

Clochán (An Introduction)

Loki's Shadow

Thomas stepped up onto the stones and gave the top a firm stamp. The short dry-stone boundary wall didn't shake. "Laid before the damned landlords, I'll bet," he muttered with an eager rasp. He stood tall to take in the view ahead.

Aside from this spot, brambles, vines and short bushes over-laid or replaced stones. The rest of the wall was wild-looking like the rest of the property lines. The many boundaries ahead blocking his path to the mountain road were a mixture of light browns with light and dark greens and intermittent splodges of rust. The fields were tinted with yellow browns, and emerald, lime and dark greens. Amongst such personality and wicked good looks in the landscape, he noticed the occasional run of vermin. Up on the mountain road, some of the landlord's riders disappeared behind a cover of trees.

Above the road the dark green forest covered the slopes

below the towering cliff face of the mountain. An orange glow lit across the summit.

Scratching his nose, he said to himself, "Yes, but maybe Denny was right."

The young storyteller wiped his brow, checked behind and then hopped off the wall.

When he got close to the mountain road, a red-orange sunset shone through breaks in the mountain's smooth line. An angled shadow stretched from the gash across the crag facing him into the thick woods he was trudging towards. He pushed his long, sweaty brown curls back. "There's no understanding him," he ranted again.

A slip on wet horse dung almost caused him to fall. Skipping a step to maintain his balance, he continued with a "Well, how do you like that?"

"Gahd," he said after noticing the tear in his shoe had ripped some more. "Just until I get home, and that'll be grand." He bent down and retied the loose laces. "It'll be a terror if it doesn't last, won't it? Nothing more I can do about that, is there?" He gave the ground his spit.

He checked around before getting up.

"The first Irish sorrow is about the Children of Tuirenn. The children do impossible things... Loves his stories, doesn't he? Quoting that one will set him right, won't it?"

He proudly clenched the lapels of his well-worn tweed coat. When he fingered the coat's top button, he found it dangling loosely. Afraid it would come off he let it go, pulled on his cap brim, and marched on to the Stua Laighean mountain road.

When he got there he checked to his left where the landlord's men had gone and then the turn where he was headed. He didn't see a soul. When he checked back the way he had come, he recalled the conversation with his brother before leaving.

"So why are you going?" Denny asked.

"There's got to be a better way. Just because he's got a thick head doesn't mean I should give up, does it?"

"Do you listen to what you say half the time?" Denny asked.

“He’d go on for so many times,” Thomas said. “how I hadn’t got the other two right. Telling the old stories I mean. ‘It’s like this and that,’ he’d say. But he was right—with those stories we got to fix their pots, didn’t we? Good money until the Sheriff’s men stole from us, wasn’t it? I owe him. We owe him. Even when he’s a touch off.

“You was the one that was always going on that you wished him dead, that he’d leave forever.

“Can you blame me? There was a real flare-up. He got really out of control, and it looked like he was going to do us serious harm.

“You see, the world was on fire—Captain Kelly trying to save us all and gahd—this one hides away—and all them listening—they’re dead. He didn’t like that a bit. And when I asked, “and what about the orphans?”—Mr. Keane ordered me not to come back..

“And he who he is; my gahd—no arguing that. I tore out of there faster than if I sat on a hive of bees.

“Go on with yeh then. Just make up your mind.”

Thomas ripped a leaf from a bush and flicked it away with his middle finger.

“No Denny, I guess I don’t listen.”

Thomas walked sombrely in the grey gloom until he reached a darker patch in the road. Branches from thick rows of trees on both sides interlocked over the road.

Maybe we can start again. It’s all about trust, isn’t it? Time enough, isn’t it?

Thomas with closed fists walked on. Eerie web-like shadows felt like they were closing in.

“And he told me not to come back,” he whispered.

He heard a light sound of branches stretching and grabbing. Thomas grabbed his lapels and focused back on the road.

“And if he asks, why am I here? Well, I’ve had my chores, I’ll tell him. And as my brother tells me, I sometimes forget.

“And if he doesn’t like that, I’ll say I’m here because it’s Denny’s fault. ‘Two farts in the wind,’ he calls us.”

Thomas followed the turnoff from the main road. It was bound by a hedged line of trees on the left side and thick bushes behind. There were still open pastures behind a line of trees on the right. He felt he was being followed but didn't see anything behind him. Scratching the back of his neck didn't help.

He followed a fork to the left that would lead him deep into the forest.

"If I say I'm sorry, is that going to be enough?" Thomas muttered. A snap came from the forest. Nothing moved on his left. Frozen, he clenched his fists again.

Got to get this over with, before the light goes. He picked up his pace to a light trot. He stumbled over a thick branch hidden in the shadows. When he tried to get up, he noticed that his shoe was in a bad state. The rip stretched from the side to the front showing a bare toe. *That's the last thing I need right now.* He heaved the branch into the brush and walked on.

He arrived at an open spot where he usually met Mr. Keane. Thomas called out his name a few times, but no-one called back, which was odd because Mr. Keane had unusually good hearing.

Although the light was weak, a swathe of changing shadows encircled him. The figures on the evergreens shifted like tall giants hovering over prey. Flailing motions scared him back to the path he had come from. The trees towered around him. In the break between two bushes directly in front, he faced the darkest of the dark.

He refused to give up his position but kept scratching an upper arm incessantly. Ten minutes of relative quiet passed. Thomas debated whether to go back or start walking uphill. He waited some more and then called again.

If he wanted to talk to me, it wouldn't be difficult to find me, would it? Nothing gets by him.

Scuttering sounds came from somewhere ahead but deep inside the forest.

"Wolves," said Thomas. *Giant wolves. 'No way,' says Da. Killed off a long time ago. But all those terrible piercing eyes and all that ripping apart business.*

Whatever was in the forest stopped. There was only the light sound of wind shaking the tops of trees.

Just a field mouse. That's what it was. Heaven's name—field mice is what it is. Well maybe a small fox.

Mister Keane must be here somewhere. He's just busy. He scratched the stubble on his cheek. His stomach growled.

With all this trouble and this late hour it would be appreciated if he could give us something to eat. Well, either that or I'm going home. He slapped his leg and rubbed his hands together, and took another deep breath.

With another “Lord forgive me,” he marched right on through the bushes and into the opening in the forest.

Something scraped at the tear on his boot. “Not again,” he said and froze. It was quiet, but hairs rose on the back of his neck. He couldn't see anything, but he was convinced something was in there and that it was bigger than a mouse.

“My,” he muttered, and slowly, hobbled back out.

In the clearing, he heard only the wind. “In the name of the Almighty, what am I going to do?”

Something rushed deep in the forest. It slowed, and then it seemed to meander as it rushed downhill. It sounded heavy, swift and powerful.

“Heavens,” he moaned. “What's happened to Mr. Keane? This isn't right.”

Thomas continued moving backwards on the path that led to the main road. He stopped to listen.

Whatever was in the forest stopped.

He removed his cap and clenched it in his fist. Fear that started in the pit of his stomach was rising. Thomas didn't care about trying to figure out what it was; he had heard enough. He pivoted on his foot and raised the other to turn. Three toes protruded from the end of the torn boot.

Thomas knew that if it wanted him, it would get him. Seeing the open road he lunged forward for a powerful run. Dim twilight lit the way. The young man leapt over rocks and shadows desperate not to slip on fresh

horseshit. Ignoring the racing steps behind, he ran faster, faster than he thought possible. Thomas didn't care that he was about to lose his boot. Breathing so hard he didn't hear it come alongside. Before responding to the musky breath at the back of his neck, he overheard the most frightening thing he had ever heard in the whole of his life—his own voice screaming as his body was ripped apart.

Crossings

The phrase, *Isn't there something you're forgetting?* took form. The dark of the dark floats on the infinite. An existence oozes into ether from a determining virtual still point warding off forgetfulness. He is succumbing to a drowning numbness with an inevitability of fading dreams. The phrase within the bubble is nurtured within.

Alone and almost without projection or sense, an existence referred to as Kevin Neal accepts the question.

Only bad memories, came an answer.

From blackness came a glimmer of story. Within that light smouldered.

Kevin realized at the end of times that he was older because there was a life before. Slipping into darkness, he waited in disbelief for the next memory.

The word "find" was within.

What? was his answer.

Remember when you were young?



Remember? He was hesitant to define that word. It meant direction but where he was—there wasn't any.

Remember, he repeated.

I remember grabbing the st/.lick. In his mind, he closed his hand into a fist.

"Find," repeated the voice.

The beast, added Kevin, as his body kept sinking in the water's deathly embrace.

The twenty-one-year-old, was in a tight spot.

From within a mist-like smouldering flicker, was a vision of the first of his many troubles. Kevin Neal was seven, which was five years before Thomas had been killed.

To reach him you followed the mountain road for a mile after Killealy village to his neighbours the Kellys. Their small cottage was turned away from the road. It's rolling fields stretched away from the trees at the base of County Wexford's tallest mountain to an openness that extended towards a misty horizon.

On the path to the cottage, a pair of women and two girls rushed back and forth in half circles around a motionless little boy, like a flock of birds preparing for migration. The women were sorting out who was going to take flight first. The motionless one next to the dropped coat was Kevin Neal.

Kevin's sister, as she paced towards the Kelly's cottage yelled, "I *am* going." She wiped sweat from her brow with her sleeve.

"Heaven help us. No, you're not, Kathleen," replied Mrs. Neal. "I've got to bring Seamus home. I don't have time..."

Kathleen picked up her ankle-length dark-brown dress revealing

matching socks and brogues. Without looking back, she ran to the road.

“But Mam...” said little Kevin as his mother passed him by.

On the other side of Kevin, Mary Kelly said, “Don’t you dare.”

“I’ve got to go,” said Mrs. Margaret Kelly as she paced nervously to and from the cottage. “...and you’re not to see that Stephens boy, do yeh hear me? No, you’re not. And you’ll watch over Anty. Do yeh hear?”

“But...?”

“Do you hear?” Mrs. Kelly repeated again. “That’s the last of it. Don’t start on me. Your sister’s inside—by herself.”

“No.”

Mrs. Kelly stopped and gave Mary a terrible mad glare.

“I hope they run away from you,” Mary said as she rushed towards the cottage.

“That’s awful. You don’t really...” Her mother let go of her skirt to swat locks from her face. “Anyway, we’ll talk about this when I get home. I’ve got to go.” She turned and saw Mrs. Neal running after her daughter who already was already well ahead of them on the mountain road. She noticed that Kevin was staring at her.

“Mr. Murtagh will be fine,” Mrs. Kelly said. She pulled her kerchief up over her hair, and wiped her hands on her apron. “Kevin, Anty’s inside. Sorry, but it’s really important. I have to go.” She picked up her skirt and ran after the other two.

As Kevin stared at Mrs. Kelly, his mother, and his sister hurrying down the road, there was the sound behind him of Mary Kelly slamming the cottage door. The noise of minutes ago was replaced with an unnerving quiet.

The boy wore long-sleeved linen shirt, and coarse woollen knee-breeches, and had bare feet. His hair was cut short like his father’s. He dragged his toes across in front to make a mark in the dirt.

Mary Kelly came rushing back out of the cottage and told him, “Kevin, you can’t stay there. You’ve got to go inside.”

Unmoving, he stared at the line in the dirt.

“Anty’s inside. I’ve got to go. She’ll stay with you until I get back,” she

told him.

“Kevin Neal, look at me.”

When Kevin raised his eyes, young Mary repeated, “I want you to go in with her ‘til I’m back, do you hear me?”

Kevin nodded. He watched her climb over the short boundary wall and hurry away.



“Should go in,” he said as he looked back at the cottage. Putting his finger to his lip, he considered trying to get Anty to give him some food from the kitchen. Her name was common in the Wexford mountains. It was short for Anastasia.

“Bossy,” he said.

He wiped his snotty nose, with his sleeve.

A strong, chilling wind made Kevin pick up his coat. As he tried to put it on, he noticed that sheep and lambs were trying to escape through the open gate.

“No, no, you bad sheep,” he yelled.

As he tried to pull on the other sleeve, he ran to stop them from getting out. He reflexively hopped back after his bare foot almost stepped on a soggy sheep dropping. While stopped, he pulled his sleeve up again. In front of him, another sheep sauntered out through the gate.

The young lad hurried over, shooed the others away, and started to close the gate. He saw animals loose on the other side, so he stopped and slipped through instead. Kevin picked up a stick that was leaning against the fence. His brother Seamus had shown him how to use it to loop the rope over the post. He reached to touch the rope but a lamb sneaked out by running around his feet. “Hey,” Kevin warned.

Facing the escapees on the other side of the road, he said, “Bad sheep. You have to come home. I count oooo-n-e, two, three, f o u r, five...”

He pointed to the last one but didn’t know the number. “I see you,”

he warned. He shook a finger but looked wistfully up, at a trail that led up to Cloroge More hill.

“Kevin, you can’t do that. Get back here.”

He turned and saw nine-year-old Anty running towards him. *She’s a girl. She’s going to squeal*, he thought. *I’ll get in trouble*. He looked back at the path that led up the hill.

Anty opened the gate and closed it behind her. Her hair was tied back in a bun like her mother. She wore a knee-length woollen dress, long stockings, and shoes.

“Kevin Neal! You’re not supposed to be here. What are you doing?” she asked.

“Sheep got out.”

“But you’re supposed to be on the other side,” she said as she put her hands on her hips. She took a deep breath and looked at the loose sheep and said, “Never mind. Let’s get them in.”

When Anty brought the last lamb towards him, he opened the gate again and told her, “You always say you want to climb the mountain...”

She looked up and then back at the open gate.

“They did leave it open, didn’t they? We do have an excuse,” she said.

“An adventure,” he said. He remembered that Seamus had repeated that to his older brother Aiden. Besides, Anty had told him that less than a week ago.

Anty stared at the trail and said, “Maybe we could go a little way.”

“Will we see my da?” asked Kevin.

“Coming?” she replied, as she passed him.

Kevin took the stick leaning against the fence, ran after and passed her.

“Hey,” she yelled. She raced past him towards the stream. When Anty got there, she ran across the stones and jumped to the other side.

Kevin hopped from one stepping stone—one clochán—to another. Before hopping to the fourth one, he crouched and smashed the surface of the water a couple of times with his stick.

“Are you coming?” Anty yelled.

Kevin tried to get up but wavered when he was almost up. He dropped

his stick and screamed, "Yeaagh!" He stepped back but missed the stone and landed in the stream. The water reached his knee. He was about to fall sideways but spun and landed on the other foot which got wet just above the ankle. He managed to twirl and flopped onto the beach.

"Wow, that's cold," he yelled.

"Well look at you." She put her hands on her hips. "And you threw away your stick. What if we get attacked by monsters? Well, I'm going. Catch up, if you can."

As his stick floated away downstream, he watched Anty disappear into a line of trees. He got up, and as he brushed the dirt off, he sensed a presence, on the other side of the stream, beyond the trees. He didn't see anything. Other than the steady gurgling from the stream, it was quiet. He stared back at where Anty had gone. *It's there because she's not here*, he thought.

Tree branches on the other side ruffled. For an instant, Kevin froze. They started shaking again. Without further hesitation, he raced to the place where Anty had disappeared.

As he raised his bare foot to run, he wondered, *was it the breath of the faeries in the wind or were bad men speaking?* He remembered that the last time his family was together was at Mass at the top of the hill and he and Anty had been looking up at the mountain.



A week and a half earlier, Kevin had come to the crossing with his mother and old man Kavanagh had been there to stop him. "Joseph Kavanagh, don't let Kevin cross before I get there," she yelled. "Joseph, do you hear me?"

Old Mr. Kavanagh waved in acknowledgement.

Kevin stopped, turned back and saw his Mother's eagle-like eyes staring at him.

The man sat on the grass, a few feet to the boy's right. His feet dangled

over the small bank.

The stream was only about five feet across and Kevin didn't think it was deep because grass grew in the middle. It was lined with tall trees and spotted with tall grasses and plants. His father and brothers had already crossed and gone beyond the trees on the other side.

"Do you like our eggs?" Kevin asked.

"Eggs?"

"I feed the chickens and my brother—"

"Seamus. Yes, it's nice of him to bring me some. I saw him and your brother go by with your da a few minutes ago."

"And I—"

"—and you feed them. I know. If they could talk, they'd say you're a good lad."

Kevin looked down at his Sunday shoes and kicked a rock into the creek. He paced around the path to the stream, while he looked for something else to say.

"Are you fishing?" Kevin asked.

"Do you see a rod?"

"No."

"Then, I guess that means, I'm not fishing."

"Then what are you doing?"

"I'm thinking."

"Why?" asked Kevin.

"Why not?" Mr. Kavanagh replied.

"Are you thinking about fishing?"

"No."

"How come you're not going across?" asked Kevin.

"I'm weighing the cost of getting to the other side. Besides, there's lots to see here. There are birds, fish, plants—and nosy people like you."

Kevin watched his feet go back and forth and then he looked back at his mother.

The old man smiled. "Have you ever been up there?"

"No, but my Mother's over there with those ladies and she'll tell you

lots if you don't go to Mass up there."

"I suppose you're right, Kevin. One way or another I'm in for it. Do you see that water there? That's the Urrin River."

"It doesn't look very big."

"Here it's small, but the mountain feeds lines of streams into it farther down and eventually it becomes a river. Little things can become bigger things in time. This water will go around Duffry Hall, into Enniscorthy town where it joins the wide, gentle Slaney River which meanders through the heart of the county. It goes a long way and it will force its way into the Irish Sea. Do you know what a sea is?"

"No," Kevin answered. He looked back and he saw that the other ladies had finally reached where his mother was waiting for them.

"The water in the sea is like this water, but it's filled with lots and lots of salt. You wouldn't want to drink it. It has huge fish in it and they're bigger than both of us. They can eat you up. You'd be a nice tasty snack, don't you think?"

Kevin laughed.

"The thing about the sea is that there's so much water you can't see the other side. It's the biggest thing you can imagine and there's more. There's lots more. It keeps going on and on."

"Mister, are you going to the sea?"

"No, I'm just thinking about going across."

"Mister, if you run fast, I bet you could probably jump over it."

"Kevin, Kevin, Kevin. And maybe not. You see the clochán is there to guide your way across."

"Clochán?"

"You gotta find the right stepping stones—the clochán, and with their help, you'll get across as long as you step carefully."

The old man stared at the path through the trees and added, "Wherever you go, Kevin, choose wisely."

Mrs. Neal walked up behind Kevin with an entourage of women and said, "Thank you, Joseph, for minding my Kevin. Evelyn loves to talk."

"I heard that Bridget Neal," shouted Evelyn Scallan. "And who was it

that was complaining about the price of eggs and the lack of good milk?”

“Hold on Kevin. Not without me, you’re not,” Kevin’s mother said as she reached for his hand. Kevin withdrew his hand from her grip.

“Mister Kavanagh says he’s not going to church.”

“Kevin’s got an artful imagination,” responded Mr. Kavanagh.

“Now leave Mr. Kavanagh be. He’ll move when he’s ready.”

She stared at the man sitting by the river and added, “And that won’t be too long from now I hope.” Kevin saw her give him a firm glare.

“Mr. Kavanagh told me to walk across the stones. I can do this on my own.”

“No, you won’t, dear boy,” his mother said.

Kevin quickly scurried down and hopped to the first stone and his mother quickly followed. He hopped to the second, the third. The last was much farther away than the rest.

“No,” yelled his mother, but he jumped anyway.

His right foot touched the stone, but he started to fall back. Mrs. Neal grabbed his hand, spun him around her while she hopped to the stone and swung him around. She held him dangling over the water. “Should I let you go?” she asked. “Then what would you do?”

“No,” he yelled as he wiggled and tried to swing to the stone.

His mother grabbed him with both hands, hopped to the other side, and let him go. He scurried up the bank. On the far side, Kevin stood tall and put his hands on his hips. Before he could say a word his mother ordered, “Enough of that. You let Mr. Kavanagh be. He lost his wife and recently his son joined his brother in the fishery.”

“Where?” asked Kevin.

“He’s gone to the new found land.”

Before running through the trees, Kevin watched his mother point a finger at Mr. Kavanagh and draw a line up and over the trees towards the open-air Mass. “Kevin,” she said, “on your way up, tell me if you see any wild strawberries.”

Beyond the trees Kevin followed a goat path across a grassy field which led to the huge hill. Before him was a patchwork quilt of greys, rust reds,

toasted browns, and fresh greens with the random spattering of colours of wildflowers. The white of wild goats and granite rocks salted the dark fields.

Kevin's long stockings protected his calves from the scratchy, dense bell heather, yellow gorse, and thorny blackberry bushes. It was a rugged hike and sometimes the vegetation scraped at him higher than his knees.

The pure mountain air, warm spring morning sun and his desire to get to the top fuelled his will to keep climbing.

Higher up off the path his Da waved to him. He was taking to Anty's father. Kevin saw some goats with kids munching on the prickly heather much farther to the left.

When Kevin reached his father he was told, "You can take a rest if you want."

"It's fine, Da. There are flowers over there. Can I pick them?"

"I don't know, can you?"

Kevin picked a few and waved the flowers for his mother to see before his father carried him back to the path. When Kevin's mother joined them she was accompanied by Anty Kelly.

When she asked if she could have them, Kevin pointed to where he got them. *Pretty scratchy for a girl*, he thought, as he stared at her bare legs. "Fine. Here," Kevin said, and he gave her the flowers.

With the flowers in hand, she walked back down the thin trail to her mother and her sister.

"Is it far to the top of the mountain?" Kevin asked his father.

"It's a lot farther than our walk to the top of this Cloroge More. The name means 'the mountain's big bend' because it's part of the mountain. It is not quite right because you really have to go down and walk up a far piece. Kevin, it's a ways and I am sorry to say we won't be able to do that today. Really. It's something you'll do when you're older. It's a long hike to climb Stua Laighean."

"How do you know that?"

"Thomas Brien the story-teller told me."

"I wonder what you could see up there," said Kevin. "Could you see the sea?"

“The sea? Who’s been talking to about the sea? Maybe if you had better eyes than mine and it was really clear, maybe,” said his father.

“Are there creatures up there? Will they hear us? Those people following the path look like a line of ants,” added Kevin.

“Those are all very good questions,” his father said, but before he could add anything Kevin started running ahead. He was trying to catch up with his two older brothers. They were almost at the top of the hill and that’s where he wanted to be.

When Kevin reached the end of the climb, he was really tired. He was going to keep running after his brothers, but the mountain captured his attention. This top of the hill was a stepping stone to places of wonders.

If only, I could fly to the top of that mountain, he thought. His eyes followed the pathways. It was difficult to figure out where the lines of the cliffs were. He looked back and saw his mother watching him. *They’ll never let me go,* he thought.

He was going to sit down, but Mrs. Scallan came over and shoed him towards the rest of the crowd. Remembering the goats he had seen on the way up, he thought, *If I had some goats with me, then she’d stop that and leave me alone.*

He wandered into the crowd of people. A very tall man stepped aside and there she was. *I’d recognize her even if she was on that mountain way up there,* he thought. *If she wants something she’ll just come and take it. It’s Anty.*

She came towards him with a bunch of flowers. She had picked more of them since he last saw her.

I wish she’d brought me back some berries. I’m starving.

“Do you like the flowers?” he asked.

She moved her brown curls away from her face. “Yes, I think my mam will like them.”

“Oh,” he said. He turned back to the mountain. “Have you ever walked up there? What do you think you can see? Can you see the sea on the other side? To get there do you think you’d starve? Do—?”

“Kevin, are you asking me a question?”

"Yes, but..."

She stood there waiting for the rest.

"Yes, but..." he added.

"It would be an adventure. I think it would be grand to go way up there," she said. Her fingers fiddled with her wavy, dark brown hair above her ear. "We could go and leave this place, and we could go see what we can see."

"But..." added Kevin.

Kevin's mother intruded into the conversation and added "Father Barrett's Mass kit hasn't arrived. The Mass is going to be delayed. Father is going to give you your lessons now so I want you to hurry on over there. Hurry. Don't keep him waiting."

Kevin kept moving his legs, but he didn't see the priest. He made sure he walked ahead of Anty, but he kept listening for her voice to tell him where to go.

Father Barrett walked over to the children. He sat down on his heels and directed a stern gaze into Kevin's eyes. "If you don't practice reciting your prayers, your Lenten penances will be marked down by God as coming up short. Do you hear me?"

Kevin looked away, then down, and followed it with a nod.

The priest said some prayers with them and asked, "Do you have any questions?"

"Is it wrong to ask God for something that maybe some people think isn't right?" asked Kevin. He was thinking about getting God's permission to climb the mountain.

The priest looked at Kevin's father and the group of rebels he was with on the other end of the field. "Some people don't know what they pray for," he said. "Although they want something it might not turn out the way they want. It's a big world and God has a lot of responsibilities. It's not always clear what the right thing is. It's God's guidance we should be asking for." He hesitated.

"And young man, until you're older you'll ask me what's right. Do you hear me now, young Kevin?"

“Yes, Father.”

“For your sins say another two ‘Our Fathers’ and three ‘Hail Marys’. Now off with you. I see my kit has arrived and I have a Mass to prepare for.”

On the walk down after Mass, Kevin and Anty took their time. Kevin gave his version of what he asked the priest. “Father told me that if we pray about climbing it, we can go on up,” he said.

She looked up and away, and mumbled to herself, “I don’t think that’s exactly what he... Well if you squint your eyes and ears a little.” To Kevin, she replied, “You might be right.”



After rushing out from the stream’s forest cover, Kevin was abruptly stopped by the glare of bright sunlight. He rubbed his eyes and looked up. Anty was earnestly hiking up the hill. She must have heard him because she turned and waved. Kevin intended to remind her that the priest last time told them they could go to the mountain.

He stepped slowly and cautiously through the prickly and thinly spaced goat’s trail that Anty followed, since he wasn’t wearing the stockings or shoes that he had the last time.

When Kevin got closer, she meandered off the path to get some wildflowers. He got distracted and went in a different direction because he found something better—lots of juicy berries. There were lots of small wild strawberries.

He was impatient with eating them one at a time. He devoured them by the handful. He spilled more than he swallowed.

He heard Anty say something and saw her waving. He collected another handful of berries. He intended to give them to her but kept eating them as he walked.

When he reached her he noticed that she was bent over and staring at the ground.

She looked back at him.

"Want some berries?" he asked.

"It's all over your face," she said.

Kevin wiped his sleeve across his mouth, and saw that it was marked with berries.

"Did you get lost?" she asked.

"I saw the Púca."

"No, you didn't."

He hesitated for a moment and thoughtfully said, "Well. It could have..."

"Over here," she called.

He looked at the mushrooms and replied with "Can we eat them?"

"Faerie ring mushrooms?" she answered. "No, you can't just eat them. Mam says they have to be dried out."

"So, there are faeries around here."

"They were dancing last night. See the circle, around it? That was them." She reached for the mushroom.

"No! No. Don't! They won't have any place to come back to and they'll curse you," Kevin demanded.

"And how do you know?" asked Anty.

"Mr. Kavanagh. He told my brother Aiden. I heard him."

"I knew that, cause my mam told me," she said.

"Did you know that besides a curse, they'd follow us?" asked Kevin.

She looked at him and asked, "Why don't you pick it? Then they'll only bother you while I eat it."

"Shush. They might be listening," said Kevin.

"I don't see them."

"That's because they're hiding."

"My da told me that he knew someone who saw a faerie man cut wood down there up the road near old man Kavanagh's," said Anty. "He was talking to a raven, he said."

"Why?" she asked as she stood up.

"Well, everyone knows that old ravens know things about what's

happening in far-away places,” she said.

“What do you think he would tell us?”

“The raven or the faerie?”

“Birds? I don’t understand what they say. Do you?” asked Kevin.

Anty brushed her dress away from a clump of heather that pulled on it.

“Besides, there are good faeries and bad ones,” added Kevin.

She looked up, told him, “I’m going up there,” and left.

Kevin saw a wild red grouse staring at him while following her up the hill. The thrusting bobbing head with red eyebrows seemed to be warning him to “Go back, go back, go back.”

Anty stopped to sit on some flat rocks about half-way up the hill. Kevin had to walk past her to get a seat and the heather scratched his leg again. He stared at her fist-full of flowers and as he ate another berry, she snatched a couple from him.

They were both tired and breathing hard after a long climb. There wasn’t a damp wind to refresh them from the beating sun. The clouds were thin, very far away, and wispy.

In the landscape ahead of them, they saw white-washed cottages sparsely dotted across a gently rolling patchwork of colourful fields. The flat line at the horizon was interrupted by some distant peaks.

Anty had her thumb in front of her eye.

“That’s Killealy,” she told him.

The grey thatched roofs of the few stone cottages clustered in the village looked smaller than her thumbnail.

“They’re down there,” she said.

“Mam and Kathleen?” asked Kevin.

“Our das are there somewhere, but I don’t see them.”

“I see sheep,” replied Kevin.

Anty gave him a quizzical look.

“I think I see my mam,” she told him.

“Where?” he asked.

“By the street.”

"What street?"

"She's carrying a basket. That's her—right there."

Kevin put his thumb in front of his eye like he had seen Anty do. "Doesn't help," he said.

"Your legs are bleeding—should have held onto your stick."

He flicked some dirt with his toes.

"I wonder what we could see from the top of the mountain," she said.

"There's a sea over there," Kevin told her. He didn't know where, but he pointed anyways.

"I don't see my mam anymore," she said.

"Where's my da?" Kevin asked.

"I don't see any of them anymore. What will happen if they don't bring them back?"

"Don't talk stupid," he replied.

"It's just... I heard my da and mam saying terrible things. I'm... Da said he had to take my brothers."

"Why wouldn't they come back?" Kevin asked.

"They're going to fight with my uncle. They're going to keep the bad people away."

"The Púca is there," Kevin said, as he pointed to the trees that reached the sides of the hill and the mountain. "He lives in the Duffry forest. He's right there."

"You said he was down there," she said.

Kevin just scrunched his shoulders.

Anty looked at the Duffry forest and then pulled her shawl up around her neck.

"What?" asked Kevin.

"I thought I felt something staring at us. It's nothing."

"Thomas, the storyteller, said that nothing can stop him."

As she turned around, she adjusted her skirt and stared at the heather near her feet.

"The Captain can have him do the fighting and our das can come home. The Púca can become anything. He'll fight anything. He's better

than Fionn McCool and even Cú Chulainn. Nothing can stop him.”

“Have you ever seen him?” Anty asked.

“Well, no, but Thomas has and...”

“He just tells stories...”

“You’re being stupid,” Kevin yelled as he stood up, and the berries spilled to the ground. “I know things... It’s...”

“There’s nothing you can do about it,” she yelled, as she dropped the wildflowers to the ground and walked away.

“You’re just stupid,” he repeated.

The mid-day sun was hot and bright.

He watched Anty hurry away from him. Kevin looked back at the thing that he sensed was staring at him through the trees. He stood tall and put his hand on his hips like he saw Anty do.

“Where’s my Da?” he asked.

He sensed that something heavy and powerful was laughing at him. “Or is he stamping and growling?” he asked in a quieter voice.

He ran after Anty but the heather tore at his feet again. He hobbled and then rushed faster. He didn’t heed the thing watching him. He just didn’t want her to leave him alone.

The Fallen

Anty's father Patrick Kelly stared at the Stua Laighean mountain that towered over the rooftops of Kiltyealy village. It belonged to the Irish pagan god Lugh. The Vikings knew him as Loki. Patrick's farm was on a slope at the base of it. Folk, like his wife Margaret, referred to it as Mount Leinster. Patrick wondered if on top of it, wasn't where they should be.

He stood at the crossroads in the heart of town. From the main road, another led through Scullogue Gap. The break in the mountain enabled access to counties on the other side. It was a relatively dry day, in north-western County Wexford. A gaggle of disconnected ramblings from hundreds of men and boys swirled around him.

"Will you quit your belly-aching, or I'll smash your head open?"

"...a taste of what you deserve"

"Would you ever g'way!"

"Give that back."

"Lort! Are you alright?"

From behind Patrick, a voice of experience said, "...and slap the English with the likes of this... better kiss your arse and tell it goodbye." Patrick scratched his balls and wondered where his wife was.

Near him, he caught sight of his sons. Conor the oldest was looking up. He was watching a bird dropping a poop. He pushed his brother Seán into it and yelled, "Share the wealth."

"You asshole. What the?"

"So Lizzie is it?" said Conor, as he paced back and forth waiting for his brother to smash back.

"She's here?" Seán asked as he quickly tried to brush it out of his hair.

Patrick shoved Conor's shoulders hard, and demanded, "Now what was that?"

"Da, not here," Conor whined as he watched people around gawking at him.

"...and why's your coat on the ground," his father asked the youngest.

"Because it's too hot," Seán replied as he grabbed it and gave a laugh.

Patrick, knowing he dropped it so he could return a punch, said "yeh, right. You'll know what you're missing when you don't have it anymore. Won't you? There's no sense in either of yeh, is there? I mean, why can't you get along? What would your mother say? And..."

Before he completed the sentence, Seán interrupted with, "Lizzie, is she, really here?"

His brother Conor shrugged. Seán ran off into the crowd.

"Your mother?" their father asked.

Conor shrugged again. "Haven't seen her."

"You know her. She's telling them, what's right. And your sisters, they're not going to want to stay."

"Where's the Captain?" asked Conor.

"The Colonel you mean?" said his father with a grin. "He'll be the last to speak."

“yeh. Sure,” said Conor.

“Your uncle will be anything, he wants to be.”

“And it will be on us, won’t it?”

Patrick stared at the enveloping crowd. He just shrugged and told them, “Your mother will be here soon and she’ll have lots to say.”

Taking the cue, Conor rolled his eyes and quickly slipped away.

Patrick caught sight of his neighbour John Neal as he weaseled through the crowd. “It’s him. It’s John Kelly. I saw him,” yelled a man beside him. He wore a dark brown jacket and was waving a cap madly. “He’s riding in,” he added.

Now we’re going to hear how we’re going to fight those outsiders,” said another man while raising his pipe.

“Shut up and you’ll learn something,” an old man in a light brown waistcoat replied.

“Shore enough,” echoed a voice somewhere in the crowd.

Margaret should be here soon, Patrick thought.

“...souped up with too much hope and unfettered dreams,” he remembered Margaret telling him. “The likes of you. ...forgetting the tempests that killed the French landing two years ago. You don’t know what you’re dealing with.”

She was right, he thought. *She was the one that maintained order*. But he knew whatever the cost, he would be taking all of their boys to the fight.

Patrick returned John Neal’s wave as he made his way through the crowd to join him.



Three weeks had passed since Kevin’s sister Kathleen and his mother had marched to Kiltalea. Their attempts to bring home at least Seamus had failed.

In the early graveyard hours, Kevin’s oldest brother Aiden Neal rode in formation with the rest of Captain John Kelly’s cavalry. It was early June

and for this time of night, it was warm. They were going to New Ross. Remembering the women trying to convince them to return home made Aiden give a mild laugh. The pain in his side quickly sobered him.

He was slightly hunched over and groaned as he stared at the passing ground. There was the beginning of an outline of a shadow. Aiden twisted back and saw an early glimmer on the horizon. When he looked forward it was still difficult to see anything, except around the lantern holders who led the way.

He, like many of the others, wore a coarse dark woollen vest, coat and knickers. His long socks were black. His hair was short, straight and dark brown like his father's, and unlike the others, he didn't wear a hat. Aiden wiped a hand across the rough stubble on his cheek. He was tired and was slipping out of line with the horsemen on his left.

About ten minutes later, Aiden was jarred back to consciousness. Something kicked his shoulder and a voice yelled, "Hey! Wake up."

Aiden realized he was on the verge of falling off his horse. His body had been leaning towards the ground. He stopped his fall by holding his horse's neck. He pulled himself back up quickly. He was more than a horse length behind the others and saw the man next to him had put his foot back in his stirrup.

"Keep it together," the rider with the broken nose ordered. He was chewing on something. He pulled his Irish top hat down and then flicked up his chin as he said, "Get on with yeh, and stay alive."

Aiden gave him an embarrassed nod and nudged the horse with his heels to pick up its pace. When he got ahead, he saw Robert Johnson at his left shaking his head. "He should have let you go," he said. "A hit on the head and a nice run, that would wake you up wouldn't it?"

Aiden held his reins tighter and tried to ignore his snickering. To keep alert, he focused on an exchange a couple of rows back. He heard a horseman who was a couple of lines behind ask, "Mick Murphy isn't it?"

"Sergeant Murphy to you," came the reply. "Young Tadhg Roach, is it?"

"Right you are, but twenty-two's not young."

“We’ll see. You up for the fight?” asked the Sergeant.

“Right as rain,” answered Tadhg Roach. “You’re from the north-east. Yeh must have seen the start of it.”

“...first of it in Wexford...was a terrible thing. There’s no fixing for what they’ve taken from me, and I’m just glad I have a way of showing them the errors of their ways.

“But...” said Tadhg Roach.

“The traitors burnt our houses, and flogged and tortured as they went,” Sergeant Murphy interrupted. “On the north side of the Slaney river, they beat us real bad. The rest of Wexford wouldn’t stand for it and they pushed back hard. With the help of the clergy and some upright Protestant gentry, we stopped them in their tracks.”

During the break in the conversation Aiden continued to try to see through the darkness, but he still had no idea where he was or what was around them.

“Tadhg where did you join up?” the Sergeant asked.

“Joined Captain Kelly when he brought his mountain people to Enniscorthy. That’s where I’m from. We took it back and then we took back the town of Wexford.

“We were definitely in a time of grace, weren’t we?” posited the Sergeant.

“There’s a lot of us. ...shouldn’t be difficult to take New Ross.”

“The Captain told me he expects between five and ten-thousand men will meet up to-day. Keep focused, my son. If we can take New Ross and the mountain pass at Newtownbarry before the English reinforcements come, the rest of Ireland will rise up.

“And if we fail, the Crown’s army will put an end to us, won’t they?” said a heavily bearded rider next to Tadhg.

“You’re right there. Do you understand what we’re up against, Tadhg?”

“Yes, I do, Sergeant.”

“Young Tadhg Roach—good to know you’re awake.”

Aiden heard the Sergeant make a series of clicking sounds and the horse advanced his way.

"Aiden Neal, is that you?" asked Sergeant Murphy as he came along his right side.

"It's himself." Aiden replied.

"Sergeant Mick Murphy—Captain Kelly told me to look in on yeh. You don't look well. Straighten up. You're a soldier, so act like one. You're supposed to be joining the advance guard. Look the part." He looked ahead and added, "Damn, we'll see the outline of the town soon enough."

An awakening dawn reflected off the back of men's coats in front of them.

Aiden didn't look at the man talking to him, but asked, "Why did we have to kill the farmers at Three Rocks? Not all of them could have been the enemy."

"Aiden, do what you're told. You think too much. We need to know we can rely on you to not get our boys killed."

"That's rubbish," Aiden replied.

"Destroying that village saved lives. Ambushing the redcoat's reinforcements won us the town of Wexford. Most of those people were just chased off, and you don't know what you saw. But when someone tries to swing a sword across your neck, you can't hesitate. War is a damn bloody thing—and doing nothing is a whole hell of a lot worse. We're going to liberate New Ross. You've got to be a man and do what you have to. Do you hear me?"

"Why did John Kelly stop me from going to see my da?" asked Aiden.

"He's Captain Kelly to you and don't forget it. His uncle might live next to you but..."

"How did you...?"

"Never you mind and don't interrupt. That doesn't give you the right to show him a lack of respect. Aside from that, I hear yeh. John Neal was a brave man."

"What do you mean 'was'? You don't know that. You don't know anything."

"Calm down, boy. He fell on the battlefield, and a branch punctured his chest."

“You don’t know he died.”

“It looked bad to me. I saw a lot of blood.”

“Why couldn’t I just talk with him?” he asked as he squeezed a curl of reins in a clenched fist.

“We have a war to fight and the Captain won’t give anyone special treatment. Straighten up. The Captain ordered us to be at the wall at the break of dawn. You’re making me look bad. Your father had blood on his sword. He fought well, but for us, this is just the beginning. Now, if you don’t mind, I have to take care of something.”

Aiden straightened up and said, “My da died chasing a bunch of Wexford farmers from their homes.”

The Sergeant didn’t pay attention. He moved out of formation and rode ahead. Aiden saw him stop and dismount by a tree.

When Aiden passed, he watched the man stab a body, that was seated next to a tree. He saw him being stabbed in the neck and chest repeatedly. The victim didn’t move or make any noise.

“Not much interest in asking who they’re fighting for, is there?” Aiden muttered. He straightened, and advanced. The rider in front picked up his pace to maintain formation.

About twenty minutes later the rebel cavalry approached New Ross amidst a purple sunrise. Aiden’s contingent waited to merge with the rest of the horsemen. The cavalry was becoming part of a second line of the advance guard. Long lines of men with pikes were lining up on their flank. He estimated that once they got into position there would be about five hundred of them lining up facing a wall that wrapped the town in a half-circle along the Barrow River. An existing line of horsemen stopped in front of the open Bewley gate. The entrance gate was adjoined on one side by a two-storey tenement and on the other by a wall. A marksman hid behind a low defensive wall above the gate. A couple of muskets hung out of windows on the second floor of a residential tenement.

Aiden looked around but didn’t see any sign of his younger brother Seamus. He hadn’t seen him since before he followed the charge into Three Rocks. The purple was surrendering to an advancing column of blue sky

flowing from the east. He felt helpless as the sun dragged him into another day of dread.



A crowd, mostly of women and children, watched the preparations for the battle from about a quarter of a mile above and north-east of the Bewley Gate entrance. They stood on the crown of a plateau, which had a gentle slope that swept down to the town walls, through the town to the river beyond. The spectators watched the soldiers and cannons move around in the town streets. They stood in the open, to the north of the medical tent. A road that ran parallel to the town wall separated them from the wounded. The families had heard that the battle was going to be fierce and were collected there with the intent of bringing their wounded home.

Bridget Neal had a firm grasp on seven-year-old Kevin's shoulders. His fourteen-year-old sister Kathleen stood beside him and within her line of sight. Julia Sinnott, a close friend and neighbour stood to her right, with her twelve-year-old daughter Fiona.

Kevin's Mam crouched down, turned him around, and as she rubbed his eyes greeted him with "Maidin mhaith." When she didn't give him the food, she promised, Kevin stared up at his sister. Kathleen pointed to the food bag her mother was carrying.

"You must be starving," his mother told him as she caressed his curls. She gave each of them a chunk of bread. When Bridget Neal stood up, she nervously caressed her wavy hair. There was chaos in the curls, that couldn't be tamed by a bun at the back. She pushed up a rolled sleeve that persistently settled below the elbow but then held the edges of the shawl that hung loosely over her shoulders. As lines of men from many directions entered into formation in front of the wall. Bridget nervously pace back and forth in her space between Julia and an old man who moved into position to her left. He didn't look well, and he spat out a big gob of something unsightly.

“Are Aiden and Seamus here?” Kevin asked as he pulled on her skirt. “Where’s da?”

“Just give me a minute,” his mother replied.

He kicked at a small rock.

“Kevin, those are your Mass shoes. Don’t.” She took another look at the cavalry that was lining up in front of the town wall. The battlefield was still, except for a few officers scurrying back and forth behind the troops. In the distance, she saw men leading a herd of cattle.

She caressed his dark hair again, put both hands on his shoulders, drew him near without looking at him and told him, “they should be with the other horseman in front of the wall, but I don’t know. I don’t see them.”

“Yeh know, ti’s as fine a place, as they come,” Julia said as she looked at Bridget Neal and with her finger mapped a half-circle in the air. She gave a side look to Kathleen, pointed with a thumb over her shoulder and said, “The infirmary, behind us there, is where they’ll set them. Heaven on that.” She returned her hands to clasp each other at her waist. Julia Sinnott was a solid build of a woman who was used to gruelling hard work. She hesitated to state anything as fact without seeing for herself. A white linen kerchief covered her hair. A light grey linen blouse was modestly covered with a woollen shawl which was securely wrapped and tucked into a belt. The sleeves were rolled up above the elbows and a light linen apron covered a dark calf-length skirt

“Is it safe to be up here?” Kathleen asked. “I mean people in the town can see us looking at them,” said Kathleen. The sleeves of her light linen blouse were rolled up below the elbows like her mother. Her uncovered light grey blouse was buttoned to the neck and the light grey skirt didn’t have an apron. Her hair had the light brown colour of her brother Seamus’s but was straight and manageable like Aiden’s. Her mother was going to answer, but it was Julia Sinnott she was looking at.

“We’re with the sick,” Julia said. She turned and leaned closer to Kathleen and said, “Heavens, yes. D’hey wouldn’t dare touch us.”

“But have you ever seen...?”

“Kathleen, don’t be rude,” interrupted her mother.

"The people dey're are common daycent Wexford folk. You've got a point dough. Dey're all in a terrible state." She gave a stern stare to her daughter Fiona who pretended to ignore her. She bent closer and told her, "Don't yeh go leaving us, yeh hear, or I'll clobber yeh." Julia stood upright, giggled and gave Bridget a wink.

"Kathleen, you look out for Fiona," Bridget Neal added.

Kevin pulled on his mother's skirt and looked up at her with a persistent gaze.

His mother ignored him, and after staring at the lines of rebel cavalry she reported, "I see some other groups of horsemen riding in to join the lines at the gate."

"Dat's dem," Julia added. "...don't see my Fredrick, but dere's Captain Kelly. Dat one is as fine as dey come, yeh know." She bent down and pointed out what she was looking at.

"Mrs. Sinnott, do you see my da?" Kevin asked again. "What's Seamus doing?"

"No, not yet," she replied.

When she stood up she leaned over to Bridget and added, "Dat's a special ting. She drew a small circle ahead of her, raised her hand upwards, circled again as she said," See the officers are going on about something with those lads with white flags. ...A peaceful surrender—wouldn't that be something?"

"That just means no-one's going home," said Bridget Neal. "After this, they'll just go to the next battle. Winning here isn't going to end it. The English are sending an army of soldiers to fight farmers with pikes. How do you think that's going to go?"

"Hard to know what to pray for," Julia replied as she watched representatives with white flags march from the officers' tent, towards the town wall gate.

"Well will you look at that?" said Mrs. Neal.

"What's dat," asked Julia.

"I think I see Seamus," said Bridget. "He doesn't have a hat, and he's moving his arms while the rest aren't doing a thing, can you see him? He's

lost his jacket...”

“Dat hair, da way he’s not sitting and acting. Yeh, dat’s your boy.”

“And I see Aiden. There he is!” Bridget said. “He’s near the gate.” She meant to point them out to the children, but they were gone.



As Aiden’s lines of horsemen merged into formation with the rest of the cavalry in front of the gate by the New Ross wall, he saw a big herd of cattle being positioned behind them.

The rider next to him was scratching his head.

“I hear yeh,” said Aiden.

He watched Captain Kelly ride up front where he gave a speech to the men.

“We will take New Ross as we did the towns of Enniscorthy, and Wexford. You’ve all fought well beside me and have proven to naysayers that in the end, we can and will rule the day. Look at us! We’re United Irishmen. Wexford’s Protestant and Catholic finest are riding together to show the English crown that Ireland can and will manage its’ own affairs, thank you very much. Lads, our fight begins here in Wexford. When the rest of Ireland sees what we’ve done, the rest of the island will follow. Ireland has freed itself from the discrimination of the penal laws and because of what we do today, I can see a day when, like the French, we’ll have the rights and freedoms we deserve.

“Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité!” shouted an Irish rebel.

“Like the French,” yelled a rider behind him.

“Away with land ownership of the few!” cried another.

“Vive la France,” yelled another Irish man, who raised his hat in the air.

“Éireann go Brách,” Captain Kelly shouted. “I see families in the distance. Men, make them proud. Stand fast and await my orders.”

Captain Kelly and several other officers rode back to join the

commanding officer.

Aiden saw long lines of pikemen march towards a side gate in the wall. On the other side up the hill, he saw a line of women but couldn't make them out well because they were too far away.

The battle at Three Rocks had left him disheartened, but he like the men next to him knew they had to take this town. If they couldn't take it from the locals this time, it was going to be much more difficult when the English sent in reinforcements.

"Who's that?" Aiden heard someone ask.

"The commander, you mean?" said a man who was a couple of horses away from him. "That's Bagenal Harvey of Bargy Castle. He's a Protestant barrister. He's trying to persuade the other side to surrender."

"How do you know?"

"Men with white flags have been going back and forth. We're just waiting for another white flag to come out and tell us if they're going to surrender. It worked at Wexford, maybe it'll work here too."

"So, we're going home," someone yelled from behind.

"Go tell that to Harvey and he'll string you up."

Aiden, along with the rest of the cavalry waited for what seemed an eternity. He watched a man with a white flag walk out from the entrance gate. Captain Kelly rode through the lines of cavalry to intercept him. A soldier from the wall shot the man with the flag. There was a cacophony of screaming and yelling. A few minutes later the chaos was followed by a herd of stampeding cattle which thundered around the cavalry's formation from their flank and ploughed towards the open Bewley gate.

Aiden heard someone screaming, "Halt, you fools!"

He heard Captain Kelly order, "Draw swords."

To Aiden's right, he saw the Captain with his raised sword, order something, to the contingent at his far right. Aiden felt frozen with fear. What he was experiencing didn't seem real. He squeezed his raised sword tightly to feel something. He heard the Captain give the order "... CHARGE!" and he watched him slice his sword forward. The contingent on his right raced towards the noise of the thundering hooves coming from

the dirt cloud emanating from the gate. The Captain raised his sword again.

It's time to face death, thought Aiden. *Da, I pray, I can do what I have to.* He wanted to bless himself but was afraid the others would consider him weak. He noticed that the hands of a boy ahead and to his left were shaking nervously. Aiden squeezed his sword and his reins more firmly.

Once the command to charge was given for their line, the riders raced towards the entrance in pairs. Aiden prepared to hold his breath as he passed through the dirt cloud, but he saw a spew of blood gush up by his left hand. The wind spewed some of it at his face. The horse's head twisted. His mount buckled and as Aiden spun off everything seemed to slow. The gates were so close. Aiden couldn't believe this is where he would die. He noticed that the rest of the cavalry was edging to race around him and leave him behind.

Mam doesn't know da's gone, he thought. *I'm not there... and this is it and for nothing. Dear God—no!*

Before hitting the ground he heard the bugle sound for the next line to charge. His body slammed and rolled across the ground. He lost consciousness when the back of his head hammered the ground.



“Kevin, what are you doing?” asked Kathleen, as she and Fiona came running up to him. “You can't be here without telling us.”

“I'm still hungry.” He was watching a grey-haired man who was on the road building a wooden table.

Kathleen noticed a breastfeeding woman was giving a girl that was about Kevin's age some bread.

“Mam's just worried. That's all,” Kathleen told him and she drew out a bit of dried bread that she had stored in her blouse. “You can have this,” she said as she waved it in front of his nose.

He grabbed and ate it. Kevin looked at the young girl in front of him and said, “Some people are just stupid.”

"Anty is it? So what did she do?"

"Are the Kellys here?" he asked. "Is she?"

"No, they went to Enniscorthy," she replied.

"Why are people mean?"

"They don't know their head from their arse, I guess," she replied.

"What's that got to do with Anty?"

"She said that da's wasn't coming back, and there's nothing I can do about it."

Kathleen noticed that the mother and little girl were gone and that the man was pulling the table off the road and yelling at women that were nearby. One of them brought over some saws and knives. *He must be a doctor*, she thought.

"But..." she added. She didn't know what to say. "What would you have liked to tell her?"

"That I told Captain Kelly. She didn't listen to me."

"What do you mean, you...?" but before she finished her thought, Fiona interrupted and told her that her Mam was waving at them. "Your mam must be upset because my mam was holding her hand," she added.

Kathleen looked back at Kevin asked, "What else is it?"

"Maybe she went away because she didn't believe me."

"Kevin, that's not true. Her mother just took them to a safe place. That's all. She's not going to..."

From the infirmary, a woman screamed, "Do what I asked. It's begun, and there's no time."

From the other side of Kathleen, someone else screamed, "Fiona, what'd I tell you 'bout walking off?" It was Julia.

"Do you know where we are?" she asked. "What are you doing here? Kathleen, you should know better."

"But it was Kevin."

"Don't blame..."

"Seamus?" Kevin asked.

"What? I don't know. You should ask your mam. Kathleen, take care of them please," Julia Sinnott ordered. "I've got to get back."

The boy watched Mrs. Sinnott run to the infirmary. She argued with a couple of boys and then rushed back to join his mother.

Kathleen crouched down, looked at him in the eyes and told him, “Kevin, don’t know exactly what it is between you two but the next time you meet, you tell her. You have to fix it. Do you understand?”

Kevin looked at her quizzically, nodded and put a hand out.

“After this, you’ll have to get it from Mam,” she said, as she gave him another small piece of bread. “I don’t have anymore.”



Aiden opened his eyes slowly. His head was pounding and he was dizzy, out of breath and ached all over.

Aiden remained still while he analyzed his situation. He was sprawled out on the ground on his side and faced the wall gate at an angle. He remembered falling and being shot at. Above him he noticed that the barrels of two muskets stuck out from openings in the wall.

There is no doubt, one of them will get me if I move, thought Aiden. Where’s my sword? He didn’t see it anywhere. Beyond the gate, there’s a lot of fighting. If Captain Kelly routs the town, they’ll come back for those two, won’t they? Is that likely? I doubt it. God in heaven...can’t stay here. I’m going to have to make a run for it.

Not far from where he lay, he saw the body of a dead Loyalist. “Lord he’s the one that killed the man with the white flag. Not playing with a full deck, were yeh,” he whispered. Aiden recognized the feather in the man’s hat. He didn’t see his musket anywhere.

Beyond the gate, he saw that the dust from the cattle and the cavalry had cleared. There was a lot of rifle fire in the background. Other members of the cavalry lay around him, some moaning, some ominously still.

A middle-aged rebel struggled to stand up. “Idiotic fools,” he said to the wounded. “New Ross surrendered. Why didn’t we wait for reinforcements?” Blood flowed down his cheek from an open cut at the side

of his head. His hand covered a wound on his arm.

Aiden looked on with disbelief. *You fool. Don't you realize?*

Blasts of musket fire sounded from the wall above. There was a gush of blood up from the top of the man's head. He spun slightly, and Aiden barely caught the look of shock on the man's face as he toppled dead to the ground.

Aiden froze with fear. He rolled his eyes up and caught a glance of the face of the soldier, but he and the other musket-man quickly pulled back from the wall. *Something has got their attention.* He felt himself shivering. When he tried to move, he felt a sharp stabbing pain in his left shoulder. *Lord, it feels ripped,* he thought as he stared at the bloodstain on his jacket. *My right leg feels sprained; and I really must have smashed my head. We're having a fine time of it, aren't we? The muskets are firing inside now,* he observed. *I'd better make a run for it while they're distracted. I wish I had the stamina of Seamus. If any of us is going to get through, sure enough, it will be him. Nothing is going to stop that one.*

Aiden tried to push himself up, but he felt dizzy. *Lord Almighty, it aches.* He stopped, but the pain in his head didn't go away. *If I could take a little rest,* he thought. He wanted so much to close his eyes.



“Bridget, I spoke to the children. Dey'll stay close and don't worry, I'll keep a good eye on dem.”

“He's trying to move,” Bridget told her.

“Went to the infirmary and spoke to the boys who carry in the wounded. Dey won't go out unless the soldiers tell them it's safe. Aidan is too close to the wall, dey say. I'd pray that your boy doesn't let them know he's alive. If he lies still until they win the fight inside, we'll get him out. Save your prayers for dat.”

Bridget looked around the medical tent for older and more capable men, other than the doctors but there wasn't anyone else. She heard cannon

and musket fire inside the town and at other gates. She watched clusters of men hack each other mercilessly throughout the town streets. The dust from the stampede receded and the formation of the rebel cavalry was starting to disperse.

“Lort help us. If only, dey’re were more soldiers,” said Julia.

“Well, there aren’t. That’s all there is,” said Mrs. Neal. She grabbed Julia’s hand and held it tightly.



Through the Bewley Gate, Aiden watched a wave of rebel pikemen run by the end of the entrance roadway. Although background gunfire was consistent, the amount of it lessened. *Dear Lord, we’re running out of ammunition.*

At the end of the street, the fighting became chaotic. He saw loyalists with swords stabbing rebels without pikes. He watched three Loyalists turn a wagon over at the next intersection. A farmer hit one of them with a club and took his sword. He and some other men chased the remaining two down the roadway towards the entrance gate. *What fools they are. They think they have the loyalists on the run, but they’re going to hit back.*

Muskets fired and the farmers started to fall. When the musketeers stopped to reload, two men jumped up from under the bodies.

God Almighty, it’s Seamus. That stupid fool. They’re going to kill him.

Aiden pushed his hand towards him and muttered, “Go away. Go back Seamus.”

He looked up at the wall and didn’t see the guns, but he knew they would hear him if he called. He dragged himself a few feet nearer to the gate, pulled some stones towards him and threw one as far as he could, but it only went as far as the gate entrance.

Aiden saw Seamus drive a pike into the face of one of the Loyalists.

“Have to do something to help...” whispered Aiden.

Seamus fell, twisted, ran, picked up another pike and used it to kill

another combatant. From the fallen man he grabbed a sword, chopped at the arm of an older man and stabbed a younger one.

Aiden tried to stand and pointed upwards with two fingers. Seamus recognized him and he froze for an instant. He stepped back, picked up a fallen musket, checked, prepared it and fired. He must have missed because a couple of shots were returned and one grazed his leg.

Aiden noticed that some men had set a fire in the middle of the crossroads far behind Seamus. Some men dragged the wooden wagon towards it.

Oh my God, thought Aiden. *We're losing. Damn it.* He realized Seamus's only chance for survival was to follow, so he beckoned his brother to join him.

Seamus kept loading his musket.

Aiden looked around for his sword, but he didn't see it. He could barely stand.

Seamus fired upwards at a musketeer. Another shot him in the leg. Two New Ross men with swords and one with a pike ran towards him from the other end of the street so he dropped the musket, picked up a sword and hobbled bravely towards them. He sliced the arm of one of them and blocked the blade of the other. With horror, Aiden saw two more soldiers enter the street with muskets.

Seamus stepped out of the way of a pike and managed, with his left hand to pull the man towards him so he could stab him.

Far behind the soldiers, he saw men throw a body onto the bonfire behind them. It started moving madly when it burst into flame.

"The man's alive. They're animals!" Aiden choked.

Loyalists threw another wounded man on, and then another.

Aiden hobbled towards the gate, but Seamus waved him back.

Aiden flagged him to run to him and started shouting, "I'm here, you pagan, rat-infested bowl of swill. I'm over here you, cowards." He quickly started hobbling away from the wall to get beyond the range of musket fire. As he backed away, he kept flagging his brother to follow.

Aiden saw the end of a musket appear on his side of the wall. As he

prepared to turn, he saw Seamus start to run towards him, but he was too late. One of the men chasing him caught up to him and slashed his left arm. He saw his brother quickly cover the open bleeding wound with his other hand and he called something to him.

“Seamus,” groaned Aiden as he turned and stumbled in a mad struggle to stay alive. He focused on the image of his brother’s lips saying something about “Mam.”

Something hit the ground beside Aiden. The next shot and the next were behind him. He looked back and saw three men slashing his brother’s body with swords.

Aiden forced himself to keep moving away.

“Dear God, Seamus has fallen,” he said under his breath. *We’re going to lose New Ross. I have to tell someone. ...and Mam needs to know.*

He took a last look back. Beyond the gate entrance, the pyre now looked like a blazing inferno. Above the gates, he now recognized the presence of other smoke plumes.

I’m looking at hell itself, he thought.



“Why is Aiden just standing there? Why doesn’t he run?” asked Bridget Neal. “Get away from there!” she screamed.

“Bridget, if he can see you jumping, waving and screaming, don’t you think they will too?”

They watched Aiden hobble beyond the range of musket fire.

Bridget stared at Julia, and yelled, “He made it. He’s done it.”

Julia gave her hand a comforting squeeze.

Bridget looked around for the boys with the stretchers, but she didn’t see any of them. She also didn’t see the girls or Kevin.

She heard Julia say, “No. No, dear Lord.”

“What?”

“The soldiers—dey’re coming out of the gate.”

Bridget heard musket fire and saw the form of her son Aiden fall to the

ground holding his stomach.

Two men with muskets came out of the gate. After three attempts each, one of them managed to shoot him in the lower back. One of the two looked back inside and yelled something. The other followed him back inside.

"He might not be dead," Bridget moaned. "I'm going. Oh dear Lord, the children!"

Julia took a quick scan, but she didn't see them. She touched Bridget's hand and said, "Dear, if you have to... Yeh don't have to worry." Julia added a nod.

Bridget picked up her skirts and ran as fast as she could down the slope and across the open fields. The men that shot her son hadn't advanced beyond the town entrance gate. She got close enough to recognize the jacket his father had sewn for him. She got close enough to recognize the way Aiden parted his hair, the lines of his face and finally the remaining life in his eyes.

She saw his lips say, "Mam?" with a look of utter disbelief.

"Your father?" she asked as she was running.

He pointed away with his right hand and lowered his eyes.

"Oh, good God," she said, as she fell on her knees. "Lord in Heaven. Aiden. I..." Aiden started crawling towards her.

She stopped about 200 feet from him.

"And Seamus?" she moaned.

He pointed with his left hand to the wall and lowered his eyes again.

"Oh my God." She blessed herself and got up.

Bridget started to run to Aiden again, but she stopped. She stood frozen.

Responding to the expression on his mother's face Aiden glanced back. A man on the wall was waving a pike with a decapitated head on it. Seconds later a charge of riders rushed out of the town gate.

"Mam, run. You have to go now!" yelled Aiden. He grabbed a handful of sand.

Bridget didn't know what to do.

“Go. You don’t want to see this. Run!” With a scream, he stood up and took off his coat. He raised a palm to her in front of his chest and looked down.

She saw that his hand that was holding his stomach was covered in blood. His face was also spattered with blood.

“Why?” she screamed as she held out her arms. She saw the soldiers riding their horses hard, and every one of them had raised swords. All she wanted to do was stay with her boys and her husband John because it felt so right.

“Damn it, Mam. Go!” yelled Aiden as he threw his handful of sand at her. “For Kathleen, Kevin and me!”

She crossed herself, touched her lips, and turned away. She ran and ran because their world depended on it.



Julia Sinnott stood in shock, “The children,” she gasped.

They weren’t close. She looked and looked and still didn’t see them. She stared around and into the crowd until she located the girls talking to some children.

After rushing to them, she raised her open hands wide above her shoulders, and shouted, “Girl, what were you thinking?” and slapped Fiona’s behind. She pointed to Kathleen and spun her finger like a little tornado in the air for emphasis and told her, “You’re scaring us to death. Were you told to wander off? Well, were you?” She gave each of the girls a disappointed look, and pointed to her Fiona and told her, “You have no sense, don’t yeh know?”

“Kathleen was helping that little girl. She was lost and we found her mother and then we came back here to help these ladies.”

“And where’s Kevin?”

“Well, he was... Oh, he’s just being stupid,” said Fiona. “Now he’s way over there. He’s next to those shrubs. He’s talking to a lady who has a boy

that's his age. She's wearing a dark red shawl."

"I am going to get him and I want you girls, to stay dey're until I get back."

"Where's my mam?" asked Kathleen.

"Stay dey're til I get back," ordered Mrs. Sinnott and she hurried past the infirmary.

"What in heaven's name is he doing way over dey're?" she asked herself. "...not thinking of running away, is he?"

She found him talking to the son of a Bidy Greene. The boy was a couple of inches taller than he was. "Nothing to worry about Julia. He's been good company for my son, Jack."

"Kevin, your mam and I were worried," Julia said as she patted his hair. She bent down to look him in the eye, put her hand on the little boy's shoulder and asked, "Why did you run away?"

"It was smelly and people were screaming and acting mean."

"He's quite talkative," said Bidy, "and he really knows his stories, doesn't he?"

Julia gave her a cordial smile and a nod. "What's he been saying?"

"He was telling us about how Fionn McCool and his men would do such a fine job if they were here. He says, that the Púcaman is going to help Captain Kelly and that everyone else will be able to just sit back and watch. That would be grand, wouldn't it?" she said as she fiddled and wrapped her shawl more securely around her neck and drew nearer to the boys.

"That's just what we need," Julia said and forced herself to give him a pleasant smile as she stood up. Her hands were clasped, in a relaxed fashion, at her waist. "...Just like his brother Seamus, isn't he? If only it was as simple, as all dat."

Julia looked back at New Ross. She saw the smoke from rising from raging pyres at street corners throughout the town. She walked about ten feet away, so she could get a clearer view.

She saw Bridget, getting off her knees. Julia was overtaken with horror when she understood what was happening.

Aiden was standing, and trying to flag his mother away. Loyalist

cavalry with swords poured out from the town gate. Julia watched them stab the fallen as they moved across the field.

“Oh dear Lord. Dey’re going to take you both,” Julia gasped. She froze with guilt and disbelief at what she had just said. Bridget’s son Kevin was behind her. She brought her knuckles to her chin.

Julia saw heads on sticks being raised along the top of the town wall. “...God forsaken heathens. How could dey?” she asked.

As she watched Bridget leave Aiden, the riders bore towards them. Aiden staved off the first blow by whipping back with his jacket. A second rider from behind slashed Aiden in the head.

“Dear girl, don’t look back. Run,” ordered Julia with her fists clenched by her chest like a boxer. “Just run. Keep running.” She sensed that Mrs. Neal knew what had happened because she stretched out an arm to her even though Julia knew that her vision wasn’t as good as hers. She returned a symbolic last small wave. Julia stood stunned, horrified, yet captivated as she watched the enemy continued to race towards her. She didn’t wait to witness the murder of her friend as she turned and ran. She gave a quick check back and saw that the riders continued to ride towards the hill.

“Dey’re coming to kill us,” Julia gasped. “Dear Lord in heaven—the children. Where are the poor children?” she yelled after turning and not seeing anyone behind her.

“Oh my Lord, Kevin! Where are yeh?” There were clusters of women and children madly racing away from the lookout to the north-west towards the trees and mountains.

She caught sight of Kevin running with an elderly woman.

The boy has more sense than I do, she thought. She looked back to where she had left the girls. They were supposed to be on the far side of the infirmary. She didn’t see them anywhere.

“Dear God, what do I do?”

She looked back at Kevin. He tripped, and the old woman kept running. Julia ran to him and found him crying. She grabbed him and hugged him burying his face in her deep cleavage with her hand at the back of his head and told him, “Kevin, I’m here.” She let him go and stared him

in the eye and said, "We're looking for Kathleen and Fiona." When she stood up, she noticed that everyone around them was running in a panic and that they were being left behind.

"Where's my mam?" Kevin asked as he stood looking up to her.

"The bad men were chasing her. Now they're after us," she replied. "We have to find Kathleen and Fiona." She firmly grabbed Kevin's hand.

"Kathleen," he said as he pointed behind her.

Julia looked back and saw her daughter Fiona next to Kathleen by the medical tent. A stampede of horsemen was rushing towards them.

"Dear God, dey came back. Dey did exactly what we asked of them," Julia gasped. "Oh dear, God."



Kevin pulled on her skirt, and said, "I'm afraid."

As Julia picked him up, Kevin noticed that the solid bear of a woman had eyes that were filled with tears. As she held him, he heard her say, "Dear, dear Bridget. Why?" In an instant, she squeezed him so tight that Kevin didn't think he'd be able to breathe, but her grip loosened when she started running.

Kevin stared over her shoulder and watched the girls move away from the medic's tent. It looked like terrible men on horses were coming out of the ground on the horizon. People were terrified of them. They were running away and screaming. Kevin started crying. When the riders got near the people by the tent, they hurt them very badly. Kevin watched a rider chase Kathleen and when he reached her, her head shook, and there was a spray of red. Kevin watched her fall but lost sight of the girls because soldiers kept hurting people and breaking things.

"Mam?" Kevin screamed. "Mam!"

In the tears of big solid Mrs. Sinnott, in her touch and in the pronunciation of his mother's name, he felt his mother's tears. Kevin didn't know what to make of it, but he felt it.

In the bounce, bounce, rhythm of Julia Sinnott's running, he felt, heard, and saw the waving of many arms with swords, reaching from a clump of men and horses, cutting and torching wantonly. He watched the horses trample a young girl. Through his tears, he watched flames from tents spread to the clothes of the wounded and nurses.

Through his tears and the sounds of his own crying, he watched beasts slice people apart. A barefoot woman that was racing near them with a young girl in her arms was falling behind. He watched her trip, and the two of them tumbled across the ground. Kevin screamed louder, and wet himself as he stared at eyes of men and horses that looked stressed, maddened and unnatural. The bad things were racing after them.

Kevin saw a big, single, thundering, mad beast. The monster of war was an evil thing, like nothing he could have imagined. It had many legs and arms, breathed fire and cut life from the living.

"They are coming for us," groaned Mrs. Sinnott. She held on to Kevin tightly, as she ran. Kevin could still hear his own screams when he put his hands over his ears.

Mrs. Sinnott stopped, near a crowd of women and children. She put the boy down, stared back and saw soldiers riding towards them. She knelt, took his hands off his ears and told him, "The bad men are coming. Look at me," she said as she caressed his hair and put her hand at the back of his neck.

Kevin was crying uncontrollably and shaking. "Yeh have to stop." She slapped his behind and repeated "Yeh have to stop. The bad men are coming and yeh can't let them hear yeh. Do yeh understand?" She glared at his eyes.

He still shivered uncontrollably but nodded. She grabbed him and gave him another powerful hug and kissed him and rested her forehead on his.

"Someday, you're going to make the monsters pay. Your mother will be proud of yeh," she said. Her face was covered in tears. She wiped her eyes and said, "Now, I want you to hide in the bush behind me and make yourself small. Whatever happens, don't move and they won't find you. Do

you understand?" She waved him away. "Now, go," she ordered. "Hurry. Quickly. Dat's a good lad." After he slipped into the small bush, she stood up and turned to face the oncoming rage of beasts.



Although Kevin huddled up with his head between his knees and his hands over his ears, he could still see the back of big Mrs. Sinnott's dress through the leaves in front of him. As the sounds of horses hooves got close, he heard a woman call out, "No, no you can't." Terrifying bouts of screaming followed.

Kevin heard Mrs. Sinnott in front of him choke, "In God's name, have you no mercy?" He heard the snort of a horse and then he watched Mrs. Sinnott raise her arms. She gave a terrifying scream like he heard before as something smashed at her and smashed... There were sprays of red and she toppled to his right. He could only see the back of her dress when she landed on the ground. When the horseman rode out of the way, he saw that the circle of women and children were on the ground and had ugly gaping wounds. Kevin wanted so badly to scream with all his might, but he saw a woman on her knees screaming very loudly. A horseman came back, got off his horse and cut her with his sword. Other horseman came back to the circle, dismounted and collected things from the bodies.

"Mamma," moaned Kevin very quietly as he rocked back and forth, back and forth...

He looked at the back of Mrs. Sinnott's dress. It had stopped twitching. She was unmoving.

After a few minutes, the horseman rode away out of sight. Kevin closed his eyes, but he still saw the bad things. Putting his hands on his ears didn't stop the sounds. They were still loud, awful, and terrifying. His pants were fouled with pee and poo and he shivered with fear. If anyone saw him move, he knew the bad men would cut him too. *No crying or they'll hear me*, he thought. He tried to clear his tear-laden eyes.

From behind young Kevin, a pair of hands grabbed the back of his coat. The boy attempted to lean forward and reach Mrs. Sinnott. The hands on him were too strong. Kevin tried to slip out of his jacket, but the hands grabbed him out by his armpits. He saw that a hand had fresh blood on it. Once Kevin got pulled out of the bush, he tried to kick the figure's shins.

Kevin twisted around and saw that he was fighting against a boy who looked like he was about Kathleen's age. He was about fourteen and had a bleeding cut along his neck and another across his shoulder.

"Quiet boy, we have to run for it. I'm trying to save your life."

"But..."

"Oh, good God, stand up," the boy said as he pulled him up by his bloody hand. He wiped the wound at his neck with the back of his sleeve and then grabbed and hefted young Kevin over his shoulder. "Damn it," said the boy as he started to run.

From the boy's shoulder, Kevin saw a man hit a boy with a stick. He kept hitting and hitting...

After a long run, the boy put Kevin down.

Kevin heard someone scream, "Douglas, Douglas. This way. Quickly. We're leaving."

The boy grabbed his hand and pulled him towards a crowd of people. He attempted to put Kevin's fist in the hand of an old lady, but Kevin pulled it away and slapped back. The old woman's hand was bleeding and dirty looking and Kevin didn't like the look of it.

"She will take care of you and I have to go," the boy said and ran away. Kevin heard him call, "Mammy is that you? Wait for me."

Kevin backed away from the old lady. She pointed across an open field. "That's where I'm going," she said.

"No. I am going over there, toward the mountain," he replied and pointed in a different direction. Kevin ran toward the mountain and followed a line of people marching to the road that had led his family to this awful place. He didn't recognize anyone's faces. Most of the strangers were bleeding, moaning or crying. He couldn't tell if any of them were good people. He felt guilty of leaving nice Mrs. Sinnott, but he was very

afraid. He was very afraid.

A young girl took his hand for a long piece, but she got distracted and Kevin lost contact with her. A lady shuffled him along with her two boys and a crowd of a dozen others.

When he reached the main road after an hour of walking, he heard someone screaming, "They're coming. They're coming." Kevin ran, from the clutter of strangers, across the open fields towards the mountains. He managed to get away from people. He found a farmer's three-foot stone boundary wall similar to the one he curled up against with his mother and sister the night before. Although very tired, he dragged and leaned fallen branches against it as his mother and sister had shown him. They needed to be protected against the bad men his mother had told him. He crawled in under the cover and lay with his back against the stones.

Kevin kept seeing images of running feet, screaming faces and people letting go because they were being chased. "Mamma, where are you? Mamma? I miss you," he muttered to himself.

When he rested in Julia Sinnott's arms, he had felt like he was being told that he would never see her again.

"Where's Anty? Wherever you are Anty, don't come here!" he whispered.

Like all those hurt and frightened people, he was terrified. His body jolted whenever he heard something strange. He kept softly repeating, "Run. Anty run." He stopped making sounds for a minute. When he didn't hear anything in a louder voice, he told himself, "Someday the monster is going to pay."

With his blood-covered hands, he reached for the branch and broke a stick off it. He pulled it back to his chest and curled up. Yesterday, he had his mother and sister's embrace. Now, he lay alone and shivering.

After waking from a sleep Kevin still felt tired. He looked around and remembered where he was. He wiped his eyes. The sun was starting to pass beyond the mountain so that it was almost dark. He was groggy. He called, "Mam," but he didn't see her. "Mam," he called again. All he saw was darkness, some trees around him, and some strange fields.

He remembered seeing his sister. He saw her strange, open eyes. There was just that stare.

That wasn't her. That wasn't Kathleen. “Mam? Da? Where are you?”

His tears, sobbing and shaking eventually felt like someone else's. While waiting for the morning, he watched for the monster. He had seen it. It had many heads and did very bad things. He held the stick tightly.

“Kathleen,” he began.

Kevin startled and moved his head and looked up through the leaves to a dark blackness above. It wasn't a sound that surprised him. It was a feeling that there was a thing out there that was unseen and it was coming. Another gust of wind fluttered the leaves.

“Why?” he asked in a quieter voice. His feet shifted from the weeds. The cold firm farmer's ground made him yearn for Mam and neither she nor Kathleen was there for snuggling. “Sometimes she walks so fast. She doesn't wait,” he scolded. In a louder voice came, “She could have stayed with me. And she yelled at Mr. Murtagh.

“And always leaving when she's not supposed to.

“She...”

Remembering things not supposed to be seen, stopped him. Closing his eyes didn't make it go away.

The torn oak saplings above him shook threateningly, and Kevin retracted his hand. He stopped breathing. Curling onto his side, he whispered, “...but he didn't save us.”

Pushing back firmly against the cold stone boundary wall, he tried to control the shivering. He stilled for the sounds of monsters, waiting for the voices but they didn't come.

“For good people, he'll do anything,” he remembered Thomas say.

His little dirt-caked hand loosened its grip on the sticky blood-stained weapon. The foil touched the rustling leaves, but they wouldn't be stilled. Seven-year-old Kevin Neal smashed the cover above—hard. Whatever was out there, didn't shake back.