tavern with his own hands. The house gave him a sense of satisfaction, a feeling he hadn't felt since being forced away from his roots. Here he had a chance at a new life.

And she took it all away from him. Hugh McNamara gave her his heart, and in return, she allowed him to perish at the hands of his evil brother, Alex. And if Hugh was still here, then so, too, must be Alex. She'd find a way to make amends, even if it killed her in the process.

* * *

Her dreams invaded his thoughts.

Hugh McNamara woke with a sudden jolt and returned to the portal between man's world and his. The thin veil was hazy and gray.

He watched her through the darkness. Her words were like silent whispers, sounds cut off by a barrier separating two distinct worlds. Part of him wished he could hear her; the other part didn't care what she had to say. Julia's words didn't matter to him anymore, and neither did the feelings he once had for her.

MCNAMARA'S GHOST

A whirlwind of emotions tugged at his heart. He stared at her. Even slouched against the wall, Julia tempted him like no other. He had to admit, in all his years, he'd never laid eyes upon a beauty more gracious, more perfect...more vivid. Julia was the marvelous work of a god's detailed perfection.

Pain struck the core of his soul. He closed his eyes. The feel of silken lips caressed his own. The touch of a soft hand cradled his chin. Time was cruel. Hugh opened his eyes and pushed his past memories back; back to stand at a safe distance.

She couldn't do this to him again.

He walked to the edge of the room and stepped across the marble floor saddle. A shock of electricity zapped through his ethereal body and coursed through his veins. His blood boiled. On the instant, Hugh jumped back. A tingling sensation danced on his skin.

He cursed to himself. His soul was confined to the original hallway. He'd have to focus his energies in a more specific manner to travel through the house. But he didn't have the desire to do so at present. Waking from a centuries-old sleep was draining enough. He needed more time to use his energy in a skilled manner. And time was all he had.

Soon, he reminded himself. Soon he would be free again to roam man's world, and revel in its existence. The thought of returning to a real life excited him. He wanted to breathe again, to feel the wind, the rain, the sun against his flesh. Sleep had claimed him for far too long. The notion to want to live again struck his soul in an odd manner. He wondered why he hadn't wakened sooner.

A slight touch of heat warmed his heart.

He turned back to the hall.

She was leaving him.

Julia rose from the floor and headed toward the stairs. Her long, slender legs moved gracefully across the carpet. Her perfectly formed feet barely touched the floor.

MCNAMARA'S GHOST

She walks like an angel, like she always did.

Hugh watched as Julia made her way up the stairway and turned the corner. She faded from his sight.

A sudden realization hit him. If he didn't know better, he'd swear he still loved Julia.

Ridiculous. How could he love a woman who'd left him to spend eternity trapped in time? Who'd betrayed him with his own brother? Besides, love was no longer his to give or to receive. Ghosts couldn't love in the tangible way.

Ridiculous.

Hugh stepped back and re-entered the ethereal plane.

CHAPTER 4

Julia walked along the flower path winding behind the house. Rows of French lavender bushes swayed leisurely in the soft wind, and colored the garden with a light touch of purple and green. She ran her hands along the soft buds. The lavender growing at the inn reminded her of the gardens of her mother's castle Dun Danu. Danu had a passion for the wild fragrance. Julia missed her mother.

She clipped several stalks to bring inside the house to dry.

Hugh had loved the gardens at Dun Danu. And he loved her lavender perfume. The striking color of the flower reminded her of times past. Julia gathered the cut bunch of stalks and tied them with a deep purple ribbon. If the past were as easy to capture, she'd have long ago gathered the remnants of time and kept them hidden away for all eternity. But life didn't work that way.

She closed her eyes.

The soft touch of a hand caressed her arm. She smiled to herself.

Hugh used to love to walk with her through the castle gardens.

MCNAMARA'S GHOST

Visions of days past came flooding back to haunt her.

A whispered breath tickled her ear.

She opened her eyes.

“Hugh?”

The whisper didn't come from a vision. Something stirred her space in the here and now.

A shadow emerged from the rows of lavender and approached her.

Julia stepped back. “Is that you, Hugh?”

The misty form settled into a more defined outline—tall, muscular, and with an aura of immortal power.

There was no mistaking Hugh McNamara, thought Julia, even in ghost form.

Dressed in an ancient Druid's cape, the man she loved more than life itself reached out to her, his hand motioning for her to come closer.

She stepped forward.

He came closer.

The sensual touch of his hand caressed her cheek. She leaned her head nearer, yearning for more. But her pleasure was short-lived.

A strong, sudden force pulled her back.

Her breath grew ragged. A dark presence enveloped her soul like a firm hand choking the life from the very core of her being. She gasped and dropped the bundle of lavender. She covered her mouth with her hand.

Alex.

Alex Caldwell had invaded her world.

Surely she was going mad.

Hugh stood in the near distance, a look of confusion crossing his face. He didn't seem to notice his brother's life force.

“No,” she said to herself. “This can't be happening.”

The shadow came closer. Alex curled his lips in a sly grin. “Hugh can't see me or feel me,” he said. “In your world, a Warlock's ghost can appear only to one soul at a time, and I have chosen you as that

MCNAMARA'S GHOST

soul, and not my brother. For now, I care only to deal with you, my little spellbound witch. Hugh is not amusing to me at present. I'll deal with him later, when I return to the ethereal plane."

She raised her hand—palm up—out in front of her and marked the distance she desired to keep between herself and Alex. "Go away," she cried to him. "Stay away from me."

A car horn beeped in the distance. *Samuel.*

Julia backed away.

The shadow faded.

Alex's life force released its hold of her.

She ran around to the other side of the house and never once looked back. She loved Hugh, and she knew something was wrong. But she couldn't fight Alex Caldwell's evil wrath alone.

Turning the corner, Julia caught her breath and tried to appear as composed as was possible for someone who had just come face-to-face with the soul of a dark, powerful Warlock. The last thing she wanted was to frighten off Samuel.

She was pleased he'd kept his word. A silver SUV pulled into the driveway and parked at the bottom of the front steps.

The sight of Sam's vehicle eased her anxiety. A sense of relief flooded Julia's soul as she tried to calm her panicking nerves. Together with Samuel, she could fight Alex and free Hugh. He was also her connection to the past—her only tangible link to Hugh—and despite their somewhat awkward relationship, they always managed to get along amicably.

Samuel exited the car and walked around to the back. His casual stride alluded to the carefree nature Julia remembered him to have. He hadn't changed; he never did.

Sam opened the hatch and retrieved a large, black duffle bag and a small box. He slammed the hatchback closed.

Julia waited for him at the bottom of the steps, her usual reserved façade keeping its guard. Watching Sam was like watching the past.

MCNAMARA'S GHOST

He reminds me so much of Hugh. Julia took a good look at him. Samuel Caldwell could easily pass for his uncle's twin—both had hazel eyes, dark blond hair and the same square jaw line. Sam looked more like Hugh than he did his own father. He also had the same pure soul, and that frightened her. Alex Caldwell had no mercy for pure souls.

"I'm glad to see you, Julia," said Samuel. "It's been too long." He put down the duffle bag and offered an opened arm embrace.

"I know," she said. "It's been a long time for a lot of things."

* * *

He stared through the unseen veil of time and waited in silence. The frustration of being so close, yet so far away, angered Hugh.

He wanted more out of existence.

He wanted Julia.

She came to him, welcomed him. Then, for no apparent reason, she pulled away. Hugh wondered if Julia remembered their heated passion. Or did she fancy her betrayal with Alex more than she did the love she and Hugh had once shared. Pain sliced through his heart. Even after two hundred years, the aching feeling hadn't yet gone away.

His heart had never failed him before. Why should it now? Hugh wondered what had really transpired between Julia and his brother.

"*Go away. Stay away.*" Her words echoed in his head.

A sudden rush of immortal energy enveloped his space—a dark, vile energy. He'd recognize such evil anywhere, anytime—no matter its form.

Alex.

A firm hand slapped him on the shoulder. "Oh, but to revel in the sweet sense of that which is life... It pleases me you miss it so much, brother."

"Leave me be."

Alex laughed. "I would never even consider such a preposterous notion." He leaned in closer to Hugh. "Your misery is exactly what my soul thrives upon. That, and the fact the two souls for whom you care

MCNAMARA'S GHOST

more than anything else in the world have now joined forces. I imagine their collaboration will make for good sport.”

Hugh turned to face Alex. “You’ve been stripped of your powers.”

“Only in this world, brother. Not in theirs.”

“Then I suppose,” said Hugh, “I owe the gods my deepest gratitude. The veil between man’s realm and ours bars you from crossing over.”

Alex removed his hand from Hugh’s shoulder. He stared dead ahead, his hands now clasped behind his back, his posture straight like that of a soldier in the devil’s own army.

He was scheming revenge. Hugh sensed his brother’s wrath inside his own soul.

“The more I disgust you, the more I am pleased,” said Alex.

“What do you want?”

Alex continued to stare straight ahead. “He stirred me from my sleep. Did you know that?”

“Who? Samuel?”

“Is that what you named him? I didn’t remember.”

Anger twisted in Hugh’s soul. Alex had never cared for Sam and obviously he still didn’t.

“Do you not think it the least bit ironic? Your bastard waking my soul from an age-old sleep?”

Hugh struggled with his conscience. Alex didn’t deserve to know the truth about Sam. “Leave him alone. He’s done nothing to you.”

Alex looked over his shoulder to Hugh. A wicked grin crossed the man’s thin lips. “Ah...but he has. He’s invaded my space. He seeks my powers—the powers of Ogham.”

“Your rights to those powers were stripped away when you left me to burn in the tavern.”

“He’s been plotting,” said Alex. “The boy’s good, I’ll give him that. He’s even managed to master a significant portion of grandfather’s magic. He’s succeeded where you failed.”

So, Sam was a Warlock. The realization saddened Hugh. He wanted

MCNAMARA'S GHOST

more for his nephew than to merely take up where Alex left off.

“And now he collaborates with your whore.”

Hugh held his tongue. He balled his hands into tight fists and took a deep breath. Alex wasn't worth it. He never was.

“I'm glad to see I haven't lost my touch,” said Alex. “I was worried I'd never again be able to get the best of you. But alas, I have proved my doubts wrong.”

Hugh shot him an angered glare. “He should take your powers—all of them.”

“A change of heart? I do say, brother, this is truly a rare moment. Damning your own bastard? You shock me. Even I would never stoop so low.”

Hugh lunged for Alex's throat. “Samuel could never be like you. His soul is pure, not tainted as is yours.”

“Do you hate me now, McNamara? Do you finally hate me as I have hated you?”

He let go of Alex. Hugh stepped back and adjusted his shirt cuff. “Julia and Samuel would never betray me. If anything, they gather to plot against you.”

Alex stared at him. “I never gave such nonsense a single thought.” He turned back toward the misty veil. “Fitting, though, I should say.”

“What?”

“Julia lashed out at me in anger the night I burned the tavern. She told me you had earned her blessings, and that I did not. Of course, I had to get to you before she did. And well, we know the results of that.

“And now, here you are, lashing out at me as did Julia. I never thought those two would be plotting my demise.” He turned back to Hugh. “Thank you, brother. Now I must get to them before you do.”

“That's impossible.”

Alex shook his head. “Not really. The portal between the worlds is at its thinnest on Samhain. And if my mind serves me right, we are only two days away from October 31st.” He stepped close to Hugh and

MCNAMARA'S GHOST

placed his lips against Hugh's ear. "In man's realm, my powers have not been taken from me. I will cross over and I'll claim my birthright. And this time, dear brother, I'll finish off your miserable little whore."

Hugh lunged for Alex's neck, his temper no longer patient. But it did him no good. His hands passed right through Alex's form. He stumbled and fell to the floor.

With his evil laugh echoing about the ethereal plane, Alex Caldwell vanished on the instant.

CHAPTER 5

The candle-lit chandelier cast an eerie glow about the dining room. Julia preferred some things remain as they did centuries ago. The dim lighting calmed her nerves, and made her feel as if all secrets remained hidden.

She reached for the crystal wine glass sitting next to her plate. The smooth, red liquid eased down her throat and warmed her soul.

She avoided eye contact with Samuel, and hoped to avoid the inevitable. She didn't want to talk about the night Hugh died.

Sam stared at her. His curious gaze seemed to be searching her face, her soul, her inner most thoughts.

"Why did you return, Julia, after all these years? Why now?"

She put down the wine glass. "I don't know. One moment I was in Manhattan at my desk working on a study of ghosts, and all of a sudden, I was overcome by a strong sensation to return to the tavern." Anxiety welled up inside her. "I find it difficult to talk about Hugh, especially since he's haunted my dreams. I feel as if he's here."

MCNAMARA'S GHOST

She paused and took a deep breath. Now came the dreaded part. She hated to tell him, but Sam had to know. "I think Alex is here, too." She heard her own voice quiver. "I've encountered him on several occasions."

Sam dropped his fork. The color drained from his face and made him look like a ghost.

"What's wrong?"

He rubbed his right temple. "Real dreams or visions?"

"What difference does it make?"

"It makes a whole hell of a difference, Julia. Now if you want me to help you, answer the question."

"Both."

"Then we're in more trouble than I thought." Sam rose from his chair.

"What are you talking about?"

He turned to her; his eyes offered a pleading look. "Hugh isn't actually dead."

She froze. Her body went numb. "What do you mean, he isn't dead?"

"He's been stripped of his immortality, but in this world only. Unlike a mortal's ghost, Hugh can still come back. He has one chance at reclaiming his immortal existence in man's world. My great-grandfather secured the privilege for those of his line when the gods blessed him for his heroic service in battle. At the time, he was a great Witch, and had not yet succumbed to the dark side of magic."

Sam paused. He ran a hand through his straight, dark blond hair. "I never told you about the night Hugh was left to burn in the tavern. About what went on here after you ran away."

"Well, maybe you better tell me now." A sense of panic knotted her stomach. Had she been so lost all these years, so far out of touch from her world of magic, she didn't sense Hugh's life force? Her heart pounded with a frantic pulse.

MCNAMARA'S GHOST

Sam placed his hands into his jean pockets. He paced the floor. "I returned here that night. And when I saw the state of things, I knew I had to start looking for a body—a dead body." He paused.

A nervous twitch jumped at his jaw line. "Only part of the building remained standing. I sifted through ash and still-smoking timber. But he wasn't there. I couldn't find Hugh. Then I heard a moan. The sound of a man in pain and confused. I found my uncle's body buried under a pile of heavy beams. Somehow, he'd survived. And he did so without being burned. In fact, the beams showed no sign of being in the fire, not even singe marks, nothing."

"But even an immortal witch cannot survive fire."

"I know. But Hugh did. And since he wasn't burned, his heart was still intact. He was as alive as are both you and me at this very moment."

Julia pushed her chair back. "It's impossible," she said. "We both saw the fire. There was no way he could've survived."

"We weren't alone, Julia. Someone else was there. Something else was there."

She rose to her feet. "Another Witch?"

Sam turned to her. "I don't know. I pulled Hugh out from under the mound of wood and placed him in a grassy patch on the lawn. He kept repeating something about the Ogham stones. He told me where he'd hidden them, and I was to look for them. I left him briefly and went back inside the house as he instructed me to do. The stones were exactly where my uncle said they'd be. But when I came out of the house, something happened."

Julia walked over to the window. She folded her arms in front of her and stared outside to the front yard. "What?"

"There was another being," said Samuel. "A shadowy figure dressed in a long, black hooded cape. I saw him from the corner of my eye." He paused a second time. He turned to face Julia. "Then I saw my father, too."

MCNAMARA'S GHOST

She swallowed hard. Her gut instincts were right then. Not only was Hugh here, but so, too, was Alex. "Did your father recognize you?"

"No." Sam shook his head. "He didn't have time to realize who I was. He never had time to realize I was his son. In an instant, my vision blurred. It was as if I was watching a droplet of rainwater fall into a puddle. Everything shattered, rippled...then they were gone. The three of them disappeared as if they'd never been there in the first place."

"Maybe they weren't."

"No. I know for a fact they were really there. I had the Ogham stones in my hand. If it weren't for Hugh, I wouldn't have known about the stones."

"Then were is he now?"

Sam just stared at her, a blank look masking his face. "I think my great-grandfather might have been the shadow I saw that night. He would've had within his powers, the ability to create a ripple in time."

"But why would he desire to do so?"

"To keep the Ogham safe, to keep Alex and Hugh safe from each other...at least temporarily. I believe in the ethereal plane they cannot harm one another. Only if they cross over into man's world, will they regain powers to be used against their own blood and others."

The thought worried Julia. She didn't like thinking about Alex being given back his powers. "What's in the box you brought with you?" She knew better than to press the subject. Perhaps a change in conversation would sooth her nervous soul.

"The Ogham stones."

"You brought them here?"

"Why not? I would never dream of allowing them out of my sight. I couldn't leave them in the city. They wouldn't be safe."

Samuel turned back toward the table and reached out for the small box. He untied the frayed cord wrapped around the cardboard container and set it off to the side. He lifted the lid.

Inside the box sat numerous round, colored stones. Pink, light blue,

MCNAMARA'S GHOST

green, yellow—a rainbow of colors cradled in purple silk velvet. Black lines, arranged in various order, marked each stone. Julia marveled at the collection. “Can you read their etchings?”

“Yes,” said Sam. “I am well-schooled in both the meaning and use of the Oghma.”

“Have you used them to find out about Hugh?”

He shook his head. “No. I can’t cast these.”

“Why not?”

“I don’t have the right to. These aren’t your average Ogham stones, Julia. This set once belonged to the god Oghma himself. He created the holy language with these stones. I’ve never known a mortal, or Witch for that matter, who had the power to use them. Even I can’t touch them with my bare hands.”

Julia took a deep breath. She stared at the box and reached her hand inside. The stones lifted from their bed of velvet before her hands even neared the box.

“That’s impossible,” said Sam, his voice quivering. “They aren’t supposed to react to a Witch—only to Oghma and the keeper whom he appointed.”

“And to those born of his line and of his kin. Oghma came from the Irish fairy race. He was a hero among my mother’s people.”

Sam just stood there. A look of shock crossed his ageless face. “Of course. Why didn’t I realize that before?”

The stones settled in Julia’s palm—a white aura reflected around each individual circle illuminating the entire set. Her hand tingled. “The Ogham has many purposes, and in Hugh’s case, they were to be used in more ways than one. The Ogham was used for divination and for marking land boundaries.”

The stones rose from Julia’s hand and shifted. They fell in a specific pattern, lining up in a straight line from her elbow to her fingertips.

Julia turned to Samuel. “Read them from bottom to top.”

Sam leaned in closer. “Hugh, son of Aodan.”

MCNAMARA'S GHOST

“The Irish version of Hugh is Aodan. The name means fire. Hugh once told me he was named after a powerful ancestor, Aodan. He must have kept the stones here at the tavern to mark his lot. This land was his, as was the surrounding ethereal plane. Other Witches would've sensed this and stayed away. Or, at the least, they'd have come in peace and avoided any wars.”

“Obviously, my father didn't take heed.” Sam stepped back.

Julia sensed a bit of anger in Samuel's soul. “You did what you could to help Hugh.”

“But I didn't do enough. My father destroyed our family. He brought shame upon our sacred heritage. I should've seen it coming. I should have stopped him.”

“Maybe you still can.”

“How?”

Julia stared at the stones. “If there was a ripple in time when the tavern burned, then Hugh and Alex are out there somewhere. They're trapped on the ethereal plane. We need to find a portal, open the doorway and bring Hugh back to the mortal realm.”

Sam laughed. “You make it sound so simple.”

“It is.”

A look of confusion crossed Sam's face. “How?”

“The day after tomorrow is October 31st, the Celtic New Year. During this time, the veil is very thin between man's world and the ethereal realm. We can get Hugh back by bringing him through the portal.”

“That's impossible,” said Samuel. “Someone would have to cross over to the ethereal plane in exchange for Hugh. The two worlds must be balanced. We can't bring one soul into this realm and not send another back. Hugh couldn't stay here.”

Julia put the stones back in the box. “I know.” She reached in front of Sam and picked up the lid. She secured it on to the box with a firm hand.

MCNAMARA'S GHOST

Sam stared at her and shook his head. "No. What you're thinking is ridiculous. You can't cross over, Julia. You can't."

She let out a deep sigh. "Why not? After all these years, it's the least I can do."

Sam reached for her hand. "You can't. You've turned your back on magic for more than two centuries. You can't just step back into that world at will. It takes time."

She pulled away from him. "We don't have time. If Hugh isn't brought across now, he'll be wiped from the face of existence."

"He's been trapped in time for ages," said Sam. "Why should now be any different?"

"I, too, have kept secrets concerning that night, Sam. I should have told you long ago, but I didn't. I couldn't talk about it."

Sam placed a caring arm around her shoulders. "We have to come to terms with the past. We can't hold anything back now."

She nodded her head. "The night Alex came to the tavern, I met with him twice—once before he met with Hugh and once afterward. I told him Hugh had earned my blessings and not him. At that point, he knew he'd never be given the powers of Oghma." She paused.

No one knew about the curse, and up until now, she'd refused to speak of it. But Sam deserved to know and she had an obligation to tell him. "Once the blessings of Danu were taken away from Alex, Hugh became his grandfather's only heir. At that very moment, the powers of darkness increased Alex's magical abilities. Your great-grandfather made it so by striking a deal with powers of good and evil. The accord was meant to even the score, so to speak.

"But Alex wasn't content with being evil. He yearned to control both worlds. That's why he went after Hugh. With his brother out of the way, he was convinced he'd persuade me to change my mind. I ran into him on my way back to the tavern that night. I had hoped to bury Hugh's remains. The thought of him here, alone and exposed to the elements, disturbed me. But when I arrived, all I found was Alex. We

MCNAMARA'S GHOST

made a pact. He wanted to strip Hugh of his powers, but I couldn't let that happen. You know the soul of an immortal Witch, even in death, still contains its own powers.

"If those powers were taken from Hugh, he'd never rest. I agreed to never return here, to never again practice the limited magical abilities I still had left. My powers were diminished earlier because I broke the sacred vow and spoke of the blessings of Danu. I wasn't permitted to discuss such dealings with Alex.

"Your father knew of this vow, and he cursed me on the instant. I had no time to react, no time to even realize what was happening to me. By the time I went to tell Hugh about what had transpired between Alex and me, I was already under the Warlock's curse and Hugh was already held captive by Alex."

Julia reached for her turtleneck collar and pulled at the wool fabric. She exposed the ancient medallion hanging on a chain at her neck. "This is your father's crest, the mark of the Warlock. The bulk of my natural powers are held in bondage until the day he chooses to relinquish my soul from his grasp. When I remove the pendant, or attempt to interfere with Alex's curse, my skin burns, and I am left with a branded mark scarring my flesh. It only happens sometimes, though. So, I suspect, Alex isn't always aware or awake. I believe he attacks me only when the mood strikes him."

She let go of the turtleneck. "But the curse didn't stop all my powers. I could still cause Alex minor problems and he used that fact against me. I agreed to never interfere with his doings. In exchange, he would relinquish all rights to Hugh's powers. If I ever broke the accord, Hugh's soul would be wiped from the face of all existence. He wouldn't even be a mere ghost lingering in time. Alex would steal his powers. It was all part of the pact I made with Caldwell."

"Then why did you come back?"

"Partly because I never trusted Alex. Partly because I felt Hugh needed me to return. I can't explain it. I'm here because I was driven

MCNAMARA'S GHOST

by an unseen force to return to the tavern.” She stared at Sam. His hazel eyes and square jaw reminded her so much of Hugh. She needed to settle the score with Alex; there was no way she would allow the vile Warlock to win this game.

“The way the pact was made, your father could’ve betrayed me at any moment. He still can, and there’d be nothing I could do about it. The pact would still stand. Alex had cursed me first, and therefore, he had rights over me and my word. Besides, I came back because I found a way to make amends with Hugh. To pay him back for taking away what should have been his. I should never have told Alex about the blessings of Danu. Now I have to right that wrong.”

Sam eyed her with caution. “I don’t like the sound of that.”

“My powers in exchange for Hugh’s.”

Sam lowered his head and pinched the bridge of his nose between his thumb and finger. He wrinkled his brow. “If you give up to my father what powers you have left, you die.”

“I know.”

“And my father will grow stronger.” Sam lifted his head. “I would never allow such a thing to take place.”

“That’s exactly what I was counting on when I called you. At the moment, I didn’t know about the ripple in time. I thought Hugh was just unable to rest in peace because of the way he had died. My limited abilities would have served to help him in that state. But after sensing his soul so strongly, I felt something was wrong.

“I knew if I lured your father out, you would fight him, together with me. Had my powers not been diminished, I’d have settled this score more than two hundred years ago. Since Hugh still has a chance at reclaiming his immortality, we can help bring him back to man’s realm, and back to watch over the Ogham stones. He’s the rightful heir.”

She stared at him. “You’re the only one who can help me with this. You can take my powers instead of your father taking them. We’ll

MCNAMARA'S GHOST

arrange it so the exchange takes place at the precise moment I cross over to the ethereal plane. Hugh can come across to man's world, you increase your powers—we save Hugh's soul. And we put an end to Alex Caldwell once and for all. You can fight him. If he dies in the mortal realm, no soul would have to be exchanged for his. My soul would be exchanged for Hugh's."

"Hugh would never allow it."

"Hugh doesn't have a choice."

CHAPTER 6

She invaded his dreams.

Visions of a raven-haired Fairy Witch danced in Hugh's head. The beguiling beauty teased him, taunted him; she knew what he liked and she played him well.

He reached out to her and pulled her close to him. The soft feel of her silky skin against his chest sent heated tingles down his spine. He wanted her and now he'd have her.

In the open fields, under the blanket of night, he covered her body with his. The heady fragrance of wild lavender filled the air around them. He took a deep breath, and bent his head to her neck. His mouth explored her smooth flesh.

She stirred ever so slightly beneath him, and draped her arms about his neck. He reveled in the sensation of being so close to her.

A sudden, hot wind rose up from the night's shadows and enveloped his body, pulling him away from his Fairy Witch. His skin burned. Flames of fire licked at his flesh. He struggled to free himself from the

MCNAMARA'S GHOST

wind's grasp, but his movements only served to entangle him more. The sound of a tree cracking in two echoed the distance. Heavy, bent branches came flying toward him in the wind. His world faded to black...

Hugh woke on the instant.

Julia stirred his dreams. He needed to reach out to her; to know once and for all what had really transpired between her and Alex. He needed to know for his own sake.

But to converse openly and freely with Julia, Hugh had to appear in the flesh. He concentrated his energies and zoned in on Julia's heart. He felt her soul. She slept in the far bedroom at the end of the upstairs hall.

In ethereal form he floated out of the house and up to the second-story balcony outside Julia's bedroom.

He concentrated his energies into one mass and watched in amazement as flesh and blood returned to his hands. The temporary form was like a gift from the gods. Hugh rubbed his hands together just for the sake of feeling his own skin. The sensation thrilled him to no end. He was satisfied with his efforts. Even after all these years, he hadn't lost his touch.

With his newly-attained form, Hugh gently pushed his fingers against the balcony doors. The tiny glass panes rattled in the quiet of night.

He crossed the threshold and entered Julia's bedroom.

The fragrant perfume of freshly cut lavender filled his nostrils. He followed the scent across the room.

A large, four-poster bed sat in the center of the bedroom. Hugh ran his hand against the fine wood posts. Intricately carved stalks of lavender tied with ribbons decorated the bed. Even for a witch, thought Hugh, Julia was superstitious. He remembered her teaching him about the magical properties of lavender, and how the ancients used the herb to protect against evil. He remembered teasing her about such beliefs.

MCNAMARA'S GHOST

He remembered a lot of things about Julia.

He stood at the side of the bed and stared down at her. For centuries, he'd longed for this moment.

Julia lay sleeping. Her long, raven colored hair flowed freely about her alabaster face, and fanned the pillow. How he wanted to bury his face in her long locks and breathe in the sweet essence of his very own goddess. But to do so would be to disturb her. And he only planned on watching tonight.

She looked like an angel wrapped in cream-colored silk sheets dotted with bows and flowers, and matching blanket.

Pain twisted in Hugh's heart. He was once the soul who kept Julia warm, the soul who wrapped his body about hers like the sheets and blanket did now. He wanted desperately to believe Alex had tricked Julia, that Alex was the one responsible for her betrayal of him. He wanted to take back that which was once his.

He longed to hold her. A light touch would do no harm. He reached out to caress Julia's face with his hand, but his fingers swept right through her flesh. Anger washed through him like a tidal wave. Hugh pulled back and curled his hand into a fist.

Was this all he'd be given after centuries of confinement? To be allowed to appear as a vision or a ghost in a dream?

Those fleeting moments when she called out to him granted him the ability to take on a shadowy form in her presence. But those connections had never lasted long. Now, however, Julia stirred him from his ages-long sleep with such strong will, his old powers returned to him. He'd waited what seemed like all eternity for this moment. But he never envisioned it to be anything like this. After all these years, his beloved Julia had finally returned to him, and he couldn't even touch her.

Fate was more than cruel. He hated the gods. They blessed him and cursed him at the same time. He was merely a pawn in their game.

He cursed under his breath. While Julia was awake, he couldn't

MCNAMARA'S GHOST

touch her. And while she slept, he could only reach out to her in dreams. But tonight, Julia didn't dream.

He laughed to himself. She was a clever Witch, shielding her innermost thoughts from night's unscrupulous invaders. Not even the powers of an immortal witch could break that barrier. He hated being trapped like this. Julia shut him out, and he was certain she didn't even realize it.

Hugh turned away from the bed and headed toward a vacant chair across the room.

A moan echoed in the darkness.

He looked back.

Julia's body stirred ever so slightly under the covers. "Hugh," she whispered.

He slowly turned around.

She licked her lips and swallowed. A look of confusion danced across her sleeping face.

Temptation struck Hugh's soul like he'd never imagined. He walked to the side of the bed, and leaned over Julia's body. His shadow covered her sleeping form. He bent his head to hers.

He kissed her.

The soft touch of Julia's velvet-smooth lips pressed against his was enough to send Hugh's emotions spiraling.

She reached up and wrapped her hands around his neck. Her fingers entwined in his hair.

Hugh's heart raced. His pounding pulse echoed in his ears and throbbed at his temples. His beloved Julia had finally returned to him. The honey-kissed flavor of her mouth drove him wild. His tongue delved deeper.

A hard punch jabbed at his chest. It took a moment for reality to set in. He was being punched.

Julia was punching him. She repeatedly pounded her fists against his body.

MCNAMARA'S GHOST

He pulled away and stepped back.

A silver flash blinded his eyes as a ray of moonlight danced off the pendant dangling at Julia's neck.

Alex.

She still wore Alex's crest. His heart sank.

His limbs tingled with small, shocking sensations. His blood grew warm.

Julia woke. A frightened look crossed her face. "Hugh?" She threw back the covers and rose from her bed.

"No," said Hugh. "Stay away from me." He waved his hands in a frantic manner. "Don't touch me. It's too dangerous."

* * *

She didn't believe her eyes. "My God, Hugh, it's really you. You're alive—in the flesh." She crossed the room and followed him to the chair.

"Please, stay away. Something is happening to me, and I don't want it to affect you." He doubled up, clenching his hand to his stomach.

Julia tried to contain her emotions, but it did little good. Tears flowed down her cheeks.

Hugh let out a deep breath and straightened his body. He walked closer to the chair.

"I never thought I'd see you again," said Julia.

"Is that why you made me suffer all these years?" He stumbled.

She reached out for him.

"No, I don't need your help." He steadied himself and lowered his body into the yellow striped chair. Beads of sweat dotted his forehead.

"I didn't know you were alive. I thought you died in the fire."

"Alex had an obligation to tell you I was still alive. That my grandfather saved me." He shot her an evil glare. "But I don't suppose that would've mattered to the two of you"

"What does that mean?"

"With me out of the picture, I imagine a powerful Witch such as

MCNAMARA'S GHOST

yourself would find my brother's dark nature quite appealing. Did it take long for you to warm his bed?"

The accusation hurt her. "How could you think I'd abandon you for Alex?"

"It was my brother's plan. He told me so before he ruthlessly tried to kill me."

"I thought you knew me better than that, Hugh McNamara. I loved you. I still love you. Not a moment has gone by in all these centuries that I didn't miss you. My life has meant nothing to me without you."

"Really? Is that why you still wear his crest? Is that why you told me to go away—earlier in the garden?"

A knot twisted in the pit of Julia's stomach. Alex was right about not revealing himself to Hugh. The evil Warlock still had some viable powers. "Your brother stopped me in the garden. He was there choking my soul. I called out to him, not you. I wanted Alex to stay away."

Tears welled up in her eyes. She didn't want to cry, but keeping her pain from Hugh didn't matter anymore. He hurt her and she didn't care if he knew how vulnerable she had become.

He stared at her with a look of contempt in his eyes. "You think because I failed once, I'd fail again?"

She didn't answer.

"Why didn't you come back for me?"

Julia wiped the back of her hand across her face, erasing the tears. "I did. But it was too late. I made a pact with Alex, and in exchange for him not stripping your soul of your powers, I allowed him to take mine from me. I was helpless to do anything that could help you. I also didn't know you were still alive."

Hugh let out a deep breath. He closed his eyes. "I should have known better."

"I'm sorry I'm not the Witch you thought me to be, Hugh McNamara."

He cupped his face in his hands, then looked up at Julia. "No, that is

MCNAMARA'S GHOST

not what I meant. I think the world of you, Julia. I always did. Your magical powers meant nothing to me. It was you—the purity of your soul, the playfulness of your spirit, the seduction of your beauty.” He shook his head. A look of disbelief crossed his handsome face. “Forgive me. I’m sorry. I had no right to blame you all these years without knowing the full story.”

“You have nothing to apologize for, Hugh. I love you and you’re here now. That’s all that matters.” She reached out her hand to his forehead.

He pulled back.

“It’s okay,” she said. “I have some powers Alex could never take away. Whatever is happening to you right now won’t hurt me.”

His flesh was hot to the touch. “You’re burning up, Hugh.”

“I know. I can feel it in my blood.” He undid the tie at the top of his cape. The heavy wool cloak fell to his elbows. “I feel as if I’m slipping away. And I don’t mean just from this world, but from existence in general.”

He was fading from existence. Julia knew Alex’s curse was beginning to take affect and she was the cause of all of this. She didn’t know how to tell Hugh. It was difficult for her to explain her own shortcomings. “Sam and I have a plan. We can save you and bring you across to man’s world.”

“I don’t need saving. I just have to find out what is happening to me and correct the matter. Perhaps it is only the stress of using my energies after so long a sleep.”

She turned away from him. Julia lowered her head and glanced down at the floor. “It’s not the sudden use of your energies. My return here is a violation of the pact I made with Alex. You’re fading from existence because of me. I felt you so strongly that I thought you were calling me here. I sensed something was wrong. Now I know it must’ve only been Alex wanting me to return so I’d break the pact and you would seize to exist.”

MCNAMARA'S GHOST

“Do not blame yourself for my brother’s wrongful deeds. I’ll find a way to reverse his curse, I promise you. In the meantime, I don’t want you or Sam to do anything drastic. Besides, I can’t come across permanently without another soul being sent back.”

She bit her bottom lip. “I know.”

A look of concern covered Hugh’s face. “No. Don’t even think of it, Julia. I would never allow you to cross over in my stead.”

“You don’t have a choice. None of us has a choice in the matter.”

“Julia...” With an open hand, he reached out for her.

But it was too late.

Hugh McNamara slowly faded away.

“No. Don’t leave me, Hugh. Don’t go. You can’t. Please...No...”

He was gone—even his cape.

She had to find a way to bring him back.

The bedroom door creaked open.

The feel of an immortal spirit still lingered in the house. Julia sensed another presence invading her home. The hair at the nape of her neck stood on end.

She stared at the door. Apparently whatever was here wanted her and called to her. Julia followed her gut instinct and entered the hall. She searched the darkness for a wandering spirit, but found nothing.

She started down the steps. “Hugh?” She knew talking to herself would never frighten a ghost, but in a strange way, it helped calm her own panicking nerves. “Who’s there? Hugh? Samuel? Is that you, Sam?” She didn’t hear anything in response. She swallowed hard and faced the inevitable. “Alex?”

Silence prevailed. She continued down the stairs, her step slow and cautious. She stopped mid-stride, and froze in her tracks.

A shadowy apparition formed at the foot of the stairway. A figure clad in a black hooded cloak stood below, arms crossed in front of its chest.

Julia’s initial instinct was to turn around and run back up the stairs

MCNAMARA'S GHOST

to the safety of her bedroom. She chided herself. *What good would that do?* A ghost body knew no boundaries. “Who are you? What do you want?”

The figure lifted its head, threw back its hood, and stared up at her.

Shock washed through her senses. It was a man—a man who looked much like Hugh, only older.

“Who are you?”

“I am no longer permitted to say my name. The privilege has been stripped from me by the god Ogham.”

“You’re the Sage of Ogham Castle, aren’t you? You’re Hugh’s grandfather.”

He nodded his head. “You can’t go back, Julia. Doing so would never help my grandson.”

“But I have to. There is no other way for him to cross over into man’s world. And if the exchange isn’t made soon, he’ll die.”

“You can’t go back.”

She didn’t believe her ears. *How can a man allow his own line to die?*

“Remember the bond of blood. For no other can save Hugh.”

“I don’t understand.”

The figure vanished. “*Remember the bond of blood...*” The man’s words echoed in the night air.

“What the hell is going on here?” Sam flicked on the hallway light. He stood at the top of the steps and stared down at Julia, one leg of his black sweat pants rising higher than the other. His hair was tussled. “Are you alright? Is something wrong? I thought I heard voices out here.”

“It was nothing, Sam. Nothing.” She walked back upstairs and brushed passed him. “I’m sorry I woke you.” Julia headed for her room.

“You can’t keep secrets from me, Julia. We’re in this together, remember?”

She stopped at the door. “I’m going back no matter what you say,

MCNAMARA'S GHOST

what Hugh says, or what anyone else says. I'm going back."

"You can't. It won't help anything."

"Good night, Sam." She crossed the threshold and closed the door behind her.

"What do you mean no matter what anyone says? Who was here?" Samuel pounded his fist against the door. "Damn it, Julia, tell me who was here tonight?"

She refused to answer.

CHAPTER 7

Julia entered the kitchen and went straight for the teapot. She turned to Sam sitting at the table. He sat hunched over a stack of yellowed papers and the Ogham stones, and looked much like a mad wizard searching for a long-lost answer. He wore a gray sweatshirt and black jeans. His hair still looked uncombed.

“Can I get you anything? Tea, coffee, eggs?”

“No, thanks,” he said. “I’ve had my fill of coffee already.”

She glanced up at the clock hanging on the wall above the sink. “It’s only seven-thirty. What time did you get up?”

“Actually, I’ve been awake since last night. I couldn’t go back to sleep after I found you in the hall.”

A feeling of guilt churned in her soul. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to wake you.”

“No, it’s quite alright, really.”

Julia filled the shiny stainless steel pot with water and set it on the stove. She turned the burner on and took a seat at the table. She stuck

MCNAMARA'S GHOST

her hands in the pockets of her terry robe. "What are all these papers?"

"My great-grandfather's Book of Secrets—his personal Book of Shadows. It's amazing what he wrote down here. Look at this line." Sam pointed to a page written in various hues of red ink. He placed his finger on a series of words etched in deep red.

Julia studied the flowing script. "It's written in Ogham's sacred language."

"Yes, I know. The entire book is written in the same code. Can you read it?"

"Of course I can." She took the book from Sam and turned it to face her direction. Julia read the words in silence. Shock assaulted her soul. She read the passage again, but this time, she read it aloud.

"The bond of blood is the only bond by which a soul of my line may be saved. Salvation for my kin must come from our own line." Julia looked up. "Do you have any idea when your great-grandfather wrote this?"

"A year before my father tried to kill Hugh."

"So he knew what was to come."

"Yes, I suppose so. He was a very powerful Warlock, and despite his love of the dark arts, he respected magic in all forms. He wasn't stupid."

"He saved Hugh. Your great-grandfather was the shadow that caused the ripple in time." She tapped her fingers against the table. "What do you think 'the bond of blood' means?"

Sam chuckled. "You're staring at it. I'm Hugh's savior." He poked his hands against his chest. "I'm the bond of blood—Hugh's blood. Alex and Hugh were brothers, and I come from the same blood."

The sudden realization hit her hard. "Hugh can only be saved by a descendant of the Sage of Ogham Castle." She paused. The idea made sense save for one small fact. "You can't fight Alex alone. We have to do this together. He's way too powerful for you."

"Don't underestimate me, Julia. You don't know my strength. I've

MCNAMARA'S GHOST

been practicing magic for as far back as I can remember. Now's my chance to make amends with the past—to make a worthy Witch of myself.” He took the book back from her and closed it. “Besides, my father never recognized me in the past. It's about time he did so now. He needs to know he had a son and heir. I'm the only soul who can right the wrongs he committed on this earth. If I don't, I'll pay for his sins for all eternity.”

The teapot whistled. Julia rose from her seat and headed for the stove. She lifted the pot off the burner. A white mug decorated with lavender sat on the edge of the stove. She filled it with hot water and placed a tea bag inside. “Even if this idea works, we still need to call Alex out.”

“That part should be the easiest. When the veil between this world and the Summerland are at its thinnest, Alex Caldwell can easily cross over. We'll call him at midnight. I can guarantee my father will have no problem stepping into this world if he thinks there's something here for him to gain.”

“And what would that be?”

Sam offered her a sly smile. “The Ogham.” He lifted the small box and shook it in a careful, light manner. “My father will return here to fight for the powers he feels are rightfully his. He'd do anything to satisfy his greed.”

“That could work. We'll set a place for him, and for Hugh, at the table tonight. Between the two of us, we should be able to call them both forward.”

Sam gathered the loose papers into a neat stack. “It's also dangerous, Julia, but I suppose you know that already.”

“Yes,” she said. “Calling the dead is never an easy feat. And calling an evil entity is even more dangerous. I must admit, I don't relish the idea of bringing a character as vile as Alex Caldwell through to man's world, but we don't have a choice. If Alex doesn't come this way, I'll never be free from his curse. Only he can reverse the spell. If he

MCNAMARA'S GHOST

doesn't, I'll never regain my full powers. And without those powers, I can never give Hugh the blessing of the daughters of Danu."

"Right," said Sam. "And the Ogham stones face the danger of falling into the wrong hands—perhaps even into Alex's."

"And Hugh will die." The thought pained her like a knife slicing through her heart. She took a deep breath. "I'm prepared to do whatever it takes to save Hugh and to save the Ogham stones. But we won't have much time. Once Alex and Hugh come across, we'll have to act quickly. We have to send you and your father back before it's too late. If we miss the portal, time will be shifted, and only the gods know what will happen then."

"Precisely. If two souls come across, then two souls must go back."

Julia leaned across the table and placed her hand upon Sam's. "Hugh loved you like his own son." A tear fell down her cheek. "He'd be proud of you." She caught her breath. "I...I..."

"Please, Julia. There's no need to say anything. The past is over with. I have no hard feelings about you leaving that night. You did what you had to do, that's all. My father is a very cunning, sly soul. Had I known then what he was up to, I'd never have allowed it to go this far. Just know this—whatever happens, I'll never forget you. You were my only real connection to Hugh."

He felt the same about her as she did him. Sam was right. The past was the past. She had to look to the future now.

CHAPTER 8

“With being so short on time,” said Julia, “we’ll have to do this the most efficient way using spells not our own.”

Sam followed her down the hall. “I agree. There’s no time to write specific spells. When dealing with Alex, we can use great-grandfather’s works. Like attracts like, so the Sage’s powers can combat that of a Warlock.”

Julia opened the doors to her study and entered the dark paneled room. She reached her hand behind the wood door and searched for the light switch. With a flick of her hand, she turned on the room’s three lamps. A chilly air enveloped the study. She rubbed her arms and buttoned up her sweater.

“My most prized possession is right over here, Sam. Come, take a look.” She motioned for Sam to follow her to the other side of the study. “My book of secrets sits under that black cloth on the antique book stand. It was a gift from my mother, the goddess Danu.” Julia walked over to the corner of the room. “We’ll use spells from the book

MCNAMARA'S GHOST

for the ceremony tomorrow night.”

Sam followed her across the study. In his right hand, he carried the box containing the Ogham stones. He clutched the cardboard container as if guarding it with his soul. “After I cross over, I want you to promise me something.”

She paused and looked back at him. “Certainly. I’ll promise you anything. What do you want me to do?”

“Promise me you’ll see to it Hugh gets my great-grandfather’s book of shadows.”

“Of course, I’ll promise that,” said Julia. “Hugh will look after all your things. Besides, you’re coming back. I won’t have it any other way.” She knew such a feat would be nearly impossible, but to admit that now would pain them both.

Sam smiled at her. “Yes, I’m coming back. Though, I don’t know when or how.”

The notion unsettled her.

“You’ll have to be careful,” she said. “When you go back, you might not return to the same era from which your father left. You could end up anywhere in time.”

“I know, but that’s not my concern now. We need to concentrate on getting my father over here and freeing you of his spell-work.”

Julia walked up to the book stand and removed the cloth draped over the top. A worn, leather-bound book emerged. She opened the cover and centered the ancient tome in the middle of the stand. “My mother gave me this book when I first showed signs of my natural magic abilities.”

“Is the blessing of Danu inside its pages?”

Julia nodded her head. “Yes, but it’s written in a secret language only my mother’s daughters can read.”

Sam stepped behind her. “What spells do you intend to use?”

“We’ll need several. One to call Hugh and Alex so they can cross over into man’s realm, and one to open the portal so we can send you

MCNAMARA'S GHOST

and your father back through.”

Julia ran her hand over the gilt-edged pages. She thumbed her fingers through various chapters, not stopping until she came to the pages marked with the word Samhain written in black. She thumbed through a few more pages.

“Here,” said Julia. “This is exactly the spell we’re looking for. Now let’s see if this is what the gods want us to use.” She turned to Sam. “Give me the Ogham Stones.”

He handed her the box.

Julia untied the cord and opened the container. The stones went to her as if they belonged in her hands. She clutched one hand over the other and shook. The stones made a rattling sound.

Julia cast the Ogham on top of the magic tome. The stones fell in a scattered manner and quickly separated. Only one Ogham remained on top of the book, the others fell off and landed on the stand. “It’s the Rowan stone.”

“The Ogham predicting the god’s protection.”

“Yes,” said Julia. “Then this is the correct spell to use. If we have the god’s protection, the spell can only work in our favor. We’ll be kept from harm.”

She picked up the Ogham stones and placed them back in their box. She thumbed through several more pages.

“This is the only spell I know of that can be used to send a soul back through a portal between the realms. I’ve known the words since I was child. They came to me in a dream.”

Sam rubbed his chin. “Then if it’s your own spell, I’d say it’s safe to work with. The words will thrive on your natural powers.”

“Precisely.”

Julia closed the book. “We have our spells, Sam. Now we just need Hugh and Alex.”

CHAPTER 9

He came back to her again.

Julia sat at the edge of her bed and waited for Hugh's shadow to take on a tangible form. He shifted from murky grays to white and back again, finally falling into a human shape.

He lowered his body down on the bed next to her. "I can only come back one more time, Julia. I don't have the strength to keep doing this. I can feel my soul growing weaker by the moment."

He took her hand in his.

The feel of his flesh against hers was electric. Julia wanted to capture the moment for all time, never wanting Hugh to ever leave her again. She looked up at him. "Hugh, you have to listen to me about that plan Sam and I have. We've been working on finding a way to bring you across for good."

He smiled at her. "Do you think that's wise? The scales will have to be balanced. And I refuse to let you cross over in my place."

She nodded her head. "I know that. Sam knows that. But we've

MCNAMARA'S GHOST

found another way.”

“How?”

“We will have to bring you across, then Alex.”

“What?” He didn’t let her finish. “Are you mad? My brother is not a soul who should cross into man’s realm. He has the ability of a trickster. If he captures enough energy, it might be possible for him to remain in man’s world and destroy it. I won’t allow you to bring him across. I simply won’t.”

“We have to bring Alex over in order to free me of the spell he cast.” The words rolled off her tongue before she even knew it. She waited for Hugh’s reaction.

“Spell? Caldwell cast a spell on you?” He pulled his hand away from her and rose from the bed. “Wasn’t forcing you to make a pact with him enough for his vile soul, that he had to also curse you? Why didn’t you tell me this the other night?”

“I didn’t have a chance. You faded before I could tell you about the crest—about anything.”

A puzzled look covered Hugh’s face. “So you are forced to wear his crest. You don’t do so out of want or desire?”

“Of course not,” said Julia. “I could never desire Alex over you.”

“I never said you did.”

“No, not in words, but you did with your eyes and voice.”

He glared at her. “What else are you and Samuel plotting?”

He was accusing her again and she didn’t like it. “Why do you think I am doing something against you?”

“Again, I said no such words.”

“You didn’t have to. I sense your feelings. Besides, if we don’t do this, you’ll fade from existence. You’ll die for good, Hugh McNamara—in this world and the next. And I can’t let that happen.”

He ran a hand through his hair. “I lost you once, Julia. I don’t want to lose you again.”

She rose to her feet and approached him. “You won’t lose me,

MCNAMARA'S GHOST

McNamara. I've always been yours and yours alone." She wrapped her arms around his neck.

His lips brushed against hers in an urgent manner. Her knees trembled. Highly charged shivers of passion raced through her body. Julia wanted Hugh more now than she ever did in the past. She welcomed his savage kiss with a soft moan.

He wrapped his arms tighter around her and carried her back to bed. He gently eased her down on the silk-covered mattress. "Julia..."

"Yes, Hugh?"

He untied the black laces holding her blouse closed.

"If Alex didn't interfere with the past, would you...would you have kept our secret vows and married me?"

She felt her lips curl in a satisfied smile. "An immortal witch and a fairy. Do you think that a wise match?"

A look of disappointment crossed his face. "I never thought of us in such a way."

She hadn't expected him to be upset by her words. "Of course I would've married you. I would still marry you."

A stern look veiled his face.

"What's wrong Hugh?"

"What if your plotting doesn't work? What if I can't come back? Or if I do, what if I cannot stay?"

She pulled Hugh closer and kissed him. "We have now. And that's all that matters at the moment."

He removed her blouse and gently cupped her left breast with his hand. His lips brushed against her nipple.

The wild sensation delighted her.

His tongue teased playfully at her swollen peak.

Julia reached up and untied the string at the top of Hugh's cape. Much to her surprise he wore nothing underneath.

He smiled at her amusingly. "You see me with a cape only because you choose to do so. In this existence, I am only form. Nothing more,

MCNAMARA'S GHOST

nothing less.”

“But I can feel you and you can feel me.”

“When my energies are focused, I have substance. And at the moment, I have no desire to waste my energy on clothes.”

Hugh reached for her inner thighs. His hand trailed teasingly along her flesh.

The tingling sensation caused by Hugh’s touch was intoxicating. Julia had never imagined anything as hot or as intense.

In mere moments, she fell completely under Hugh’s bewitching spell.

CHAPTER 10

Dressed in a black turtleneck and black jeans, Sam carried a bowl of apples into the dining room.

Julia took the bowl from him and set it in the center of the table. “Shoot!” She stomped her foot lightly against the floor.

“What is it?”

“I forgot about the trick-or-treaters. Being new to the area, I have no idea what to expect tonight. We certainly can’t have kids ringing the doorbell while we’re calling out ghosts from the other side.”

Sam smiled. “I already took care of that matter. While you were in the shower, I ran down to the local market and picked up some candy. I also bought one of those huge pumpkin buckets.” He gestured with his hands as to the bucket’s size. “I filled it with the candy and sat it out down at the front gates, along with a sign saying self-serve treats, no tricks aloud.”

Julia laughed. “I’m going to miss you, Samuel Caldwell.” Tears welled up in her eyes.

MCNAMARA'S GHOST

“Don’t go getting all mushy on me now.”

“I’ll try not to, but I’m not making any promises.” She wiped the tears from her face.

“What can I do next?”

“The candles,” she said. “I’ll sweep. You get the black candles. They’re in the hutch drawer—the top one of the left.”

Sam searched through the drawer and pulled out a box of black votives and matching glass cups. Keeping with Irish witchcraft customs, he placed the candles in each of the dining room windows. “Are you sure Alex will still be able to cross over if we’re using black candles?”

“Yes,” said Julia. “The candles won’t stop your father if we call him, but they will help in holding back other dark spirits. We don’t need any unwanted guests tonight. It’ll be bad enough having to deal with Alex, without having to fight off uninvited evil.”

“What are you burning?” Sam wrinkled his nose.

A black cauldron sat in the center of the table. Steaming vapors rose from the pot’s belly. “Sage incense. It’ll help purify the area and scatter the negativity.”

Sam laughed. “Alex won’t like it here.”

She liked Samuel’s carefree nature. No other soul could make a joke at a moment like this. “Are you sure about this, Sam?”

“I’ve never been more sure about anything in my life as I am about tonight. I have to free my soul from my father’s sins. In the process, I’ll be helping Hugh.”

With broom in hand, Julia circled the room and swept every last inch of space. She wasn’t leaving anything to chance—especially remnants of negativity.

Samuel walked over to the corner china closet and opened the wood-framed glass doors. “Do you want four shamrock plates or the black and orange ones?”

“Black and orange—and make that five.”

MCNAMARA'S GHOST

He turned to face Julia. "Why five?"

"Your great-grandfather."

"I hadn't thought about calling him."

Julia smiled. "I know. But if all else fails, we'll need the Sage of Ogham castle. He's the only soul who can battle Alex on his own. Hopefully it won't come to that."

She stepped back and studied the room. A kaleidoscope of black dotted with orange gave the usually plain dining area an ethereal air. "It looks good, Sam. If I were on the other side, I'd come for a visit."

"Yeah, so would I," he said. "Hey, what about a picture?"

"I'd love that."

Sam reached for his duffle bag and retrieved his digital camera and tripod. He placed the camera on the stand and set it for the picture. "Are you ready?"

Julia nodded. Sam joined her across the room and wrapped his arm around her. She smiled.

The camera flash went off.

"Now let's see what we look like." Sam brought the camera to Julia. "Not bad. You make a good-looking Witch. No wonder Hugh fell for your charms."

She jabbed him playfully in the side.

"Here, you keep this," said Sam. He handed her the camera. "I'll have no use for a camera where I'm going."

She stared at the picture displayed on the back of the camera. She and Sam both looking happy, both wearing black. No one would believe they were moments away from toying with time. The long velvet gown was a copy of the one Hugh used to like her to wear. She hoped he'd still like it. She'd keep the picture for Hugh.

"This isn't going to be easy."

"I told you—no mushy stuff. Just remember to set a place for me next year." Sam smiled and set the plates on the table. He placed small portraits of both Alex and Hugh at opposite sides of the table. "I think

MCNAMARA'S GHOST

you should sit at the head of the table, and leave an empty seat for great-grandfather at the other end. I'll sit next to my father's setting."

Julia checked her watch. "It's almost midnight. Do we have everything in place? Where are the Ogham stones? We can't forget the stones and—"

Sam cut her off. "It's alright, Julia. Calm down."

"This isn't going to be easy. What if something goes wrong? What if we've made a gross mistake in disturbing the past?"

Sam took her hands in his. "It's alright, Julia," he said. "Trust me on this one. Besides, this time it's you who doesn't have the choice." He smiled at her.

"You're going to make me regret ever saying those words about Hugh, aren't you?"

He winked at her.

Julia knew the truth though. When it came to dealing with the higher powers that be, no soul really ever had a choice.

CHAPTER 11

Julia turned her head and looked across her shoulder. Sam sat at her side. "Are you really sure about this? Once we start, we can't stop."

"I'm sure," said Sam.

"Okay, then here goes nothing." Julia raised her arms up and turned her open palms skyward. "To the powers that be, lift the veil of time and send the Unconquerable McNamara to me." A radiant beam of white light pulsed from her palms. "To the powers that be, lift the veil of time and send Alex Caldwell to me." The bright light illuminating from her hands turned dark.

Sam stared at her, a look of fascination covering his face.

A shadow emerged at the head of the table. The shape slowly took form. Hugh McNamara returned in the flesh.

A slight rumble filled the room. The house shook.

Sam gripped the table edge with his fingers and held on tight. "That's not supposed to happen, Julia."

"It's Alex," said Hugh. "You've stirred him from his sleep."

MCNAMARA'S GHOST

A murky, black shadow formed in the corner of the room. The entity swirled in place, then grew darker.

Julia watched in silence.

The dark figure crossed the room and hovered over the place setting meant for Alex. Forming a ghost hand, the entity reached out, and forced the portrait and plate to the floor. The shadow took definite form and emerged in the flesh.

“Well, well, brother. After all these years, we’re finally back. And the feeling is—oh, so good.” Alex stared across the table and eyed Hugh with a dark glare. He scanned the room. “And your bastard son...How quaint.” Alex turned his back on Sam and approached Julia.

An angered look stained Sam’s face. “I’m not...”

In silence, Hugh nodded his head.

Sam held his tongue.

“And the lovely Julia.” Alex reached out his hand and caressed Julia’s cheek. “How long I’ve waited for this moment.”

His whispers disgusted her. She turned away.

Alex took a seat in the chair designated for his grandfather. “Nice touch, Hugh. Did you put her up to this? Do you really think the old man will show tonight?”

“I’d curb my tongue if I were you, brother. The Sage of Ogham castle can befall you in an instant.”

Alex shook his hands in false terror. “I’m frightened to the core.” His mocking gestures angered Julia. She shot him an evil glare.

“Oh, my little Fairy Witch, how pathetic you’ve become. Even I could do better than that. Show me what you’re really made of.”

Julia raised her hands and collected air, sending a sparkling ball of dust in Alex’s direction.

He banished it with an open palm. “Pity. Your powers aren’t strong enough against mine. You should have learned the black arts when you had the chance.”

Julia rose to her feet and kicked back her chair. “You’re a thief,

MCNAMARA'S GHOST

Alex Caldwell. You stole my powers. Tonight you're going to pay for all the sins you've committed."

He laughed. "I don't think so. And what about you, brother? Do you not have anything to say after all these years?"

"I wouldn't waste my breath on you."

An evil grin crossed Alex's lips. "Then at least give me a cry—a good yell." He turned toward Sam. "Perhaps the sacrifice of your son will bring out the beast in you." He hurled a bolt of lightning from his palm toward Samuel. "Let me hear you now. Humor me."

The bolt came back to him.

Alex doubled up in his chair. He sucked in a deep breath.

He was surprised. Julia saw a look of total, utter shock cross Alex's face. He'd never expected to meet his match—especially in Sam.

She bent down to face him. "Still want to play, my little Warlock?"

He curled his top lip in a snare. "Is that the best you can do?" Alex rose from his chair and hurled a ball of fire across the room. "I won't be banished so easily."

"You have no idea what lies in store for you." Julia glared at him.

Sam rose from his chair. "We've waited a long time for this, Caldwell. And you're not going to get away with your antics any longer. It's payback time." Samuel sent a charge of power toward Alex. The Warlock doubled over a second time as the bolt sizzled through his body. "You might have had powers over others in the past, Caldwell, but you have no claim over me. I am a soul who can best you at your own game."

Alex remained hunched over, bound by Sam's powers.

"Now, Julia." Sam's voice echoed about the room.

Julia lunged for Alex's neck. She managed a firm grip. "Release me from our pact, Caldwell, or I'll send your soul to hell here and now. Free me from your spell."

He gasped. "To the powers that be, hear me now, hear me well. Release and let free this Witch from my spell."

MCNAMARA'S GHOST

She let go of Alex. The crest at Julia's neck fell to the floor and sent an empty, clanging sound pinging throughout the room. The pendant shattered to dust.

Alex fell back in his chair and rubbed his hand against his neck.

Julia's hair spread out about her head and shoulders as if attacked by a bad case of static electricity. Her feet lifted off the ground. A current of energy enveloped her body and her aura. She cried out to the heavens above. A wild wind coursed through the room. Julia took in a deep breath and welcomed her long-lost powers back to their rightful home—her soul. Her feet returned to the ground.

"I'm back, Alex Caldwell. And you'll never have me again—ever." Julia stared him in the eyes.

He turned to Samuel and shook his finger. "I may be through with her, but I'm not yet done with you." He growled. Alex rose from his chair and deliberately approached Samuel.

"Before I'd do that," said Hugh. "I'd remember the real reason for my return."

Alex turned around.

Hugh dangled a small pouch from his fingers.

"You have no right to the Ogham," said Alex.

"He has every right," said Julia. "He's earned my blessings."

Alex spun into a shadow and flew across the room.

Hugh tossed the pouch to Sam, then transformed himself into shadow form.

Alex passed right through him.

Sam stepped to his toes and lunged for Alex. A second bolt of lightning came hurtling toward him. He raised an open hand and repelled the tainted energy. He cornered Alex against the wall.

Hugh appeared at Sam's side.

A ripple of time shot through the house. Everything shook and shifted. "The veil is closing," said Julia.

Sam reached for the pouch of stones in his pocket. "Uncle Hugh,"

MCNAMARA'S GHOST

he shouted, "it's now or never." He tossed the Ogham back to Hugh.

A wild wind blew through the house.

Lightning flashed against the windows and bolted across the room. The plates and glasses cracked and popped. Broken shards of porcelain and glass flew to the floor.

Julia raised her hands out in front of her. "Time of now, Time of past, take back these two souls, one from here, one from there. Take one I thee give, and take one thou hath cast. Make our present equal with thy past."

Hugh opened the pouch with the Ogham inside and reached for the stones. He folded his fingers over the round trinkets and withdrew the sacred relics. He shook his hands. He cast the stones toward Sam.

The veil of time lifted. A portal opened, and Alex and Sam were drawn in. The portal closed. The wind vanished.

Julia stood frozen in the corner of the room. "They're gone. They're really gone."

"Samuel will be back," said Hugh. "I know he will."

Julia ran toward him. She placed her hand upon his face. "You're here. You're really here now." She kissed him.

"I've waited centuries, Julia. Despite my hurt and anger, my heart never gave up. In truth, I would've waited all eternity for you."

"You don't have to wait anymore. We're together—and the Ogham is safe."

Hugh pushed her away. "Not exactly."

"What do you mean?"

"For the Ogham to truly be safe, it cannot remain in any one person's control."

Hugh reached down to the floor and retrieved the stones. He counted them. "Nineteen- and-four."

"That can't be. The Ogham is twenty-and-five."

He smiled at her. "I have nineteen-and- four."

A shadow emerged from the corner of the hall. "You did well, my

MCNAMARA'S GHOST

son.”

Hugh turned around. “It was my destiny to free your soul, Grandfather.”

“Yes, it was. By saving the Ogham, you saved me. Sam will care for the two stones he has been entrusted with. Alex can’t exist in both worlds. He’ll never be able to take control of the stones now.”

Julia walked up to the ancient sage. “Aodan. Your name is Aodan, isn’t it?”

“Yes,” said Aodan. “Hugh was named after me. He has always been my rightful heir. It was his destiny—as is Ogham Castle.”

“I could never take your home, Grandfather. You belong there, not I.”

Aodan offered a caring smile. “I am tired. Very tired. I belong in time, Hugh. Not in any one place.”

“Don’t leave me.”

“You have Julia,” said Aodan. “For Samuel’s sake, take your rightful seat at Ogham’s council. The bond of blood will always remain among you, your brother, and Samuel. The war with darkness is far from over, my son.

“My line must never die. You have a responsibility to mankind to keep alive that which my people started. And should you ever really have need of me, I will be here for you. You have my book of secrets. In its pages, you have all my knowledge. For now, I have nothing more to give. I must go.”

“No. Please don’t...” Hugh reached out for his grandfather’s arm, but it was too late.

Aodan vanished into the ethereal plane.

“He’s right you know,” said Julia. “Sam may very well still need you. When the portal opened, it wasn’t guaranteed he’d go back to the era from which Alex came. They can be anywhere in time.”

“We’ll simply have to wait and see.”

Julia placed her head on Hugh’s shoulder. She toyed with the cravat

MCNAMARA'S GHOST

He tied about his neck. "Times have changed since you last visited man's realm. I have much to teach you. And I'm sure we'll find something to pass the time. After all, we're two immortal witches with all eternity ahead of us."

He smiled a wicked grin. "Oh, have no fear, my beloved little Witch. I know exactly how we can pass the time." Hugh wrapped his arms around Julia and pulled her close. His lips met with hers.

"You're a wicked witch, Hugh McNamara. Wicked to the core."

"I know."

Together they melded in an eternal embrace.

**AMBER QUILL PRESS, LLC
PROUDLY PRESENTS**

COME THE NIGHT

BY

ANGELIQUE ARMAE

*Winner! 2001 LoveRomances Readers Choice Awards!
Best Vampire Romance
Honorable Mention—Best E-Book*

Finalist—2001 Sapphire Awards!

*Finalist—2001 PEARL Awards!
Best New Author—Best Shapeshifter—Best Overall
Paranormal*

Angels...Vampyres...Heaven and Hell... In medieval Ireland two worlds collide and the term dark ages takes on a whole new meaning...*Come The Night*.

In medieval Ireland, an evil entity stalks Lazarus Conlon, Vampyre

patriarch, threatening the safety of his wife and his family tribe. But to conquer this enemy, Lazarus must first fight his own demons including a sacred heritage descended of fallen angels. Amid this strife, Lazarus learns his only true hope rests within the heart and soul of a mortal tracker—his wife—a woman born to hunt his breed. Can his evil antagonist be defeated?

Neomina Delacroix is no stranger to the world of the Vampyre. As appointed heiress of the Tracker Council and the keeper of the Amulet of Christ and the St. John Stake, Neomina's allegiance to her people is sealed in blood. But the true nature of her heritage has been kept secret for years, revealed only to her father—Gerard Delacroix—and to her husband—Lazarus Conlon. When terror strikes the Conlon Tribe, Neomina is their only hope. Can her heart outweigh the duties of her soul?

Come The Night
Available Now!

ANGELIQUE ARMAE

Paranormal fiction author Angelique Armae a.k.a. M. A. duBarry, has had a love affair with paper and ink for as far back as she can remember. She's been writing stories and poetry since grade school. According to Miss Armae, writing is in her blood. Her all time favorite author is her late Irish grandfather, from whom she inherited her passion for writing. Angelique favors novels with dark, brooding characters and gothic settings. She considers herself a typical Virgo, is addicted to all things Celtic and believes her soul belongs somewhere in ancient Ireland.

Angelique began her professional writing career in 1999 and sold her first book a year later. Her critically acclaimed vampire novel *Come The Night* garnered nominations in both the prestigious SAPPHIRE AWARDS (for best sci-fi romance including paranormal sub-genre) and P.E.A.R.L. Awards (Paranormal Excellence in Romantic Literature), including Best New Author, Best Shapeshifter Novel and Best Overall Paranormal Novel. The book won BEST VAMPIRE ROMANCE in the LoveRomances Readers Choice Awards of 2001 and also took home HONORABLE MENTION for BEST E-BOOK. Miss Armae's work has been critically acclaimed on both sides of the Atlantic, receiving rave reviews from horror novel reviewers, romance reviewers and from readers of both genres.

Aside from fiction writing, Miss Armae works as a freelance journalist and as a reader for a major publishing house. She has had numerous articles published spanning various topics including Tarot, New York

State Tourism, and History. She is currently working on the sequel to *Come The Night* and has additional projects scheduled for the near future including several sensual novels written under the pen name M. A. duBarry.

You can view her works in progress page at:
<http://www.angeliquearmae.com>.

AMBER QUILL PRESS, LLC

THE GOLD STANDARD IN PUBLISHING

QUALITY BOOKS

IN BOTH PRINT AND ELECTRONIC FORMATS

ACTION/ADVENTURE

SUSPENSE/THRILLER

SCIENCE FICTION

ROMANCE

MAINSTREAM

MYSTERY

PARANORMAL

FANTASY

HISTORICAL

HORROR

YOUNG ADULT

WESTERN

AMBER QUILL PRESS, LLC

<http://www.amberquill.com>