Ceàrd san Adhar

A Candle in the Window

 “Jess, I’m going out for a bit,” Johnny called, moving toward the old rusty car.

 I looked to my older brother as I hunted for my younger one. “What are you doing?”

 I knew it was something to do with a girl in town. “I’ll be back before our parents.”

 “Get me ice cream on the way back!”

 Johnny opened the car’s door and asked, “Is that the only way to buy your silence?”

 “Hell yeah.”

 “Will do.” A large grin crossed over his face, and he yelled out for Joey, “Be good!”

 Wherever Joey was hiding in the woods, he didn’t give away his position. The only sound came from a rustling of leaves, which marked his response.

 “Leave the candle burning, yeah?” Johnny drove off down the long driveway.

Our house arose in the distance, tall and lengthy, stretching out of the ground. With the house built up, it was a fortress and a pain to climb, offering a guiding light. In the top window of the attic was burning candle, as my father always lit it to guide us kids home. With an eye on the house, I went in search of my younger brother.

While Joey was small for his age, he didn’t hide easily, mostly because he was scared of the dark, and it did start to get dark. Tall shadows sprang from every large bush. From behind the tree, my hand grasped him and yanked him out. He screamed in terror, falling on his knees and covering his head. My laugh spiraled into the air.

 Brushing dirt off his clothes, he stuttered, “That wasn’t funny, Jessa.”

I began the walk back to the house, and he gripped my hand, pulling me back. “Do you really want the monsters to come get you in the woods,” I claimed. Joey sprinted back to the house, leaping over dead and fallen branches and nearly tripping on the soggy grass. He screamed and pretended to fight off something in the distance.

 Continuing my steady walk back to the house, the hair on the back of my neck began to rise. Something’s eyes weighed heavily on me. My steps slowed to create complete silence, and my heartbeat quickened, deafening my ears. I turned on my heel, ready to face whatever came next, and at the edge of tree line, I saw a white stag staring back at me. Its large antlers looked ready to stab, and its large hooves pawed at the ground.

 I spoke in a loud voice, “If you’re out in these woods, someone will try to kill you.”

 The white stag was unimpressed at best. Rolling my eyes, I went inside the house.

That night, after Joey had two chapters read to him, I climbed into my bed. The candle upstairs continued to burn, waiting for Johnny to come home. I snuggled under my blankets and turned off the lights.

 With a jolt, my eyes flashed open, and the moon above me was alight. Off the glen, the water gleamed with waves lapping against the shore. The smooth rocks beat into my back, and I sat up. A light breeze moved throughout the glen, coming off the sea through the mountains. A natural cleavage was formed, and even then, the water glinted. Trees with thick green leaves hung in my vision, and I tried to recall a place that felt so similar. This looked nothing like the dead trees around my house.

 I stood, feeling the damp rocks shift underneath my bare feet. Moss stuck to my sweatpants and tank top, and I tried to wipe it off. My eyes traveled through the haunted trees, where I felt someone’s eyes on me once again this night. I blinked when a pair of glowing green eyes were staring back at me with a nose inches away from mine, the cold breath on my skin.

 “Hello,” I stated slowly. My mind had decided to turn a calm dream into a nightmare.

 The narrows of her eyes watched my every movement; I glanced right and left, where two more women with flowing hair in the wind and flowing green dresses hovered. Their feet didn’t touch the ground, and if I had to bet, I could’ve stuck my hand right through their translucent bodies. Eyes still on me, the hovering woman let out a high-pitch shriek.

 “Bye,” I said, turning my back to them and feeling a rush of energy push through me. Before I was able to escape, I felt a claw rip into my shoulder. I yelped. My legs pushed against the rocks and then up on the grass. I felt the ghosts with blood dripping from their white teeth dive-bomb me. “Shit!” I screeched, taking a hard left toward the trees.

 Branches reached down, trying to trap me. I didn’t look back, taking out the branches as I ran, tripping over roots and brushing against trees. They mounted their attack again with high-pitched screams; I reached a clearing with water and moonlight. Dropping to the floor, the three figures loomed over me, taking swipes, and I tried to fight off their hands. Blood trickled out of my shoulder, staining the green grass. One of the figures hit my injured shoulder again, and a scream exploded from my throat.

 Out of the shadows, he was fast, pulling out a sword from his side and aiming it toward the women. They hissed at him, floating above me like I was their prey. His hard face had a vein sticking out of his forehead, and his strong jaw was square. His long blond hair was pulled back into a bun, wet from sweat. He walked gracefully like a dancer, opposed to another man who crashed through the woods, sword barely out and footsteps too heavy. Branches snapped underneath him.

 The crazed one with the longsword came straight for the translucent figures, and he was an easy target. The man with blond hair muttered something under his breath. His skill was easy to watch as he took on one of these ghosts, and they screamed in pain as he tore an iron dagger into one of them. As for the other man, his longsword had been wretched from his hands, and it flung to my side. The last ghost stationed itself above me, and I reached for the longsword, hands shaking under the weight of it. I slashed the silver weapon through the sky, and it went through the ghost. The blond one stuck his iron dagger through the ghost above me, and she let out a sickening squawk. His hands were rough, raising me from the ground, and we began to run again.

 I yelled, “What about him?”

 “He is a dead man!” the man replied with a grunt.

 His dying screams echoed off the trees.

 “He isn’t your friend?”

 “I do not need friends like that.” The man pulled me to a halting left. Leaving me in the shadows of the trees, he brushed off the ground and pulled open a top. He ordered, “Inside.” I had no place to argue with him. He closed the door above us, and we were in darkness. “Be still,” he said, and fire came to life in front of him. A piece of wood burned.

 “Won’t they see it?” I whispered.

 “It cannot burn for long.” Already smoke started to rise. In the flickering light, I found him watching me. His blue eyes had dark rings around them. “Who are you?”

 “Jessa. Who are you?”

 “Sam, madam.” He sat on the ground and looked to the longsword I had taken with me. “Do you know how to use this?”

 “No.” Swords were a bit outdated for me. “What were those things?”

 Half of his lips turned up. “Boahbin siths,” he replied with a deep grumble of an accent. “They are nasty fucks. They usually go for the fishermen, but you caught their eye. The fishermen are not out anymore at night for taking. Why are you out?”

 “What do you mean?” I played along, even though every part of me told me this was a dream. I knew it wasn’t real: the creatures, the swords and the man in front of me. This was all a dream—well, a nightmare. Yet, the more looked at Sam, the more I wanted it to be a reality.

 “The boahbin siths—like all the other creatures are only out in the dark,” he explained. The flame flickered. “That is why no one comes out at night. The creatures will maim, and they will feast. They were out tonight, knowing they would get some people with all the traveling.”

 My eyes grew wide at his words, but my tongue had a different idea. “Is that why you were out?” I blinked and saw a flash of white light before my eyes, brighter than the flame could ever be.

 Sam set his jaw, but his eyes were alight yet with a challenge. “I am traveling back to the castle, in the Lowlands,” he said. “A new king has arrived, and we all must welcome him.”

 I scoffed. “You guys still have kings?” A head rush fell over me, and I tried to blink away the flashes of light, which were now blue and red.

 He leaned back against the dirt wall. “They do not have kings where you are from? Is this why you wear pants and have a weird accent?”

 “I have a weird accent? I can barely understand you.”

He smiled happily in the cramped area. “All you need is some light.” Like his words had done it, the flame went out, and we collapsed into darkness.

When I found light again, it was because my eyes opened to find blue and red lights dancing across the ceiling. There were the constant bright white headlights shining through, casting shadows across my old bedroom. My back burned in pain, and when I rolled over, I saw blood droplets on my bed. I wasn’t alone as my eyes turned to the doorway, and Joey stood in it, fear in his eyes. “Jess—”

Hushing him, I climbed out of bed.

“You’re bleeding,” he said in shock.

Blood oozed from my skin. “Shut up.” I swung a dark sweatshirt over my shoulders. Thankfully, the wound wasn’t too deep, and I glanced around the bed to see where I had nicked myself on the wall. “Where’s Mom and Dad?”

“They’re still gone.”

Red and blue flashing lights blurred into the house, making their way through the stain-glass windows that framed the front door. The outline of a police officer, hands in their pockets, became etched in my mind forever. I shuffled to the door, Joey holding onto the back of my sweatshirt, and I peered.

The police officer’s eyes were kind but sad. “Good evening, miss. Are your parents home?”

“No,” I replied evenly.

“Do you know when they will be back?”

“Morning.”

Joey piped, “They’re driving back from a—” I cut him off with a glare.

“And no one is watching you?” the officer asked.

“I’m old enough,” I stated, which I was. In less than a month, I was free. “What is this about?”

The officer’s face went slack. “There was a fight, miss, in the parking lot of the gas station up the road. Jonathan Mackenzie was dead on arrival when the sheriff got there, miss.”

Joey’s fingers clawed into the back of my sweatshirt, which ran over the claw marks in the back of my shoulders. His hands began to shake as mumbles came off his tongue, but I waited in silence.

Treasure on an Island

The next night, I settled into bed. After our parents had arrived home, it had been nonstop flurry of voices. Dad’s had been hushed; Joey rambled; Mom didn’t stop crying. Her firstborn was dead, and she repeated it again and again. I retreated to my room soon after they arrived. In the mirror, I had measured the damage; it hurt more than it looked. Stitches weren’t necessary, and I bandaged up the claw marks that no longer bled. Mom and Dad had enough to worry about, and I didn’t know how to explain this. Below my room, I felt the rumble of voices with Mom making calls and Dad moving around. After changing into sweatpants and a sweatshirt, I found solitude in my bed, away from all of them. With tiredness overcoming me, I fell asleep, only to awake again in the other—dream— world.

 Where I had disappeared, I found myself in the dirt-pit bunker, amassed in darkness, heavy wood above me acting as a door. A shiver went up my spine, and I folded my arms around me, realizing I was in last night’s clothing. The smell of the wet dirt clung to my nose, and the rest of the dirt clung to my skin and clothes. Fumbling around, I found the longsword beside me, yet I found no Sam. I found a gift from him, though: the iron dagger. I almost cut my flesh on the blade. With a bit more movement, I was able to find the door’s handle. I didn’t have the strength of Sam, but I did manage to open it. The moonlight shone down, off the high mountains echoing into the glen. Stepping up, I closed the bunker and marked it for later use. The boahban siths appeared to be long gone.

 Carefully moving through the glen and woods, I tried not to make a sound like Sam had done, my longsword hanging off my back. A twig snapped under my foot. “Shit,” I grumbled. Hesitantly, I took a step to the right, only to land on another branch. “Motherfuc—” My eyes snapped to attention as in the moonlight, a dark-haired boy watched me. His skin was as white as milk, and his eyes were hollowed out, glowing orbs. My first guess that he wasn’t normal should’ve been the fact that he wore only moss as clothing. Slowly, I reached behind me, trying to grab for the longsword, and with this movement, he took off. Relief settled over me.

 I didn’t trust the glens, and I didn’t trust the woods. Silencing myself, I listened. I listened for the creepy child and anything else out of the ordinary. I found only the sound of a stream, and with nowhere else to go, I decided that was the best bet.

 Every few steps, I stopped and listened. Johnny had always been the outdoorsy one, sometimes dragging Joey along. Any time Joey went along, they never came back with anything; Joey was too busy pretending to fight off beasts in the woods. If he only knew what I was doing—he would’ve liked being here. These thoughts brought a smile to my face, especially as I thought about Johnny, who undoubtedly laughed with Joey the whole time as our younger brother pretended to slay—what did he call those things?—nuckelavee and cu siths.

 The sound of the stream only became louder, and I stumbled through the dense trees. Glancing right, I only found the long winding stream; glancing left, moving out of the shadows was a silver horse, glimmering like the water under the moonlight. My hand hovered on the longsword because if I had learned anything in two nights here, then it was to trust nothing at night. The horse pawed in the water and moved through the water. Its large face loomed over mine. The eyes held a green hue in them, swirling into the black, and they watched me carefully. Gently, I reached up—

 “I wouldn’t do that, girl,” stated a gruff voice. My head whipped around. The cover of the trees weren’t able to hide his features: a torso of a human, legs of a goat, pointed nose and horns and long floppy ears. “The kelpie will drown you if you touch it.”

 I lifted my gaze to the kelpie, and the horse’s nostrils flared. The eyes now glowed green. It snapped at me, and I tumbled out of the water and onto the shore. The kelpie nipped at my feet, and I swung the longsword around. It disappeared into the stream.

 When my eyes went back to the ugly creature, I swallowed. “Thank you.” He took a step into the bush, but I called to him, “What are you?”

 A smile formed on his face. “I am Urish, and *what* are you?”

 “Jessa.”

 “Welcome, Jessa,” Urish stated, “to Ceàrd san Adhar.” He pronounced the name clearly, but I couldn’t replicate it. “Your red hair will protect you.” He went into the bush.

 Trying to follow him, I yelled, “Wait!”

Urish moved further into the bushes, vanishing. I desperately tried to claw after him, but the branches snapped to attention, slapping my ankles and exposed skin. The poking out roots of the ground threatened to trip me. The gleam of the glen shone ahead, and my shoulder started to hurt at the thought of the women. Taking a hard right, I knew that I had lost Urish, but for some reason, I kept going. I didn’t like these beautiful woods, and I preferred to be out of them. The dark branches snaked out and smacked against my skin. I pushed forward and came to a screeching halt when I hit sand. The water spread out before me, a deep blue with white foam covering the shore.

 “Jessa.” A large hand came down on my good shoulder.

 Gasping, I spun around and pointed the iron dagger. Relief flooded through me at the sight of Sam.

 Sam gave my shoulder a tight squeeze until he decided I was real. “You disappeared in the bunker.”

 “Yeah.”

 “Do you not have an explanation?”

 “Not yet.” My eyes traveled behind him, where a small boat was half on shore and half ready to go out to sea. On the edge of the dark water was a small island that pointed straight up in the air, which was not naturally formed. The clouds pulled back briefly to showcase the ruins of a castle. “You said it was dangerous at night.”

 Sam glanced behind himself and smiled. “I did.”

 “Yet you are going out?” I shivered.

 Sam handed me his coat. “I am. We should get you a dress.”

 I ignored that comment. “What happened to going and finding the next king?”

 “I thought I might bring him something amazing to gain favor,” he admitted. “People go to the island all the time during the day in search for the treasure, but they can never find it.”

 “You somehow think going out into the night will make it easier to find.”

 “The creatures come out in the night. Why should the treasure not?” His eyes looked over my back, where the longsword hung.

 I noticed and quickly meant to remove it. “Do you want it back?”

 “I left it for a reason. The dead have no use for it anyway.”

 “I am sorry about your friend.”

 “He was not my friend,” Sam said curtly, making his way to the boat. “He was my competition, and he is dead now. Traveling with him was a courtesy, but I think you will be much better company.” Stepping into the boat, it immediately dropped further into the water. “Jessa, I am going after that treasure, and I want to tell you to stay on shore. There is a town just up the way, and you would have refuge there for the night.”

 I asked, “But?” It felt like there was a “but” coming, and I really wanted the “but.”

 “But,” he began, “I would prefer if you came with me. You do not know how to use a sword, and it will be dangerous crossing the water and on the island—you could die.”

 I was in a dream, so I doubted that. However, if I learned anything while awake, this dream world was better than reality. So if an attractive man wanted me to go off with him into dangerous waters to find a treasure in the dead of night, what was the worst thing that could happen?

 Moving toward the boat, I felt like eyes were on me. I glanced back at the woods, like Urish was somehow in there, like I hadn’t lost him in the thicket. At least it wasn’t glowing green eyes. Telling myself to be brave, I stepped onto the boat, and we pushed off shore.

Sam offered keeping the longsword out and the iron dagger ready. “Do not look into the water,” he stated gruffly, knuckles white on his own sword’s hilt. He used his other free hand rowed the boat through the calm waters. The further the boat went out, the less waves there were. “Lurking beneath is anything ready to grab you.”

 “The creatures, you mean?”

 “Yes.”

 I leaned forward and whispered, “Where did they come from?”

 Sam shrugged. “They have always been here, even since I was a lad. I was never let out into the night.”

 “Is that why you go out now?”

 Sam chuckled. “Probably.” His blue eyes kept us steady, even though my curiosity threatened to throw us overboard. I so badly wanted to look into the water. I wanted to know what lurked below. However, if the creatures in the water were anything like the flying boahbin siths, then perhaps it was better to not. While Sam smiled, I saw fear in his eyes, like he knew exactly how crazy it was to be doing this.

 “Why do you need favor with the king?” I asked.

 Sam didn’t lose that grin. “I am not sure you want to know, but I can tell you it was not me. The king before this one and my father had a falling out. We were banished north.”

 “Do you not like the north?”

 “No. I love the north, much more than the Lowlands.” The boat ran ashore on the rocks, and Sam and I got out to pull it to shore. “Do not touch the water,” he warned strongly.

 From down below in the crisp night air, I looked up to find the ruins of a castle of the small incline. The whole isle was taken up by the ruins of the castles. Heavy block stones laid in the smooth gray rocks of the beach. Holes where windows should’ve been were left bare, but the blocks made the outline of a castle. Its peak managed to stay standing like a watchtower, and Sam eyes were on that.

 I wondered, “You think the treasure is there?” It seemed too obvious.

 “I do not see why not.” Sam started his way into the castle, and I scrambled after him. “We are looking for the Dunvegan Fairy’s flag.” Inside the castle, the stone floor had overgrown grass, and the walls were covered in wet moss. All of it was green. Vines reached up over the watchtower. “The flag will grant the king three wishes.”

 “The people don’t like the creatures,” I said, not knowing that for a fact. However, Sam was the only human I had seen out, and Urish had made it sound clear enough he didn’t see humans often.

 “People want the creatures dead.”

 “Do you want the creatures dead?”

 Sam gave no response, just rushing up the stairs with his sword drawn. I wasn’t sure how much I wanted to be near him with that thing drawn, so I stayed put at the bottom of the stairs. My eyes traveled along the walls, and this was the first time I had ever been in a castle—even if it was in ruins. It was smaller than I thought it was going to be. Wandering with the longsword dragging across the ground, I looked through the stone doorways, imaging what this castle was like in its glory. I imagined bright colors and golden light everywhere, making it shine. Now, it was all green grass, green moss and green vines. Walking over to a window that faced out to the vast sea, I looked for all the creatures that were supposed to be hidden below.

 Behind me, a small rock skittered across the ground.

“Did you find it?” I asked in the night air.

 There was no response except for rough feet against the stone and grass. Whipping around, I came face to face with a creature with large eyes and a pointed nose. The creature was barely my height, which gave me a full view of his dripping blood cap.

 “Shit!” I screamed as his weapon—a long wooden bat—came flying through the air. I ducked. He came forward again, swinging the bat wildly. Aiming for my legs, he came down, but I moved faster. Crawling over, I took ahold of the longsword. The bat came down again, but I blocked it with heavy metal, making a notch in the wood. Letting out a grunt, I kicked him back, and he stumbled. His bloody cap fell to the ground. His whole face turned red, and he started to shake. “I’m sorry,” I offered.

 That wasn’t enough. The bat came down again, almost nicking my bad shoulder. I flung my sword forward, just hoping to aim straight. Closing my eyes, I heard it hit something. Redcap let out a low howl into the air. Opening my eyes, I found him bleeding from his shoulder. He was far more focused on that than me, so I lowered my weapon.

Suddenly, Sam toppled over the creature. “Jessa, get to the boat.”

 He didn’t have to tell me twice. Grabbing the longsword, it dragged over the stone, grass and rocks as I climbed into the boat. I pulled the longsword through the water and inside. A few seconds later, Sam was there, out of breath and only holding his sword. Pushing off, he climbed in after me. The vein in his forehead was sticking out.

 “Are you injured?” he asked, rowing the boat quickly away from shore.

 “No.” I pulled myself up into the sitting position. “Did you get it?”

 “No.”

 “So it wasn’t in the tower?”

 “No.”

 I wanted to say I told him so. “What was that thing?”

 “Redcap—a nasty creature. He will kill any traveler. I just did not expect him in that ruined castle. He must be after the treasure as well.” Sam continued to row quickly, and just like that, the waves started to pick up. Sam muttered something under his breath before choosing his course of action. “Jessa, listen to me. We are going to be attacked.”

 My breath caught in my throat. “By what?”

 “Finfolk, the blue men, nuckelavee,” he listed. “It does not matter. They all lurk in the sea.”

 Like he called them by name, the boat began to thrash around, and Sam stood and pulled out his sword. The silver glinted in the moonlight. Rising from the water, their gray faces and shimmering bodies looked like they melted into the water. Their arms came forward, and Sam lashed out with his sword. “Jessa, row us to shore. Do not stop.”

 Grabbing a hold of the oars, I started propelling us to shore. My damaged shoulder started to scream in pain. I bit my bottom lip. Sweat streamed down my body. Around me, the Blue Men—as Sam called them—reached for me in the boat. Somehow keeping his balance, Sam managed to fight them off.

 He commanded, “Faster.”

 “I can’t! My shoulder.”

 Sam paused for less than a second. “Switch!”

 “What?”

 “Now!” Sam plopped down and took the oars, while I stood, taking a hold of my longsword. I tried to do the actions that he did, but it was without consistency or training. I plunged the sword down, hoping to get one of them, but the blue men grabbed the sword with his strong grip. They all attacked then, hands pulling on my skin, and they pulled me into the sea.

 He screeched, “Jessa!”

 “Go!” I screamed, being pulled into the deep water.

Awaking in my room, I thumped onto the floor, feeling water ooze out of my clothes and onto the pink carpet. In the hallway, I heard a rumble of feet and knew Joey was awake. The sun was not on the horizon, but I doubted he had gone to bed. If today proved to be anything like yesterday, then I didn’t want to leave my room.

The Girl on the Shore

The soft sound of waves pushing against the shore woke me. The cloudless sky was a globe above me with sparkling white dots twinkling. Underneath my body, I felt the harsh grit of sand, which pushed through every crack in my tank top and pants—and Sam’s jacket. My eyes snapped open. My mind rushed with memories from when I had been here last time—last night—and I raked my eyes across the shore. It was silent, except for me, and this deadly silence gave me the feeling that I wasn’t alone.

 Rising from the black waves came the blue men with blue torsos and gray faces. Below the torsos was only the black, angry sea and tsunami waves. With my body half in, I was in their territory. I scrambled back, kicking up water as I went, clinging to the sand beneath me.

 As I scrambled out of the water, the blue men’s wrath radiated from them. As the waves receded, so did they, watching me without blinking, hissing under their breath.

 Finding my feet, I stood, pulling out my longsword from my back. I pointed it toward the blue men, giving them a warning with my knuckles turning white. The leader snapped at me and all that oozing confidence disappeared. I ran to the forest behind me, looking to see if someone was waiting for me.

I teetered between the sand and the forest, and I followed along the line as a town rose in the edge of the dark night like Sam had promised. One burning flame alerted me to the small community, which was one street and five buildings. All were made out of thick stone; the windows and doors all had iron protecting them. A yell came from high, and I swung my sword up to see him. On the top of the building stood a man, dark eyes casting down on me.

“What creature are you?” he sneered, hands on his own sword. His skin was haggard, and his eyes held dark circles around them. His hands weren’t too steady either.

“Human. And you?” My sword pointed up at him.

“You are the second person I have seen out here tonight, and you both should know better than to be out in the night,” said the watchman, and my eyes darted into the trees around us. Sam didn’t seem like one to hide, but he did have to get to the Lowlands. Disappointment flooded through me that he left. “Those creatures will get you.” The watchman continued to glare at me. “Get out of here! We do not want any trouble.”

“That’s what they all say before trouble comes,” I said.

As the moon cast light, I looked toward the mountains. The peaks became sharp only to be broken off by large birds. Their deep bellowing voices echoed across the glen, sending waves of panic. I glanced behind to see the watchman pull out his sword again. My eyes found one in the sky, flying across the white moon, holding what looked to be a sheep in their steel talons.

My eyes caught the watchman’s, and he gulped. The same thoughts ran through his head, and his hand began to tremble. “We do not want any trouble,” he repeated. “I protect my village.”

“I’m sure you’re doing such a great job.”

The watchman kept his eyes on me. If he wanted me to leave, he was going to have to come down here and kick me out. The line mixed between green grass and soggy sand. Lurking off the shores were the Blue Men. I planted my feet into the sand and waited.

With the loud cawing of the creature, the watchman knew with two of us here, and the flying creature would come. “What do you want, girl? Do you want to come inside?”

Sam had said something about refuge, yet I had a different idea. “What is the way to the castle?”

“Why?”

“For the new king, of course.”

The watchman bit his bottom lip, but if he wanted me gone, this was the only way. “Take the shore,” he said. “When the mountains turn into flatlands, you will take that road in. The castle is easily seen.”

That wasn’t too hard. “Thank you.”

I walked along the line, fully ready to go on with the nightly walk. However, I refused to believe he just left me here. The flowing green leaves and brown bark covered almost every surface of the woods. Branches converged to create a thicket. When it rained, the leaves created a canopy of dryness.

As the sun started to rise on the horizon, I felt the presence of other animals come alive, now that it was safe. The mountains slowly sloped into flatlands, and in front of me, I saw the road that watchman had mentioned.

In the daylight, people began to move. There were no threats from Redcap, blue men, kelpies, Urish, ghillie dhu or boahbin siths. As I walked, I stumbled into my bedroom.

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw something raising from the ground like a blue man raised from the sea, and I instinctively reached for my sword. With it missing, I grabbed the pillow as my only weapon, whacking Joey in the head. He fell to the ground. “I yield.”

“Get out of my room!” Grabbing my younger brother by the ear, I pulled him from my room and into the hallway, slamming the door before he could get in another word.