

Chapter Two

County Donegal, Ireland

Dagda's Cave

Dagda, former leader of the ancient Irish Terrans, ended the call on the communication device that Brigid had left with him and sighed. His daughter and her companions had been gone scarcely two days and already the loneliness was crashing into him.

The communication device, no, cell phone, was of some solace. It was good to hear Donovan Callahan's voice clear as a bell from across the ocean, but after his too brief taste of human and Terran contact, it wasn't enough.

Dagda gazed around the rough-hewn chamber ablaze with more than a dozen torches set in the rocky cave walls and wished for the clear, steady glow of electric lighting. When he had awakened briefly over a hundred and fifty years before, there was no such thing as electricity. Now, the wonders of modern technology made him hunger to experience more than just a cell phone.

The sound of music jolted him out of his reverie. The cell phone was summoning him again. He picked it up from the table, checked to see the identity of the caller, and smiled as he read the name. Brigid. He enjoyed that bit of control he'd mastered of the phone's many features. Knowing beforehand who was calling was handy, although he doubted that he'd ever refuse to speak with the few other Terrans who knew of his existence. He made the connection with added joy, eager to talk with his child, and spoke in a mixture of the English he'd learned through Ethan's Singer ability, and modern Gaelic.

"Brigid, my darling, it's good to hear your voice. And do I hear Gabe in the background? Ah, indeed, it is late at night there you say? Then why are you not in your bed? You are." He chuckled. "You're quite naughty, *a chara*. So, why did you call?" A smile flitted across the stern features of the powerful Terran, softening them. "You missed me. I miss you too, my sweet girl. How I wish I could leave the confines of this cave and be with you. Now, don't cry, little one. You'll return and visit me and perhaps you'll have a baby for me to dandle." A rich boom of laughter erupted from the golden-haired male. "Ach, it doesn't matter the circumstances, all parents want grandchildren to spoil." He lowered his voice and whispered forcefully into the phone. "And have you made up your mind yet? Have they made up their minds? I know 'tis soon, but I want to know you're happy. Yes, yes, 'tis your life, darling, I truly believe 'tis part of your fate." He sighed. "Yes, I'll be patient, but don't wait until it's beyond your control. Yes, I'll look forward to your next call. I wouldn't miss it." He ended the connection and shook his head. "Where else would I be?"

Dagda set the phone down on one of the wooden chests filled with goblets, torcs, silks and jewelry, daggers and plates and other treasures useless to him now. Uaithne's—Ethan's—ancient spell, strong though it was, only prolonged his life if he remained within the confines of the Cave and cliff. Wondrous as the spell was, the Cave was still a prison.

He tried to focus on the import of his earlier call from Donovan. As part of the plan to increase the number of Terrans to combat those Destroyers who would pollute and contaminate the world, Donovan was sending him a young Terran-*mheasctha*, a Terran of human Irish blood with Terran ancestry, to assist him in his quest.

Eileen Murray had assisted Brigid and the men track the Destroyer, Nimhnach. Eileen had eagerly embraced the existence of Terrans and the probability that she had Terran blood. And she wanted to help.

According to Donovan, she was single and living on her own. Eileen had called in vacation time from her employers at the airline and was bringing her PC with her.

Almost everything Donovan had told him was incomprehensible save for the fact that she was Terran, wanted to help and she should arrive today. His pacing continued as he waited for her arrival.

* * * *

Eileen Murray pushed a stray curl from her forehead and hoisted her backpack into a better position. Sweat dripped down her face and her shoulders ached from the straps rubbing her through her thin jacket. A blister was forming on her right heel and she just knew it was going to pop. She wanted to turn back, but damned if she would let achy shoulders and a blister or two stop her now.

“I’ve got to know if I’m loony or not.” A rusty chuckle bubbled out. “That is, beyond talking out loud to myself.”

Laughing, she checked her compass again. Yes, she was still heading in the right direction to the cave. She paused to take a sip of bottled water and placed the bottle back into the holder at her waist, glad she’d remembered to bring it.

Three days ago she had been a moderately happy twenty-four-year-old with her own flat and a boyfriend. By the end of the first of May, she’d seen a man turn into a woman before her eyes, met three people who radiated power, and come home to find her boyfriend in bed with another woman. The bastard.

After kicking his arse and that of the big-breasted bint out of the flat, them clutching their clothes to their chests, she’d dried the tears she’d shed and called up a Yank named Donovan Callahan.

If she couldn’t have her self-respect, she’d at least have her heritage. Why not take advantage of all her built-up time at work and find out for sure if she was a bloody super heroine? That worm Timothy had shoved his O’Donnell ancestry in her face often enough. Wouldn’t it be a kick in the pants if she had super powers?

Well, she’d soon see for herself. If she didn’t get lost.

The trees grew closer together but she kept going even though the shadows darkened around her. At last the trees thinned, she made one sharp turn and there before her was a sheer cliff. Just like she’d been told.

A crease in the rock face should be hidden by heavy brush. When she pushed away some branches, there it was. She clicked on her torch, took a deep breath and slid through the opening into blackness.

The beam of light cut through the darkness and, as she played the light around the chamber, she saw a red arrow on one of several openings. When she touched the red mark, her fingers came away with waxy lipstick stains. A smile touched her lips. Brigid must have made it with some lipstick. It was doubtful that any ancient wanderer could have packed high gloss carmine lip color.

So, this part of the story was also true. Plunging into the tunnel, she followed a downward path and the fresh breeze that continued unabated. The arrows led her on until she was crawling on

her hands and knees. The blackness would have been oppressive if she hadn't had the torch and Brigid's arrows for company.

The shaft narrowed, before it took a sudden downward dip and a sharp right turn, and she fell forward. Somehow, she managed to hold on to the torch as she sprawled onto the dirt floor of a large cavern. A faint, narrow circle of light fell upon the room's center and she aimed the torchlight upward.

The beam of light swung around the chamber. There were signs that the room must have been planned as a living space. Small stone circles, probably created to encompass campfires were placed around the perimeter. Rough-hewn wooden bowls of various sizes lay scattered about. Could they have been used by the small remnant that followed Dagda into the cave? Some other time she'd have to explore further—now she needed to meet her destiny.

Had Brigid left her a sign for the next step of her journey? She swept the light around the wall until she found what she had been hoping to find. A bright red arrow.

Shaky fingers forked through her dusty, tangled curls, and she took a firm grip on her torch and inched through the tight gap.

And into a legend.

* * * *

Greenwich Village, New York City

"Thanks for the lift, Tony. 'Twas far easier than trying to flag down a taxi with my harp in hand." Ethan leaned down toward the open window of the SUV. "Gabe said you'd be available whenever I called to pick me up. Are you sure that'll be no problem?"

Tony Doherty shook his head. "That's my job, Ethan. I maintain the physical plant of the house, drive Brigid or Gabe around when they need me and do errands." He flashed his teeth in a smile. "I also take care of encouraging some of the lesser fish dirtying up the local waters to clean up their act." His smile became a lethal grin. "Saves time and effort to go straight to the source. Anyway, just call and I'll take you back. Later." He rolled up the window and pulled away from the curb into the traffic.

Ethan stared after the innocuous-looking vehicle as it vanished around the corner. Somehow, he got the impression that, if necessary, Doherty didn't just drop by for tea and scones with the fishes. He chuckled. Now there was a mixed metaphor for you. Ah, well, that was what a Protector was supposed to do, wasn't it? Take care of things? His job was to help Aviva Shiron to compile a transcription of the melodies he played on *Ceol Mhor*.

He was eager to meet another Singer since he'd learned that there weren't many of them. Hell, the last one had become a Destroyer. No wonder Gabe had been leery of him. He snorted. Gabe was leery because he didn't trust Ethan not to use his talent on Brigid and compel her to become his lover.

As if he needed to do that. The only thing keeping him from claiming her was Brigid herself and his own determination not to share her with anyone.

He sighed. He *needed* to focus on the matter at hand and ring Aviva Shiron's doorbell. He stepped up to the front door ornamented with ironwork in geometric designs and buzzed the intercom.

"Yes? Who is it?" A melodious, accented female voice responded to his ring.

"Ethan Clark. You were expecting me?"

"*Kayn*. Yes. Come on up."

He pulled on the door handle as the buzzer sounded again and entered into a small foyer. To his right, a polished wood door with a translucent pane of glass beckoned. The words “Aviva Shiron, registered music therapist, licensed psychotherapist” were limned in an elegant script in gold paint. Straight ahead, a carpeted staircase led to another small landing, and above him, a solid, anonymous, mahogany door. He headed up the stairs.

The faint strains of a guitar and a liquid female voice escaped from behind the wooden barrier. The music’s magic wrapped around his body and headed straight to his cock, and he paused. What the hell?

The words were indistinct, but he sensed they were in another language. It made no difference to his penis. If this female’s singing could have such a strong effect on him even through a door, he couldn’t imagine how powerful the effect would be face-to-face.

And if he didn’t knock, he was never going to find out. He struck the door twice with his clenched hand.

* * * *

The woman wasn’t what he expected. He expected a dried-up academician. What he got was a full-figured petite woman with wild, curly brown hair, honey-colored slanted eyes who dressed like a Rom, a gypsy. Large hoop earrings dangled an inch above her shoulders and rings circled each finger of the hand she held out to him.

For a split second, he ignored her outstretched welcome, mesmerized by her exotic looks. Catching himself, he shook her hand, dropping it when he saw her wince. “I’m sorry,” he stammered. “It’s just that you’re so ... you’re not...”

“Not what you expected? Well, you’re exactly what I expected. You look just like the photo Donovan emailed to me.” She grinned. “I think Donovan was playing a joke on you, *nachon*? Correct?”

Ethan set down *Ceol Mhor* near the door and shrugged. “I’m starting to think he takes pleasure in keeping us on our toes. Expect the unexpected.” A broad Irish smile widened his mouth and, putting on the thickest brogue he could, he teased the beautiful female. “And now, *agra*, would you be after telling a fellow Terran what’s to be happening next?”

Aviva chuckled. “I offer you tea and we get to work.”

Ethan’s laughter joined hers. “Ah, you said the magic word to an Irishman—tea. I hope it’s strong and not like that dishwater stuff the English drink.”

“Would I do that?” She led him farther into the apartment. A long, narrow hall opened up at the end into an enormous, sunny kitchen. Bunches of rosemary, thyme and sage hung from racks. The air was redolent with fragrant aromas from the dried herbs and the pots of basil, mint and cilantro. A copper kettle whistled on a gas burner and a platter of fresh, sliced bread sat on a granite countertop.

Ethan pulled over one of the wooden stools placed by a breakfast bar and inhaled. The familiar scents brought back memories of his gran’s homey kitchen.

He watched Aviva prepare tea, scooping up a portion from a tightly capped jar and placing it in a tea ball. Her motions were graceful, precise, like a dancer as she reached up to take down a couple of chunky mugs from the top shelf of one of the cabinets. When she stood on her toes and stretched her arm to grasp the mugs, his breath caught. Her blouse tautened across her breasts, her nipples pushing against the fabric.

Christ, his cock was rising again!

He cleared his throat. “‘Tis a lovely place you have here.”

Aviva poured the steaming water from the kettle into the cups before she answered. "It's not so large as Gabe and Brigid's place. They have five floors, can you believe it? But this is all mine. I have my practice downstairs for my clients and beyond the dining room behind you is my studio. I've a pretty guestroom just past the kitchen with a small bathroom, and upstairs my private quarters." She opened the fridge and brought out a pitcher of cream and placed it by the cups. "No cream for me, but if you've some honey, I'd love some for my tea."

A little ceramic pot shaped like a beehive took its place on the counter. Ethan smiled and for a few moments companionable silence filled the room as they sipped the tea.

"Have some bread and butter. I baked it myself."

The bread disappeared into his mouth and once more they didn't speak except for Ethan's brief compliment. "Delicious."

And her as brief reply. "Thank you."

At last, the dishes cleared, the crumbs wiped off the counter, Aviva spoke. "Let's get started."

* * * *

"So, did you bring any music transcriptions with you?"

Ethan gawked at the array of electronic and digital devices and control boards taking up one wall of Aviva's studio. Hanging from the wall were several guitars, a mandolin, several flat drums including an Irish *bodhran* and lap dulcimer. He recognized most of the instruments from the various *fleadh ceols* he'd attended in Ireland. The traditional folk music festivals always garnered a diverse group of instrumentalists. He pulled back his attention to Aviva's question and stammered, "Transcriptions? I-I don't have any."

Aviva gaped at him. "How do you remember the music? You must write it down, *nachon*?"

Ethan sank onto the low stool next to her and shook his head. "I don't read music."

"What?"

"Or write it."

Aviva stared at him. "You are joking?"

"Up until a few days ago I couldn't play the harp. Hell, I didn't even know I was a Terran."

Aviva bowed her head and her shoulders shook.

At first Ethan thought she was crying. When she raised her face and he saw the tears streaming down her cheeks, he was convinced. "Are you okay?"

Aviva attempted to speak. Once, twice she tried to catch her breath. And it struck him that she was laughing hysterically. "I am going to kill Donovan Callahan! What a joke to play on me!" Tears trickled from her eyes and she wiped them with the back of her hand. Spurts of laughter burst from her despite her attempts to quell them. "*Kol b'seder*. Everything's okay. You'll play and sing and I'll transcribe your melodies and incantations. We'll label each one so we'll have a record of them. So, take out your harp and we'll begin."

Ethan sighed. "I'm sorry he didn't warn you. Will this cause a great delay?"

"No. I have perfect pitch. I'll be able to repeat everything I hear exactly. I'll input the notes directly into my music file with an electric keyboard. Let me get everything set up while you tune your harp."

"*Ceol Mhor*'s never out of tune."

Aviva paused, then shook her head. "All instruments get out of tune. Stringed instruments especially."

"Not *Ceol Mhor*."

“Ah, you named her. I’ve named my instruments too. It makes them come alive.” Aviva touched his hand. “Ethan, trust me. The harp needs tuning.”

“I didn’t name her. That’s her name. Here, I’ll show you how pure she sounds.” He undid the embossed leather case and unveiled a small Irish harp engraved with gilded, intricate swirls and curls. His fingers, swift and strong, plucked and stroked the strings.

*

Aviva listened in awe to the harp’s music. Ethan was right. It was perfectly tuned. The crystalline notes rang true and brilliant. The melody he drew from the instrument expressed joy to be free and urged the listeners to indulge in their own joy and freedom.

He added his voice to the strings and changed the song.

Now the melody became more seductive. Sweat beaded upon Aviva’s brow as he sang of strangers giving into their desire to explore their sexual freedom. Her pussy dampened and her nipples tightened. The little song she’d played earlier became a nursery rhyme compared to his explicit melody.

Unable to control her response, she rose and stretched her arms above her head and swayed to the music. Her fingers braided, twining and untwining, weaving a seductive pattern as they descended before her and paused as the string’s vibrations died away. She gasped like a swimmer coming up for air. “What the hell did you do to me, you bastard?” Her eyes flashed and her nostrils flared as she took another deep breath.

Ethan raised his head inch by inch, his hands falling limp from the harp. When his gaze met Aviva’s, she hissed. His eyes were bottomless wells of self-loathing and grief and anger.

“I did something that should never be done to another human. I controlled you, humiliated you. I used my ability to master you.” He grabbed the harp’s strings as if to tear them apart, gripping them tighter and tighter until blood seeped from fresh slashes in his palms.

Aviva knelt at his feet, all the anger she held vanished. “Ethan, listen to me. What you just did was horrible, but you are newly awakened to your power. I was trained to handle my talent, to control it and not allow it to control me. And my power is nowhere near as strong as yours. You’ll learn.”

Aviva touched his knee and he relaxed his hold on the strings. He reached out to touch her hand, then yanked his back and stared at his bloodied palm. With a gentle touch, Aviva tugged his wounded hand and turned it over and *tsked*. “Stay there. I’ll take care of it.”

*

Ethan, still unable to come to grips with what he’d done, closed his eyes, his mind numb.

A small, furred head nudged his hand, and a rolling purr vibrated along his skin. He opened his eyes and stared into a cat’s emerald gaze. It bumped his hand again and a tiny pink tongue swiped its lips. A smile tugged at the corners of Ethan’s lips. “So, puss, what’s your name, eh? Something elegant and exotic?”

“His name is *Khatkool*. Khat for short.”

Ethan kept his head lowered as he stroked the cat’s warm, soft head with his fingertips. “What does it mean?”

He heard Aviva’s rich, laughter and raised his head. Her eyes held his gaze, she had a tube of ointment in her hands and she was smiling. “His name means ‘cat’ in Hebrew. Sorry it’s not more elegant and exotic.”

Ethan’s shoulder muscles relaxed. Aviva’s direct gaze held no recriminations. Could she have forgiven him?

She rolled her eyes toward the ceiling and let out an exasperated whoosh. “I forgive you, I forgive you. Now, leave your precious harp alone and come sit on that stool so I can take care of your hands. There’ll be no playing today thanks to all your stupidity!”

Ethan set *Ceol Mhor* aside and perched on one of several high stools in the studio. He rested his left hand, palm up, on his knee as Aviva bent to her task. Her tousled curls shielded her face while she scrutinized his wounds. Like a curious child, he moved his right hand and touched her hair, his fingers relishing the soft strands. Aviva lifted her head and he shifted his hand and cupped her cheek.

Her hands stilled at her task and she turned her head, her mouth brushing his palm. He strained to hear her muffled words as her lips moved against his flesh. “I can’t blame this on your Singer ability. I want you.”

A blast of desire shot straight to his groin as her tongue swiped a moist circle on his wounds, soothing them like a healing balm. He gripped her chin, and turned her face toward him and she opened her eyes. Their amber fire torched his reason and he ground out his demand. “Take me to your bed.”

He relaxed his grip, releasing her and watched while she placed the gauze and ointment on top of the console and turned without a word toward the studio door. Like an obedient servant, he followed her as she led him through the hall and up the stairs to the top floor and her bedroom. A sleek, wide bed piled with jewel-toned cushions took up almost the entire small area. Aviva moved toward the narrow space between the bed and the one window to let him in. “Please, make yourself comfortable. There’s not much standing room, I’m afraid.”

“I don’t expect we’ll be standing, now, do you?” Ethan said.

Aviva drew the curtains, leaving the room in a hazy twilight. She started to take off her rings, but he stopped her. “Let me.” He took her hand and placed the tip of her finger between his lips. Inch by inch he enveloped it, and slowly withdrew it and the ring, palming the tiny circlet in his free hand.

Aviva shuddered. “Stop. If you do that again, I’ll—”

“What?” Ethan nuzzled her hand and brought her wrist to his mouth. He licked the tender skin and blew on it. His voice took on a crooning tone. “Tell me, darlin’, what would you do? What would you do if I did this?” He took her hand and placed it on his bulging cock, still hidden behind the rough denim of his jeans.

Her hand curved around him and she squeezed. “This.”

Now he gasped and his eyes clenched.

“Open your eyes, Ethan Clark, take me to bed and make love to me.” His eyes opened wide at her command. Her eyes filled with satisfaction. “I may not have your power, but I am a Singer.” Her smile deepened. “What I can do is enhance the feelings you already have for me.” And she placed his hands on her hips and ground her mound against his arousal. “You want to take me and I want you to do it. Now.”

A lust-filled groan emerged from his throat and then there was no more thinking. He stroked her ass with one big hand and used the other to draw her mouth to his.

Their mouths attacked each other, their tongues plunging and entwining. They fell onto the bed, their legs thrashing. Somehow they managed to strip off their clothes, flinging them onto the floor. Ethan squeezed one of Aviva’s long, taut nipples, and bent his head to suckle greedily on the other. She moaned even as she found his engorged penis and stroked it, cupping his balls. Her eager plea cut through his feasting. “Now. Now. In me.”

He raised his head, taking in her puffy mouth and flushed face. Her eyes blazed with need. “Do you have any condoms?”

“No need. I’m protected and Terrans don’t get STDs. They didn’t tell you?”

Ethan sighed. “Seems Gabe is one for the jokes too.” He grew serious. “It’s been a while for me.”

“I thought that might be why you fell upon me like a marauding barbarian.”

He laughed, but shook his head. “And who’s calling the kettle black now?”

“You’re right, but then I’ve wanted you since I saw your picture.” She flung one slim leg over his hip, bringing her damp curls to brush his cock. “No more talk, no more laughing. Just sex.” And with those words, Ethan felt free. As free as the song he’d sung earlier. Just sex.

Only sex.