

Prologue

“Andrew Brown,” I answered.

“There’s a proper Irish name. And what brings you to see me?”

I took a deep breath. “I’m not exactly sure. You see, lately I’ve been kind of *concerned* about what I’ve accomplished with my life. And, I don’t know, it could be related to my writing—finding the right tone or balance. It’s like I’ve lost my voice—like I’ve gone hoarse. You understand, don’t you?” I smiled uncomfortably. She didn’t. “And, well, I know it sounds funny but...all my life I’ve waited to see an honest-to-goodness miracle.” Then I froze. She stared at something near me, not at me, and waited. But I couldn’t go on.

Then she shook her head and in a knowing voice said, *“Ah yes, I understand. You’re another one of them. When magic tricks and truth deceives, then you come running. So you’ve lost yoor way, have you? Yoor ability to see? Then what you meant to say is that you want me to show you the future rather than find it for yoorself—isn’t that right?”*

“Hmh. You could be right.”

“Do you consider yoorself a dreamer, Mr. Brown?” Still looking away.

“I’m afraid there’s more dream than dreamer in me. Though I

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hardly remember them anymore.”

“Well then, have you come for truth or magic? Or do you know which i’tis?”

“No,” I said, unable to penetrate her meaning.

She looked wide-eyed into the warming sun. *“There be truth and magic in all things, if only we take the time to see them. Inseparable they are. Though if it’s magic you’re after, then yoor task is a little easier. Even civilized people carry the memory of magic in their bones and it can take many forms. Oh yes, real magic does inspire. ’Tis the stuff that dreams first put in yoor head, then the dreamer stuffs wadding and wax in his ears to seal the dreams in and the naysayers out. But magic can also be tricks and tomfooleries to amaze and disappear the constraints taught us by our elders. Yes, I be interested in magic and you in truth, Mr. Brown,”* she said, pausing to straighten a crick in her neck. *“Now, would you consider taking a cup of tea with me and getting to know something about the other?”*

I nodded cautiously. “Okay.”

“Yes, you’ll do. Follow me.”

Allee swept me aside with her cane and bore forward. With my eyes riveted to her, I traced her footsteps to the front door of her cottage.

Smaller than the small rough arch, she entered and invited me in. Bending down to clear the doorway, I stumbled over the threshold and fell headlong into a small sturdy chair beside a wooden table and open window.

The room was filled with dark woods and velvets and lace antimacassars. Gleaming crystals and colored stones dangled in front of the window, creating a mesmerizing effect of refracted and reflected prised-light that seemed to dance and spin alive on the air, almost whispering to the wind chimes and twittering birds outside. That the door had neither lock nor bolt on it struck me as a little odd.

Allee sat opposite me, still looking away. In the muted light I could see that she once had been a handsome woman with fine features. Her