

*Author of the World of Shadows series*

*The*  
**Banshee**  
*Cries*



PATRICIA MORAIS



# **THE BANSHEE CRIES**

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First published by Smashwords with the title *The Roommate* in October 2016

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## **THE BANSHEE CRIES**

Patricia Morais

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Cover: [Pikwizard](#) and Patricia Morais

ASIN: B093FZCWW2

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*Ye nymphs and swains, whom love inspires  
With all his pure and faithful fires,  
Hither with joyful steps repair;  
You who his tenderest transports share  
For lo! in beauty's gayest pride,  
Summer expands her bosom wide;  
The sun no more in clouds inshrin'd,  
Darts all his glories unconfin'd;  
The feather'd choir from every spray  
Salute Melissa's natal day.*

— Thomas Blacklock, *Ode on Melissa's Birthday*



## 1. I DON'T HAVE ANY LUCK

**I walk the hallway of my new student accommodation with both fear and excitement.** The corridor that leads me to my new room is a lot different from the ones I'm used to.

A shiver runs down my spine. I hate thinking about those white and empty halls with white doors on each side so I push the memory away. This is my opportunity for a new start and I'm not going to waste it by thinking about that place.

Instead, the new accommodation is bursting with life and colour. People are loud and I smile at the sometimes incomprehensible accent.

I love Ireland, although I've never been here until now. But I had an opportunity to start over, and I knew I wouldn't find a place better than Galway.

Then why is my heart beating so fast?

I also don't want to think about my inability to connect with people because it reminds me of the other place. Instead, I blame the Halloween-decorated walls. Because even though those other halls were gloomy, they were safe. Seasonal decoration means constant change and, after the year I've had, I am not ready for constant change.

I push the semi-open door of my new room and walk in.

My room is bright and clean with only one window which covers the entire wall. On one side, there is a bed with a red and yellow duvet and a mural of pictures and quotes above it. And, on the other, there is a naked mattress.

I let my things rest on the empty bed and stare out the window where the auburn leaves fall. In my mind, there is relief and hopes for a normal life.

“Oh, you must be my new roommate.” The voice makes me jump. I spin around and see a slender girl with raven black hair open her eyes wide while concealing a small laugh. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to startle you.”

“No, it’s okay. I must be a little nervous.”

She sits on her own bed with her feet dangling a little.

“I was beginning to think I would have the room all to myself for the rest of the semester.” She winks one of her dark eyes at me. Her mouth falls open as she realises what she said and she brings her hand up to her chest. “God! What a horrible thing to say. A girl just died and here am I thinking about an empty room. You must think I’m awful.”

A girl just died? Her words echo in my mind. The girl that was living in my room must be the murdered girl I read about in the newspaper. That’s why this was the only room available when I called in to register. That’s why the lady who answered the phone was so weird about it. I really have no luck at all.

“I wasn’t thinking that,” I admit.

“I didn’t know her very well. She didn’t spend much time in the room.”

“I understand.”

Yes, I understand that after everything I have been through, I now must sleep in the old bed of a murdered girl. Sure, I could certainly understand that.

“I’m sorry, I really am rude. I haven’t introduced myself. My name is Shiobban with two b’s. My mum says just because we’re Irish, doesn’t mean we have to be common. And yours?”

“Melissa.”

“Can I call you Mel? It’s easier.” Shiobban doesn’t wait for my reply before adding. “Anyway, Mel, what brings you here in the middle of the semester? I didn’t know they accepted transfers.”

“It was a special case,” I say. I knew moving to Ireland to start my first year in Psychology at the end of October would raise a lot of questions. I’d half expected to be able to dodge most of them. It isn’t a topic I am comfortable discussing with people I have just met and it definitely isn’t a great icebreaker.

“What kind of a special case?”

“I’m not from the continent.” I end up saying. And then I lie. “There was a lot of bureaucratic paperwork that took time and got lost. In the end, the university understood it wasn’t my fault and allowed me to enroll. I just need to make sure I pass all of my first semester subjects.”

“And where are you from?” She asks. She puts both her hands up with a large smile as if it’s the only prying question she’s asked so far. “I’m sorry, I’m naturally curious. That’s why I can’t make up my mind on a single subject. I’m taking General Studies. And, right now, I’m torn on whether I should become a lawyer or a runway model”

I smile a little. “I’m from Poland.”

“Ooh, that’s why you have beautiful blonde hair.”

She rises from her bed with a jump and reaches for my hair. I don’t mean to recoil when she slides her long fingers through my hair, but she doesn’t notice it. Or cares. It’s true, I have average blond hair and average blue eyes like a lot of



girls in Poland. But then again, there's a lot of Irish women with the same features. I know that at least when it comes to physical appearance I won't stand out. As for the rest? I'm not entirely sure.

"I wish I had blond hair like yours," Shiobban says with an exaggerated sulking face. "Melissa? Is that a Polish name?"

"No. My mother also doesn't like common. I was named after the Gaelic name Maoiliosa and the fairy who lived in Merlin's cave."

"The feather'd choir from every spray," she chants. "Salute Melissa's natal day<sup>1</sup>."

I look at her surprised. "You know it?"

"Oh, well, I like poetry too. No wonder you wanted to come to Ireland." She drops my hair, walks towards her closet, and stares at her clothes. "You should get changed. We are going out for drinks."

"Drinks? I should be unpacking."

She throws her hand in the air.

"You have a lot of time to unpack. This weekend is Halloween. You should be having fun and pretending to be someone else. Besides, a girl died... We need to be grateful we're alive. Life is short and we should enjoy each moment it gives us."

It feels strange that she can just turn her old roommate's death into a celebration for herself. Maybe she is good at compartmentalising.

"Halloween is in two days."

"We're Irish! We celebrate it for six days if it means we get an opportunity to drink."

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<sup>1</sup> Ode on Melissa's Birthday by Thomas Blacklock, 1793

Shiobban doesn't look the type to accept an easy no. But I'm happy enough to be making friendships on my first day. It wasn't usual for me to connect with people so fast. I oblige. I take a simple dress from one of my bags and change into something nicer than my plain black jumper.

She is not as fast as me and takes ages to get ready. I keep looking at my watch. The room doesn't feel mine yet and it feels weird to stare at someone while they make a decision.

"I'm gonna go for a walk in the halls and get to know the accommodation a little better," I tell her. "I will be back in fifteen minutes and wait for you outside."

"Hum, hum," she murmurs without looking at me.

I rush outside. In the halls, an old creepy gramophone is playing. I try to ignore the thick cobwebs, the paper bats, and the ghosts made from bandages. A grinning girl passes by me chained to a bored-looking guy and smiles. I try to smile back but my lips are glued.

I don't dare move too far from my room.

A student wearing a grotesque grey-skinned mask, which squishes blood, raises his arms at me. I press myself against the wall. He must know he's managed to scare me because he starts to come closer.

"Ooh, Ooh..." He taunts with his arms outstretched.

I let myself slide against the wall. He is so close now I can smell his cinnamon and citrus cologne along with the fake blood.

I start yelling!

The boy kneels beside me and puts his hands up. I don't think he realises he still has his mask on. I cower into a ball, close my eyes and scream.

"Get away from her."

When I open my eyes again, I see Shiobban push the guy so hard he falls on the floor. She squats in front of me, making a barrier between me and the mask.

“Get the hell out of here!” She says before turning to me. “Are you okay?”

I’m still whimpering when I nod. “I’m fine. I just don’t like Halloween.”



## 2. THE SCARIER THE MERRIER

**The entire pub is heavily decorated for the 31st of October.** I don't enjoy Halloween decorations, but I admire the sense of patriotism they bring to the adornments. There are scary leprechauns and bloody Irish flags hanging on the walls. And some pumpkins have Celtic symbols carved on them.

People are already coming out for drinks in masks and costumes, two days before the actual date.

I'm uncomfortable among all the witches, zombies, and vampires. I don't like scary things. I used to have terrible nightmares when I was younger. My parents always said I was one of those kids who thought she saw monsters everywhere. I don't remember the monsters, but I still see strange things sometimes. Halloween is a reminder of my irrational fear.

Shiobban decided on a long black dress with lace that matches her pale skin and obsidian hair. I'm happy I'm not the only one not wearing a disguise. She looks around the crowded pub until she locks eyes with a curly red-haired girl sitting at the counter. She waves at her leads us through the horde and takes the empty seats next to the girl.

"Cara, I present you my new roommate, Mel. Mel, this is Cara."

I nod at Cara. She has expressive brown eyes framed by wide cheeks. I can't tell how tall she is sitting down but I see she has the curvy figure I often envied in girls. She hesitates before leaning in.

"Your new roommate?" Despite her low murmur, I still hear her. "Does she know?"

"Yes, she knows," Shiobban assures her, before turning to face me. "I mean, you do, don't you? What happened to my last roommate?"

"That she was killed? Yes."

"Not just killed," Cara insists. She keeps her voice low even though we're in a crowded pub. "The police have no idea how it was done. People are saying it's witchcraft. There were signs of a struggle but no visible entry wound from the outside. It looked like she was murdered from inside her own body."

I shudder. Another reason why I don't like Halloween. Weird things always happen around this time of year. I hated all things mysterious. And yet it seemed the obscure always finds a way to follow me around.

"And how was she murdered?" I ask.

Cara opens her eyes wide in excitement. "Her brain looked like a needle cushion. There were huge holes in the grey mass. Someone penetrated her head with a very sharp object but there were no signs of trauma on the skull."

I squint and look from Cara to Shiobban. I am not sure if they are pulling a prank on me but they don't to be joking. How is it possible someone could die without any marks on the bone which is there to protect the brain? "Are you serious?"

"Yes, no one can explain it. And because there's no logical explanation, they are using the same reasoning they always give."

"Which is?"

At this point, I don't care how far-fetched the logical explanation is. I am desperate for a rational description. One that won't give me nightmares at night.

"She must have had an unknown medical condition which caused a psychosomatic reaction. The acute pain from whatever she was suffering gave her a heart attack in the end."

"Cara studies criminology," Shiobbain says. "That's why she is interested in all these disgusting details."

"Oh, like you don't? You love weird things. But honestly, I don't know how you two can live there."

"What do you mean?" I ask.

"Your room. That's where the murder happened." She turns to Shiobbain, "I'm happy we were out drinking that night. Imagine. It could have been you, Shiobbain."

Shiobbain avoids Cara's eyes and takes a sip of her drink. "Right."

Poor Shiobbain. I can't imagine what it must be to have to sleep in a room where someone you know was murdered. Had she been the one to find her?

I don't have the opportunity to ask. A familiar smell of cinnamon and citrus scented cologne fills up my nostrils. The odour makes me uncomfortable and it brings a bad memory I can't place.

"Can I have a vodka tonic, please?" A male voice asks behind me.

I turn to see the guy who just placed his order. I'm disappointed when I don't recognise the medium height, brown haired guy at the counter. Maybe that perfume was popular around here.

I start to turn around but he catches the top of my arm and stops me.

"Wait a second. You're that girl? Aren't you?" I frown because I have no idea what is talking about. For a second, I think he's someone from back home who

recognises me and I'm anxious. "The one who fell today when I tried to scare you?"

I smile relieved. That's where the smell comes from. No wonder I have such a bad imprint with it.

"Maybe," I admit. "I can't say I saw your face."

He throws his head back and laughs. He has a nice perfect set of teeth of someone who probably wore braces for many of his teenage years. I think he's cute and I have the feeling he thinks the same of himself.

"I'm sorry," he says. "I didn't have the time to apologise before you rushed off. Are you okay?" I nod and he extends his hand out. "I'm Aiden. Here, let me buy you a drink to make up to you."

Shiobban clears her throat next to me. I almost forgot she and her friend Cara are here.

"Excuse me," her voice is clear and sharp. "In case you haven't noticed, she is with friends."

Aiden puts his hands up. "I don't want any beef. I was just trying to be a good Samaritan and repay the lady for the scare I gave her."

Shiobban is still seizing the guy up. I touch her shoulder and lean so only she can hear me. "I guess a drink won't do me any harm." She eyes me for a second and opens her palms flat to the ceiling. I smile at Aiden and tell him what I would like. He slides it across the bar as soon as it arrives.

"I don't think I caught your name, did I?"

"No," I reply making no eye contact, while I stir my mojito.

"So?"

I look embarrassed at him but he is smiling. "I'm sorry, it's Melissa. Mel, if you wish."

“I think Melissa is fine. So, *Melissa*, you don’t like Halloween masks?”

“It’s more the whole Halloween thing I’m not fan of.”

Aiden puts a palm to his heart and opens his mouth in outraged shock. He has sweet chuck hazel eyes and a boyish face that looks more juvenile when he smiles.

“You don’t like Halloween, why?”

“I don’t see why we should celebrate a day that means death. Life is scary already, why would we want to make it scarier by using horrible masks? I prefer to know when my fears are real.”

“But that’s what makes it so fun! Life is scary. Why wouldn’t we enjoy and make fun of that fear? Life is trying to make us fear it, and on this day we mock its attempts and say,” he puts his hands on my shoulders and shakes me. “No, not today. Today, I’m not scared of anything you throw at me.”

“I take it you like Halloween?”

“That obvious, anh? I can’t deny it. Me and myself, we are fans of the gore.”

“What about the people that use this occasion to commit horrible murders? Doesn’t it scare you? Take the other girl, who died two days ago.”

His hazel eyes get darker. “Horrible people will kill innocents every day of the year, whenever they please. Perhaps, maybe even on Christmas. It can’t be a reason to stop us from enjoying our lives.”

I bring my drink to my lips. I don’t want to keep on thinking about murdered people and scary things but it’s stronger than me. “When you say you’re a fan of the gore, what do you mean?”

“The scary monsters. All the supernatural bunch, love. The scarier the merrier.”





### 3. PRE-HALLOWEEN PARTY

**My first night in the new dorm is filled with feelings of unease.** I keep waking up from nightmares, where I'm trapped in a maze of white halls, dark figures and a masked murderer following me. Cara's confession about the room and the murdered girl makes it hard for me to fall back asleep. When I see the first rays of dawn, I decide to get up and do something productive rather than tormenting myself with these thoughts.

I don't enjoy the silent library. But at least I feel safer knowing there are at least one or two students in the room, who are either still burning the midnight oil or early birds. It doesn't take long until a few groups sit on the colourful benches and the low murmurs make me feel less alone.

A little after lunch time, Shiobban comes running towards my desk with a wild look in her eyes.

"Mel, thank god I found you." She drops her bag on top of my books. I'd picked a pile with all the mandatory reading and scattered them across my desk, since I'm trying to catch up with what I've lost by enrolling in late. The loud thump merits us with some dirty looks and few shushes. She holds her hands up apologising. "I've been looking all over for you. What are you doing at the library on a weekend?"

“Studying. I need to make up for the lost time.”

“Oh, yeah, your...” She stops mid-sentence looking for the correct term. “...bureaucratic problem. I was worried sick. Where did you and that weirdo run off to yesterday?”

“Nowhere. We went for a walk around campus and then he walked me to my room door. You were still sleeping when I left this morning. Why are you so worked up about this?”

“There’s been another murder. And since I didn’t know where you were, I was scared maybe you too... I can’t even think about it. One dead roommate I can live with, but two? It’s too much for one person to handle.”

“Shiobban calm down, I’m okay.” Shiobban’s reaction is so over the top I can’t help but wonder if performing arts was also one of her chosen subjects. She seems quite overprotective of someone she has only met a day ago. And yet her concern still manages to make me feel emotional. “What happened?”

“A second-year guy. He was found dead in his bed this morning. Apparently, he caught on fire. They don’t know if it’s the same person who did it.” Shiobban stands up and grabs my wrist. “Come, we need to find Cara, I’m sure she will know all about it. She is probably already at this Halloween party happening in the boys’ dorm.”

“It’s noon. And Halloween is tomorrow.”

“It’s a pre-Halloween party. Tomorrow is the *big* party. And we also need to celebrate your birthday.”

My blood freezes and I halt. “How do you know about my birthday?”

She shrugs and flashes me an innocent smile. Her face almost looks angelic.

“I may have snooped at the file sitting in Chancellor Rosen’s desk when he wasn’t looking. Don’t worry, I only caught your last name and date of birth.”

“When was this?”

“This morning. I had a meeting with him to discuss some specialisations and I took a peek.”

Her explanation doesn't soothe me. Why would the Chancellor need to check my file? Was he suspecting me because of all that was happening?

“Now, come on! You have the rest of the whole semester to study.”

I start gathering my textbooks with mixed feelings. “You are going to be a bad influence on me.”

She laughs. “You have no idea.”

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“Cara, hi!” Shiobban and I find Cara at the party standing next to the apple bobbing tank, dressed in a bloody medical gown and a face mask. Shiobban analyses her costume before guessing, “Dead doctor?”

“I'm a coroner,” she explains. “Slutty witch?”

“*Sexy* witch!” She corrects, swirling in her witch costume.

“And you, Mel? What are you supposed to be?” Cara eyes my regular clothes with her lips pressed tightly.

“A person who doesn't celebrate Halloween.”

It's hard to hear through the music blasting and the dozens of conversations around us so Shiobban yells, “Mel, enjoys being boring...”

Cara lowers her eyes at Shiobban's insensitive comment and hunches forward before speaking closer to my hear.

“Don’t worry Mel, Shiobban has a hard time accepting things when they aren’t done her way. But she is completely harmless.”

“True!” Still jumping with the beat of the music, Shiobban nods unfazed. “Anyway, we wanted to ask you if you know anything about what happened to the poor second year student.”

“I’m just an intern,” Cara says, “they won’t tell me much. But at the lab they are talking about spontaneous human combustion.”

“I thought that stuff didn’t exist.” I say.

“It’s a sceptical subject in the world of science, yes. But the guy didn’t even move from his bed as he caught on fire. He slept through the whole thing.”

“Paralysing poison?”

“No. There were no traces of poison or fuel.”

“*Freaky!*” Shiobban says with a spooky voice as she wiggles her fingers around me.

“I’m sure you’re regretting now having her as a roommate.” Cara tells me, though she is smiling warmly at her friend. “Anyway, I’m supposed to assist the official coroner on Monday. I will probably know more by then.”

“If the murderer doesn’t get you first.”

The three of us jump almost simultaneously. I turn my face and see Aiden has crept into my personal space and is really close to my cheek. He is smirking and clearly satisfied with our reactions. Shiobban makes an annoyed face at him and Cara slaps her shoulder with a laugh.

“Sorry for eavesdropping. I was curious.” Aiden has a beer in one hand and Death’s scythe in the other. He doesn’t wear a scary mask today but has on a long black robe. “How are you, Melissa? I see you still haven’t caved to the magic of All Hallows Eve.”

“No, not really.”

“Perhaps, I can change that if you accept to come for a walk?” He leans in a mock bow and a stray piece of hair falls across his forehead. I look sideways at Shiobban and I only realise I’m doing it when he taunts me, “Do you need to ask permission from your mum?”

“I see you guys later,” I tell them. Shiobban pouts and stares at Aiden through squinted eyes but doesn’t say anything. I raise my hand to say goodbye to Cara who has a mischievous smile.

“Use protection,” she yells when we’re already far.

I feel myself blush tomato red. From the corner of my eye, I see Aiden is close behind but he doesn’t comment on my friends’ childish and contrasting behaviours.



## 4. THE BANSHEE CRIES

**Outside the night is cold.** The early winter twilight is tainted slightly orange and there is no sign of the moon's presence yet. But the perfectly cut grass and the pathways that surround it are already lit by a bright white light coming from the street lamps.

“Are you going to see the macnas tomorrow?”

“I don't know what that is,” I admit.

“It's these gigantic sculptures they bring out during the Halloween parade. You should come, they're awesome. And there's performances and everything. You can't spend Halloween in Galway and not see it.”

“I don't like—”

“Halloween... I know. But even so, you have to enjoy a good public performance. Maybe we could go together?” He arches his eyebrows at me.

*“Maybe.”*

He smiles but the conversation dies out. We continue walking in silent for a while and I feel my heart race with anticipation. He looks at me a few times, looking like he's going to ask me something but he regrets it before outing any words.

“Did you ask me for a stroll to save me from all the Halloween gore, or were you actually planning on speaking?” I finally break the silence.

“Would it make me look more chivalrous if I did?” He replies with that boyish smile of his. “No. I wanted to ask you how you were doing but didn’t want to be intrusive.”

“How am I doing?”

“You know, considering Halloween is not your favourite time of the year. You just moved to this new *uni* and strange deaths are happening. It’s not the most inviting induction.”

“I’m surviving,” I say. Despite all that’s happened, I can’t say this has been the weirdest thing happening around me this year. And, honestly, I feel bad about the horrifying things that happened to those people but I’m also relieved that for once, it was happening to people I didn’t know personally.

“Are you okay?” Aiden asks. “For a second there it seemed like you tuned out.”

I stroke the sides of my arms pretending to be distracted by the cold.

“I’m fine. What about you? Is Halloween still your favourite time of the year?”

“I don’t choose to focus on the bad part of Samhain. I focus on the happiness of it.”

“Happiness?”

“The true Celtic traditions. Before, the 31<sup>st</sup> of October used to be a cause for celebration. Yes, I know, there was the veil thing between the dead and the living being weaker. And the fact monsters from the underworld roamed free at night. But it was also a time when people ate, drank, and spent time with their families. This was a day when people remembered who they lost and updated the dead on the past year. They felt so lucky to be alive and celebrated life as a cycle.”

“Sounds nice.”

“Nothing brings family closer than having a monster after you. If you care to ask me, whoever invented that bogus story about demons coming to get us on this day was a very clever bloke.”

Aiden finishes his speech pointing his finger at me as if he has unravelled the discovery of the century. He has a huge grin spread across his face and his smile is contagious. I appreciate the fervent passion with which he spoke of a holiday so wretched to me, even if I couldn't agree with him.

“So,” I say. “You don't think these deaths have one bit of supernatural cause to it, despite them all being strange?”

“I think these deaths are the work of someone highly intelligent and screwed up.”

A loud scream fills the midnight sky. I feel my heart stop and an overpowering wish to run away but my legs feel petrified. I grab Aiden's arm tightly. My whole body is stinging from the goose bumps that have raised the hair on my skin.

Aiden hugs my shoulders.

“Don't worry. It's just a barn owl. They are known to mate around this time.” I can see he is trying to hold his laughter. I feel grateful he's at least attempting not to mock me. “Curiously enough, their loud screech is also the sound which originated the myth of the banshee cries. I don't hold it against you. They are spooky.”

“The banshee cries?”

“You know, a female fairy who cries really loud when someone from an important Irish family is about to die?”

“Never heard of,” I admit. Then again, I never cared much about the occult. I realise I'm still clinging onto him and I let go of his arm.



“Man, if you don’t like ghost stories you are going to love Ireland.” He didn’t try to hide the sarcastic undertone.

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I come back to the dormitory feeling happy and giddy.

After spending almost two hours talking about Irish traditions and all the lore Aiden knew, I feel there’s a chance I might start to enjoy some of the supernatural beauty of Halloween. I never had anyone explaining to me the moral lessons these stories intended to bring. It feels less scary when you see them as teaching moments rather than the usual web of creepy-things-go-bumping-in-the-middle-of-the-night type of experience I always associated it with.

Maybe, for the first time in my life, I could enjoy my birthday day if I’m surrounded by people who, instead of making me feel like I’m the harbinger of all things weird, would explain to me there are logical explanations to it.

And maybe, just maybe, I could stop feeling guilty and allow myself to have friends again. Shiobban already seems to like me and Cara... Well, I don’t know her well but she’s nice enough. She’s even been a good buffer against some of Shiobban’s craziness so far.

When I get to my room, I don’t turn on the ceiling light to avoid waking up Shiobban. Instead, I head to the nightstand and pull the small string that turns on the desk lamp. I turn around to pull the covers of my bed and see a black shadow sitting across the room.

“Christ!” I yell. I raise a palm up to my chest and let the other one fall on top of the bed, looking for support. “Damn it, Shiobban. What the hell are you doing in the dark?”

She is sitting on top of the covers. Her obsidian, bone-straight hair falls in front of her ivory face. Her face is frozen on a blank expression.

“I was waiting for you. I was worried.”

“Worried? What for?”

“That Aiden guy. I don’t trust him.”

“Aiden? He’s harmless.” I start pulling the linen from my bed.

“I think he is trying to use you.”

“Use me for what?”

I sit on the edge of the bed and watch her bite the inside of her cheek.

“I think he might be the killer,” she says. “I think he might try to use you for your past. To pin it on you. I’m sorry, Mel, I was curious and I saw more than what I told you I’d seen. I know!”

I feel my throat closing up. I try to swallow but it looks I’ve lost all of my saliva. My heart is pounding and when I’m finally able to speak, my voice comes out shaky. “Know what, exactly?”

“About your friend. Your best-friend, wasn’t it? I know she died in a freaky accident last year. October 31<sup>st</sup>. I know you were with her but couldn’t explain what happened. The police had no choice but to commit you into a psychiatric ward, and that’s why you only got here in the middle of the semester.”

I blink several times. I know I shouldn’t be angry at Shiobban for wanting to know who she shares a room with. It’s only natural to want to know who the new stranger is when there are murders happening on campus. But those files were supposed to be kept secret so I wouldn’t feel like a freak.

Yes, I’ve been committed to a psychiatric hospital because I *couldn’t explain what happened*. But that wasn’t entirely true. Part of me still wondered if they wanted to keep me locked up to make sure I wasn’t the one who murdered my

best-friend. And the hardest part was I could explain it, but I was too scared of what would happen if I'd told them. I wouldn't have spent a year in a mental hospital but the rest of my life, if I'd told them the truth.

Who would have believed me if I'd told them my friend, the only person at school who had ever been nice to me, started having a schizophrenic episode? She looked possessed by a demon or inflicted with some curse. She threw herself against the walls and at one point she threw herself against the ceiling. She looked like a doll being pulled by an invisible hand. No matter how hard I tried to catch her and pull her away but she wouldn't move. By the time she died, her body was full of bruises and cuts and I was unscathed. I had been immune to whatever evil forces attacked us that night. The only reason I wasn't convicted of her murder was because there was no evidence. I had no strength to inflict that kind of damage.

I didn't tell the police about the dark figure who followed us around days before she died. My friend never saw it. I kept pointing at it but she insisted there was nothing there.

I remembered being scared of the dark my whole life and I was prone to imagining monsters. My parents never believed me when I'd told them there were creatures who wanted to harm us while we slept. So why would the police believe me if I told them about a man or a woman in a dark cape only I could see.

"I don't believe you did something to your friend," Shiobban reassures me. "I think I'm a very good judge of character and you don't strike me as a murderess. But he might try to put the suspicions on you. A strange, mysterious girl, shows up in the middle of the year... Do you know where I'm getting at?"

"I wasn't even here when the first death happened."


"But you were already in the country, weren't you?"

“I understand!” I snap as I lie on my bed.

I can't believe Aiden is a murderer. No, not a murderer. A serial-killer. How could someone be so nice and have such a dark secret?

*I think he's trying to use you.* Can it be? Can it really be that I have no luck when it comes to finding a cute guy that is seriously attracted to me, instead of wanting to use me for my weird and dark past? I did always attract the weird stuff after all, maybe I attracted the weird guys too. Finding myself attracted to someone who would turn out to be a murder? That would fit the pattern like a glove.

I pull the duvet with an extra dose of pissed off strength and cover myself up. “I get the picture,” I tell her. “Let's just sleep. I will deal with it tomorrow.”



## 5. A STRANGE WOMAN

**I don't spend the night well.** I keep hearing the barn howl screech in my dreams. When I dart my eyes open, I see a woman lurking over my bed. A terrifying woman with ashy pale skin and blood shot ebony eyes. She has dark smudges under those eyes, as if her mascara ran down her hollow cheeks. She is terrifying.

I pull the blanket and corner myself against the bed sideboard as much as I can and prepare to yell. But before the screams leave me, she is gone.

I look around. The mildew smell I felt waking up still lingers. There is a blueish moonlight entering the room through the large window but no signs of the woman anywhere. My heart is pounding so hard in my chest I feel I might throw it up.

I convince myself I'm still asleep because I don't see Shiobban in her bed. I lay back and close my eyes, hoping that if I breathe in deeply enough, I might wake up from my nightmare. Except I don't wake up. Instead, I hear crying.

Not really crying, more like a wail. A soft and terrifying keening. I feel all the blood rush down. The stench is stronger now and I know she is the room. I'm too scared to open my eyes but I don't want to die hiding under the blankets, so I peek.

The woman is floating by the door like an incorporeal being. She has long grey robes and her arm is outstretched – not to grab me, I realise – calling for me. She wants me to follow her.

I get up from my bed and head to the door. I grab the handle and I'm about to pull it open...

That's when I wake up.

My room is now brightly lit and I hear chirping outside. My eyes feel tired and it's difficult to open them but I see Shiobban has already left her bed.

My stomach sinks low with disappointment. Although I hate Halloween and the fact I'm still annoyed with Shiobban for snooping through my files, I half expect to have someone there wishing me happy birthday when I wake up.

I don't find her in the common kitchen. The students there all stare at me when I come down but no one says a word. When I approach them to ask if they have seen her, I sense them pulling back away from me like I have some sort of contagious disease. I look for her in all the common areas but the same situation repeats itself. Some look paralysed with fear and others physically run when I approach them.

I grow frustrated. What is going on? Did something happen to Shiobban and people think I'm responsible?

I almost want to give up and go back to my room to have a crying fit. Of course, something had to happen on my birthday! I wouldn't be surprised if something did happen, and I would end up blamed for it and forced back into the psychiatric hospital. Back to those white empty hallways.

My heart sinks when I run into Aiden outside, and see that he too looks scared when seeing me. I almost have a heart attack when I see his hands coming in my direction.

“Are you okay?” He asks cupping my face and forcing me to look at him. “I was scared senseless something might have happened to you. Have you heard the news? Your friend—”

*Oh, god, no!*

“Shiobban? I can’t find her. Did something happen to her?”

“No, your other friend. The red one. It’s all over the newspaper. She died last night.” Aiden shows me the newspaper and I see Cara’s picture in black and white.

I’m not sure how to process this news. I didn’t know Cara that well but I feel my entire body going cold. Another person I know has died. And all in the space of a year. My mind rushes to thoughts about the conversations I wish I’d had with her. I never asked her how old she was. Her last name. Where she was from. Or why did she want to study criminology. I feel guilty for not getting to know her better and for being so focused on my fear of Halloween and the murders that I didn’t take the time to build a friendship.

I sit on the wet grass, absorbed by my thoughts and the cold sweat drenches my hands. I barely hear Aiden when he sits and talks next to me but through the fog in my mind, I hear his last words. “Apparently, she was from a very important family. An only child and the last of the Ó’Conchobhairs.”

I look up at him but my vision is dull.

“Ó’Conchobhairs,” I repeat. “Is that an Irish name?”

“It can’t get any *Irisher* than that!” He says with a smile.

I grab his arm tightly. “The Banshee!”

“What?”

“Last night. You said the banshees cry for important families when someone dies.”

“Or is about to die, yes, But, Melissa, those are just myths. Last night it was an owl.”

I shake my head. He didn't have the same nightmares I did. He doesn't know that inexplicable things happen all the time and, for some reason, I'm the only one paying attention to them. I've almost learnt to recognise the tingly sensation of when it happens. Last night, I'd felt it too.

I must be absorbed in thought more than I realised because when I look up, I see her again. The grey lady. She wears a veil covering her face and her white hair is so long it touches the grass. She stands under a tree clutching her stomach with her head thrown back. She is keening again. I look around but no one seems to notice her.

“Do you see that woman?” I point at the tree and Aiden follows.

“What woman?”

“There's a strange woman under the tree.”

“There's no woman there.”

“Don't you hear the eerie crying melody?”

Aiden blinks several times. “Melissa, you're scaring me. Are you okay? Do you want to check the university counsellor? Maybe you're in shock because of your friend.”

I shake my head. She is gone again.

“It was probably nothing. I didn't sleep very well.” I point at the newspaper.

“How did Cara die?”

Aiden looks at the newspaper and back to me. I can see from the look he's giving me that whatever is written there will sound strange. He probably doesn't want to give me any more reasons to hallucinate strange women.

“Apparently, there was an electrical incident in her room last night.”



I reach for the newspaper but he pulls it away from me trying to hide it. I reach around him. "Give me that."

My eyes immediately jump to what I was looking for. I read out loud. "*Strange* electrical incident. All the electrical equipment was new. Police is considering further investigation."

He looks puzzled. Despite trying to impress me by sharing with me all the wonders of Halloween, I can see he is not ready to cross the barrier into admitting there is a possibility for it to be true. I often forget how careful people were about labelling things with a supernatural cause. Just because I believed the supernatural followed me all my life, didn't mean others took it as a plausible option.

"What's your point? You think this is supernatural?" The ice in his voice tells me I'm right.

I hesitate. "Tell me more about the banshee. Do they do anything else besides warning death is coming?"

"I... don't think—"

"I'm just curious."

"Sometimes they help the member of the families they are bound to cross to the other world."

"What happens if they can't cross?"

"What do you mean," he asks.

"Spirits who get stuck here because of a violent death or something?"

"I guess the banshee would be stuck here while the spirit doesn't move on. Maybe seek revenge?"

I thought about all the reasons why Cara's spirit may have found herself in limbo. Did she want justice for her death? Was she trying to stop the killer? Oh, god, was she worried Shiobban was in danger?

"I should go and look for Shiobban," I say getting up and cleaning my trousers with my hands. "I'm starting to get worried. I haven't seen her since yesterday."

"I saw her this morning," he says. "When I was coming back from my run. It was early, and she didn't look happy."

"Did she say anything?" I asked hopeful.

"No, but she never acknowledged my existence."

"Did you see where she was going?"

"I don't know. She looked like she was leaving campus. I can help you look for her." Shiobban's warning suddenly jumps in my mind. *I think he may be the killer.* I didn't consider the option when I first saw him. Cara's news side-tracked me and he'd looked genuinely worried for me. If he saw her this morning and killed her, he wouldn't be now offering his help to find her, right? "Come on, no one is going to talk to you. Everyone is afraid of the new girl."

"Yeah, why is that?"

"Because they are all a bunch of small-minded peasants," he yells at a few students I didn't realise were gawking at us. "People tend to mistrust the unfamiliar during hard times. Most people grew up here and you showed up out of nowhere. Don't hold it against them."

I could hardly blame them. I was a magnet for strangeness, even if they didn't know it themselves.

"Fine. You do the talking then."

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Aiden squeezes between a herd of masked students and requests more information about my lost roommate. I wait nervously, away from the crowd and recoil from the hate looks that insist on coming my way.

I don't hear what he is telling them but sometimes I catch one or two people looking over Aiden's shoulder and staring at me. Shiobban's last words keep ringing in my ears uninvited. *I think he might be the killer and will use you for your past. To pin it on you.* But he isn't. He is trying to help me find her.

But he is also the last person to have seen her.

Had she found out about Cara's death and confronted him in the morning? Did he decide to take care of her too? What exactly did he say to Cara last night? *Not if the murder gets you first.*

"One of her classmates said Cara's family owns a chapel nearby." Aiden's voice pulls me out of my thoughts. "She said she might have gone there if she was mourning for her friend."

"I should go and check up on her. To see if she is alright."

"Melissa, she's at a church. You pray at a church. You don't pour your heart out on heartbroken you are about your friend's death."

I squint at him.

"Then I will stay until she is finished and talk to her later."

Shiobban was the first person to welcome me at the university. She was also the first person to make me feel welcome in forever, actually. She'd worried about me even after knowing my best-friend was murdered and I was committed into a hospital for it. I can't help but feel I owe her some kind of retribution. To be there for her in her time of need.

"I'm going. Weather it's a church or the devil's lair."

“Ok, but I’ll take you.” I start to protest but he interrupts me. “I have a car. We can get there much faster.”



## 6. THE DEVIL'S LAIR

**The Ó'Conchobhairs' chapel is a small church built within the rocks of a cliff falling to the sea.** A ten-minute drive from campus.

I must be close because I see her once more, standing at the edge of the cliff barefoot. *The banshee*. She stares at me through her dishevelled hair which streams with the wind, and claps. Not celebratory claps. She stretches her arms and brings her hands in for one single clap which echoes in the emptiness. A few seconds later, she claps again. I think they are warning claps telling me of some danger but I can't be sure.

I look at Aiden in the driver's seat. At this point, I suspect everyone. He leans in closer to me and I jump. I realise later he just wants to reach for the glovebox. I don't know if Shiobban has a car but I find it unlikely she would have walked all this distance. And yet, I don't see a second parked car.

"You just happen to have a flashlight in your car?" I ask when Aiden takes it from the glove compartment.

"You don't?"

I don't think much of it. It's a perfectly normal thing to have in the car. I'm on edge because there is a killer on the loose and, I realise, I don't know this guy all

that well. But I try to push my fear away because I'm a naturally scared person. If I end up dying, it's my damn fault for choosing the worst time to play hero!

He takes a crowbar out of the boot and I feel my legs almost giving out. I think of all the places where I can hit him to buy me some time to run.

"For protection," he tells me.

I don't want to state the obvious. Why would Shiobban need protection if she is inside praying and mourning her friend? But I swallow hard and nod.

The banshee is still clapping at me and I want to tell her to shut up already. Whatever justice she wants for Cara, I'm not going to get it without finding Shiobban first.

We walk inside the church and it is cold and damp. When I heard of the Ó'Conchobhairs' chapel, I imagined something richer and more refined. Not an old – maybe cultic – chapel made of stone. There's no light besides the daylight coming in through the arched glassless windows. It has a low domed ceiling and the altar is a short hallway with a few steps leading to an empty table in front of the window.

There is no one inside.

"Look, there is a passage," Aiden pulls my sleeve and points at the stairs that lead to some sort of underground. He opens the doors and I can see tunnels made of rock. Fear starts to cloud me. "Come on," he calls.

If Aiden really is the murderer, I am letting him lead me into his trap, straight into his devil's lair.

I have a strange feeling about this. I feel as if there is something dark creeping in the cracks between the rocks. Some negative or evil energy if that was a real thing. Or maybe my brain is trying to tell me that following a murderer into his

lair isn't my brightest of ideas. I make a list of all the common traits I have noticed in murderers on television.

"Why do you think she would be mourning in a place like this?" I ask.

"I don't know her very well. We only have a class together and she always seemed a little bit stuck up to me." *Motive? Check.* I walk slowly behind him and look for something I can use for protection. I spot a large enough rock and snatch it from the ground. He has a crowbar... It seems only fair. "And she has some nerve!" I detect a hint of anger and tighten my fingers around the rock.

"What do you mean?"

He hesitates. "It's nothing. We should keep moving."

"You realise we are risking our lives and coming to this place to make sure she's not in danger. I would at least like to know if she is worth it."

"It's really nothing. She was probably just being overprotective. In a possessive way though." *Evasive? Check.*

"Yes...?" I insist.

"She told me to stay away from you. She said your *kind* wasn't for the likes of me."

My kind? I feel confused for a second, thinking he might mean something entirely different and that my English is not as fluent as I thought it was. But I remember something else.

"When did she tell you that?" He keeps silent. "Aiden, when did she tell you that?"

"I may have lied about her not saying anything to me this morning. She had a total meltdown when she saw me and started yelling at me to stay away from you. I just didn't think it mattered."

*Story doesn't check out? Check.*

I raise the rock above his head and bring it down hard. He staggers forward a little but doesn't lose consciousness. "Melissa, what the..."

He turns to face me and I hit him again with. This time his eyes open wide before he falls to the floor. He's facing the ground and I can't see if he's awake but he doesn't move. There is a deep gash on the back of his head and I see blood spread through his hair.

A retching sound rises deep from my throat and I have to hold back a gag. My hands are shaking. I can't believe I've assaulted a person. I look at the rock in my hand and see the carmine stain sprinkled on the rough surface. I throw it back on the floor as if it electrocuted me.

My heart is racing. I reach down to pick up the flashlight and sprint.

"Shiobban?" I yell, hysterical panic edged into my voice. The only reply I get is silence.

My terror is taking over. I half walk, half run through the straight tunnel which seems endless. The beam of light keeps jumping up and down, and then sideways because I can't focus it on one single spot. I keep expecting to see a shadow come at me out of nowhere.

I turn around to make sure Aiden is not following me but I'm alone. I'm alone and unprotected.

"SHIOBBAN?"

There's a sound. It's low and unclear but rhythmic. I think maybe it's the banshee telling me where to find Shiobban, so I follow it. Even though it's the last thing I want to do. As the sound grows louder, my steps grow slower. I don't recognise it has a lament but as a melody. It's more humming than words but it's not the banshee's wail. It sounds human.

"Shiobban?" This time my voice is barely a whisper.



I've reached a gallery but it's too dark to identify anything. I point the flashlight around, until I see it.

There's a dark silhouette sitting on the floor. I almost missed it because its dark clothes and silk black hair falling on their back and face. Their outline is almost invisible in the shadows. The person is rocking back and forth, humming a lullaby and holding something in their arms.



**“Shiobban?”** I take an uncertain step.

I don’t know why I’m afraid to move closer. Besides the usual tingling in my stomach, I feel whenever something strange happens around me I see no signs of danger.

“It’s Melissa. It’s okay, I think Aiden is...” I look back to where I came from, unsure if I should say dead. “...unconscious,” I say instead. “We can go home now.”

The humming and self-soothing stops and she starts to raise her head. The torches around us lit themselves as she does. I look around startled that Aiden has found us again but we’re alone. I look at my roommate, who is now standing tall, holding a creepy expressionless doll smeared in blood by the hair.

There is another altar behind her but, unlike the empty one from the entrance, this one is full of old books, bones and plants. There is a strong smell of herbs and incense in the room.

Shiobban doesn’t look frightened though. Her lips are curling on a lopsided smile and she stares at me intensely.

“Shiobban, what are you doing?”

“Your supernatural sensitive brain hasn’t figured it out yet?” Her voice is icy.

I'm not sure what is it that I'm supposed to figure out. But I have a bad feeling I fell into the trap after all. It doesn't look like Shiobban was in any danger.

"Figure out what?"

"That poor bloke you left for dead, he is not the killer."

Oh god, have I killed the wrong person?

"What are you saying?" My voice is shaky and I have a hard time breathing.

"Argh," she rolls her eyes and groans. "For a human like you, you sure are stupid. I don't know why the witches want you so bad."

In blink. "The witches?"

"Yes. Cara's family doesn't own a church. Or at least not this one. I told that to that blithering knob in the hopes you would come rescue me in my sad, sad moment." She pouts.

"So you... you...?" I can't think straight. She disappeared so I would worry. She counted on me to fear for her because I already feel guilty for losing one friend. But for what? Witches? I don't know if she means it literally or if she means it like a religion.

"Blimey! You really are slow. But I guess it's your blood that has its perks not your brain." Shiobban circles the altar and stands in front of the table, flicking through the tick pages of a large book.

"What is so special about my blood."

"Does it matter?" She lifts her chin from the book and I notice the tightness in around her eyes. I can't believe I never noticed before how much disdain her expression held. "You will be dead anyway."

It did matter. It mattered to me. It mattered why I've been led to believe she was my friend. Why there is some sort of cult after my blood? And it matters if it has anything to do with the things happening to me all my life. But I don't ask

those questions because, I don't think I'll get the answer. Instead, I circle around smaller questions in the hopes she will answer them, until I can put the pieces together.

"Why Cara? She was your friend."

Her eyes avert mine.

"She was a necessary sacrifice," her voice is barely a whisper. For a second, I think I see sorrow, but her expression changes so quickly I have the feeling I imagined it. I must be trying to humanise a serial-killer is after my blood. "I must have skipped that part on our introduction," she continues in a more cheerful tone. "My family is part of a witch coven. In order to prove my commitment to the order, I need to pass through an initiation. I was supposed to bring souls to Aillén, in preparation for the Samhain eve—"

"Who is Aillén?"

She laughs. A cold, piercing laugh which echoes on the stone walls so loud it doesn't look natural.

"Aillén is not a who. He is one of the greatest beings that has walked this Earth. He is a fire-breather Sidhe Faerie. Obviously, as soon as you showed up the coven's plans had to change."

"I don't even know your coven. What do I have to do with this?"

"Because your kind, Samhain's Daughter, is the reason for *His* downfall." I jump when she shuts her heavy book and the ground around me shakes. "Now, how on earth am I going to make you move without using any magic on you?"

"You're a witch and can't do magic?"

She sighed. "Not on Fionn's descendants, no."

The pieces of the puzzle don't all come together like I expected it to. Instead, I have more questions. What does she mean by my kind and what is a Samhain's

daughter? Who was Fionn? I must look as confused as I feel, because Shiobban tilts her head analysing me and sneers.

“Fionn mac Cumhill? No?” She says. “You had no idea your mother descends from a Gaelic family? I mean, all the poems, and the name? Fair enough it goes back ten generations or so. But it was quite on the nose there.” She taps her own nose twice and then bangs her arms on the table with a laugh. “And the banshee? Come on, do you know anything about the supernatural? Why do you think she came to you? Those old hags don’t just ask anyone for help! They consider themselves too noble for that.”

I don’t answer. I sense she is done toying with me and my time is coming to an end. Whatever it is that has been wrong with me all these years it’s ancient. I fell right into the lion’s mouth by coming to Ireland.

She closes her eyes and starts enchanting in a low voice. I don’t understand the language but it sounds both terrifying and beautiful.

I feel the wind and the dust around me rise. The colours turn brighter. It looks like the Earth’s energy is coming to life. I feel my chest swell and fill me with a sense of peace and happiness I’ve never felt in my life.

I hear a loud clap. *FOCUS!* A voice yells inside me.

I realise the banshee woman is next to me. She claps again. And again.

I approach the altar. It feel stupid getting closer to Shiobban but something tells me running away from someone who does magic won’t work. Her eyes are still closed and I grab a bit of dark powder from one of the bowls on the table. It smells acrid and smoky.

I don’t have time to do anything with it because fire start rising around me. The flames are not tall but they are just below my feet, forcing me to move but following me everywhere I step.

“I may not be able to do magic on you, but I can use magic around you,” Shiobban says.

I tip-toe trying to get away from the fire building around me. She keeps murmuring her curses passionately. I don't know where else to do, so I throw the dust in her face. She screams in agony and brings her hands to her eyes. The fire around me stops.

“You idiot!” She yells. “Do you have any idea of what is?” A candlestick flies across the room but I manage to cover myself with my arms before it hits me. “I'm going to kill you!”

She tries to resume the spell but the banshee is now swaying around her and clapping in her direction. Shiobban waves her arms trying to swat her away.

I sprint towards the exit but before I reach it something slashes my leg. I yell and slump to the ground. I twist and see a sharp bone piercing me through. I can feel the warm wetness as the blood spreads in my thigh. I feel nausea curling up in the pit of my stomach. All I want to do is pass out from the pain so I won't feel what's coming next.

The banshee claps close to my left ear forcing me awake. Two seconds later she claps in my right ear. I try to get up and she keeps cheering me on.

“I don't care if the witches want you alive.” Shiobban has a dagger in her hand. “Your blood will be just as valuable to me dead.”

She kicks me and the banshee screams. My head hits the floor with so much strength my neck jolts and I'm stunned by the pain.

She jumps on top of me and I see the dagger glistening above. I try to keep her hands away with all the strength I have left. I stared at her in horror. There is burning charcoal marks around her eyes where the powder touched her. I can't

look away. She is going to kill me and I can't take my eyes off of her shining black and red flaming cheeks.

Around me the banshee is still screaming. It sounds desperate, like she is calling for help. But I can't help her anymore. Whatever it is she expects of me, I can't do it. I can't get revenge for Cara and I can't save myself.

The blade cuts into my shoulder blade. I kick my feet on the ground as I scream, still hoping I can lose my conscious before I feel the rest.

I hear one of the loudest sounds I've ever heard pierce my hears. The sound makes my hears pop. And then there's silence. This is it. That must have been the banshee's final cry.

I must be dead now.



## 8. SUPERNATURAL FOLLOWS ME

**It takes me a while to realise I'm still breathing.** I hear low and muffled voices like I'm underwater. The seconds around me freeze. One second, Shiobban is standing on top of me bringing the dagger down. The next her eyes go blank and her head wobbles a couple of times before her body falls back.

I prop myself up on my good elbow and feel a sharp pain when I move. There is a line of blood trickling down Shiobban's forehead. Her eyes are open and stare at the ceiling but she doesn't move.

She's dead.

I realise she can't hurt me anymore but I sense I'm on the verge of snapping into a meltdown. If I wasn't in so much pain, I would kick and scream at her dead body. I'm so angry at her for tricking me. But at the same time, I'm so incredibly sad her friendship was nothing but an act. I knew it was too good to be true for weird and misfit Melissa to find a friend on her first day of a new school.

I turn around and see two men at the entrance of the tunnel. They are both holding guns.

Are they the police?

"Blimey, this one was easy!" The dark-skinned man says. He has dark hair cut very short and is the first one to put his gun away.



“I wish all of them were like this.” The other replies. He looks younger, or maybe it’s his haircut. It’s shaved on the sides and his dark ponytail is attached at the top. He lowers his gun and approaches me slowly.

“What would be the fun in that?”

“Miss,” the ponytail guy calls. Unlike his partner, who sounds British, he has an American accent. “Are you alright?”

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I find Aiden outside and there is a third man with him. Aiden’s brown hair is pasty and glued together from the dry blood. He holds a stained cloth to his head. A weight lifts off of me and I’m so relieved I didn’t kill him. I run towards him but my stomach sinks when he flinches away from me.

“I’m so sorry, Aiden. I though you...” I can’t finish.

“You thought I was the killer?”

“Shiobban put all these ideas into my head. And you had a crowbar and—”

“I had a crowbar because three people were killed and we were trying to look for your missing friend.” His voice is hard and resentful.

“Yes, I know... but when I found out you lied, I—”

“I lied because I didn’t want to admit to the girl I *liked* her arrogant friend bullied me because of my feelings.”

I noticed the word *liked*. I’d ruined it. My only friend in Galway tricked me into liking her so she could kill me. And I’d attacked the one person who had been genuine with me and now he hated me. Shiobban ruined my fresh start in Galway and I’d let her.

“I was only trying to help!” He was trying to keep calm but I could sense his fury. “I didn’t know your bloody friend and I was willing to risk my life to help you.”

“I’m so sorry.” My chest is so tight and the knot in my throat swells. I can sense the tears coming.

“Whatever! I need to go.” He pauses and looks at three men who are standing in front of the church entrance. “Will you be okay with those three?”

He looks concerned and that only makes the guilt worse. I can’t believe he is decent enough to worry about me when I’ve hit him with a rock. Twice.

I look at the men. Whatever they are, they are not police. They wear regular clothing and I haven’t heard any ambulance or police sirens since we exited. I think there is a chance they might know a little more about what was going on with Shiobban. I don’t think they would rescue me and Aiden from the tunnels so they could kill us after, so I nod.

“Sure,” he spits. “Them you trust.”

He turns his back on me and heads to his car. I see him reverse and disappear in the fog without looking back. I clean a tear with the back of my hand.

I head towards the group to thank them.

“Don’t mention it,” says the ginger man who was attending to Aiden. “It’s our job.” He points at my shoulder. “You should get that checked out.”

“What is going to happen to her?” I ask.

The dark-skinned man points to the church with his thumb. “Who the witch? We’ll burn her body.”

I stare at them. I thought maybe they would tell me Shiobban was a crazy and was part of sect they were trying to bring down. But their blunt use of the word ‘witch’ catches me off guard.

“So...” I hesitate. “You’re witch hunters?”

“Not only witches,” the ponytail guy says. “But you can call it that. My name is Zac by the way.”

“George,” says the first one.

“Melissa,” I say. “The girl there... the witch... I don’t know what to call her. She called me something. She said she wanted my blood because I’m a Samhain’s daughter?” I paused, terrified I’m sending myself to the pyre. “Does it mean I’m a witch too?”

Zac and George share a puzzled look. I don’t think they know what I’m talking about.

“Samhain’s daughter, hein?” The third man says. He has a wide smile on his face like he’s found gold. “I’m Oscar. And, no. You’re human. Just *different*.”

“Different how? Because no matter where I go, I have the feeling supernatural follows me.”

“Yes, I don’t know much about humans like you but we have a whole collection of lore back at headquarters. They might say more. You are welcome to check out if you want.”

“There are others like me?”

I almost feel giddy. He puts his arm around me and guides me towards the car.

I look over my shoulder to confirm with the banshee, who stands at the edge of the cliff, that is safe. I’ve defied the odd by surviving a witch, I’m not sure getting into a stranger’s car is the best move. It’s safe, a voice says again inside my head and, although she stares at the ocean, I know it came from the banshee. Then her body starts to shrink and I see a black raven take her place and spread its wings. The bird flies away until I don’t see it anymore in the clouds.

“Yeah, I never met one but I’ve heard rumours,” Oscar continues. “Apparently, it all started with Samhain’s eve...”

# GLOSSARY

<b>Aillén</b>	A fire beathing goblin, who burned the hill of Tara every Samhain eve. He would put his victims to sleep by playing fairy music from his harp.
<b>Banshee</b>	A female spirit from Irish folklore, who cries or screams really loud when the member of an important family dies.
<b>Fionn mac Cumhail</b>	A Hunter warrior from Irish mythology, who inhaled the poisonous fumes from his spear on Samhain's eve, thus becoming immune to Aillen's magical spell and defeating him.
<b>Samhain</b>	Gaelic festival marking the end of the harvest season. It starts on the night of the 31 <sup>st</sup> and end on the 1 <sup>st</sup> of November. Even though Samhain is actually on the 1 <sup>st</sup> of November it is now associated with Halloween.
<b>Sidhe Faerie</b>	Pagan spirits from Ireland which are considered to be ancient Celtic gods.
<b>Witch</b>	Woman who is known to practice witchcraft (magical spells, incantations, and rituals).

# Hey,

## I'm Patricia, the author of this book.

I hope you enjoyed this short-story and found the *World of Shadows* a fun and exciting reading. The world created in these pages are part of a larger series, published only in Portuguese at the moment. But I would like to keep on writing and translating the rest of the books, and answer some of the questions left open here in later instalments. **For that I have a favour to ask you. Would you consider adding this book to your [Goodreads](#) or [Amazon](#) page and leaving me some feedback?**

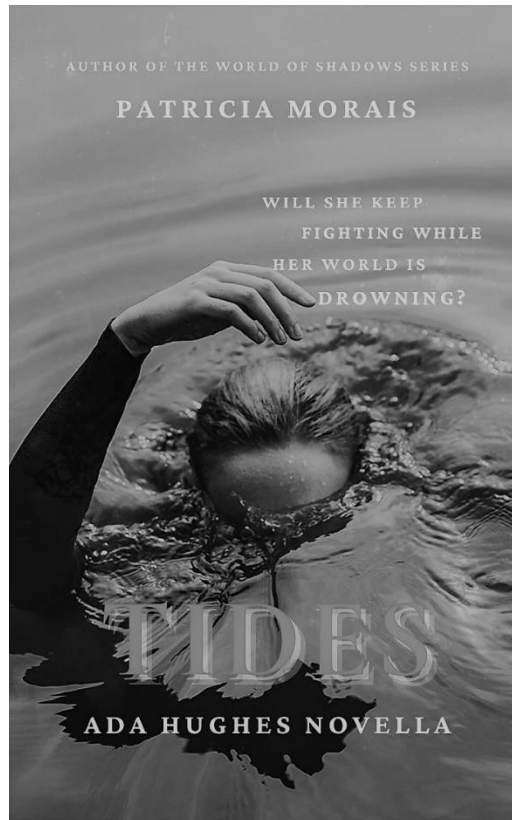
My ambitious goal is to keep on improving as I write more about this world, so that I can come back to you with an awesome reading experience. It will also help me reach more readers who will hopefully enjoy this story.

Cheers,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Patricia". The script is elegant and cursive, with a large, flowing initial 'P'.

**FAMILY DRAMA...**  
**FORBIDDEN LOVE...**  
**A NEW WORLD...**

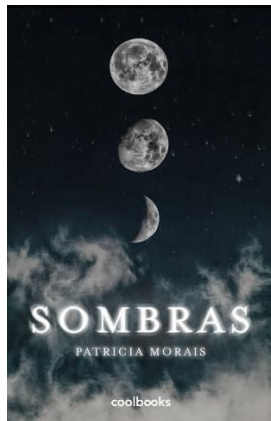
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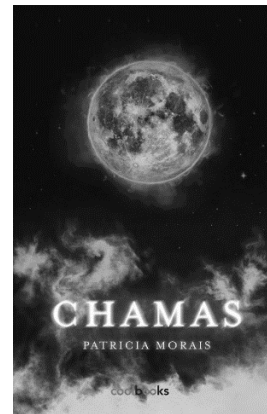
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If you stumbled upon this story and speak Portuguese, you might be happy to discover that Patricia Morais already has a few books published. Discover the original books of the *World of Shadows* series, and others.



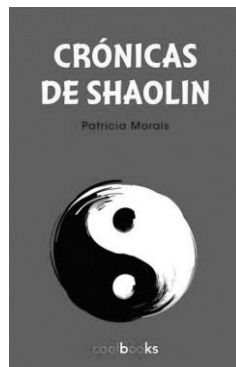
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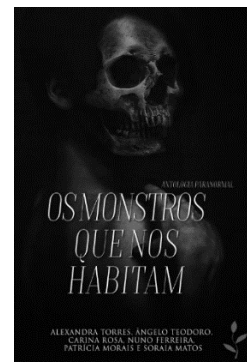
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# ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Patricia Morais has changed her mind about her profession a lot of times. But one thing she always knew she wanted to do was to write stories. She is the author of the *World of Shadows* series. Her books *Sombras* and *Chamas* are only available in Portuguese. But her series companion books, *Tides* and *The Banshee Cries* have been translated into English.

In 2016, she travelled to China to learn Kung-Fu in a traditional academy, in the middle of the mountains. During which she discovered a deep hatred for running. She recorded her experience studying martial arts full-time into a memoir, *Crónicas de Shaolin*.

Her favourite hobby is procrastinating with a popcorn bucket and watch supernatural movies (or TV shows) while calling it “research”. Her second hobby is to roam Wikipedia, looking for strange monsters while actually researching.

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