

HER GODMOTHER

By Cate Cavanagh

catecavanagh@gmail.com

P.O. Box 662

Livingston Manor, N. Y. 12758-0662

845-707-3172

Acknowledgements

Loré, my ever-Allie, for being all a mother (or godmother) could ask for...
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A Special Forward

Cate Cavanagh has written a book of magic, mystery and miracles. To me, it seems perfect that it also revolves around a godmother.

As a youngster, I used to spend some time during the summer with my godparents, Lute and Mayme Pettis. They lived in Wisconsin. I had just one brother; they had seven children. I loved to feel like I was a part of their huge family. My godmother, like Allie's in *Her Godmother*, was warm and caring. My godfather, while a grownup, was more like a little boy than any other man I have ever known. He is still living, and I think he must be in his 90s, and thankfully, he has still not really grown up.

Like Allie, my godparents' home was filled with love—and animals. One of their daughters, Gail, had a horse. Oh, what a thrill it was to be able to ride that horse. Each of their children had something special about them, and even though I haven't seen them in many years, I have fond memories of all of them.

Her Godmother is a wonderful volume to help children whose lives are not ideal learn that with love, caring and perhaps a few unexplainable things, miracles still do happen. And maybe they can find a little bit of Allie's magic to throw into the mix.

I am delighted that Cate asked me to write the forward to *Her Godmother*. Get ready to sit back, dream a little, and believe in the power of...love!

**Janet Elaine Smith, Author of *My Dear Phebe*, a peek at another young girl's life
—in a very different time .**

There is a place where sunshine falls gently upon the face
and bathes it with golden kisses.

There is a place where squirrels tap the windowpane for nuts
and the birds wait on the feeder for seeds.

Under the house, an unlikely family resides
and shows their babies off with pride.

They all eat the after scraps tossed gently
to their doorway 'neath the house.

There is a place where cat and dog
lay curled up by the fireplace and
the flame of a hearth warms this place
where all that is grace, love, and peace reside.

All a girl could want is there.

Whether she knew it or not....

... As she began to drift into sleep, she awoke suddenly by a rumble and crash. She quickly sat up. Startled, she trembled from the clamor of the violent storm that suddenly raged outside. Her room lit up like daylight as if someone put the light on then off in her room! The giant drum roll of the storm pounded again. She got up from her bed to close the window. Looking out she knew she had never seen a storm like this. Brooklyn storms seemed quieter. As she began to close the curtains, she noticed something outside. At first, she only heard the storm because it was so dark outside. The rain pounded on the roof like a roar. Suddenly flashes of light changed night into day seconds at a time. She was temporarily blinded by the sharp brightness of lightening against the dark. Flashes of light continued and her eyes began to adjust. There was something down on the lawn. Straining her eyes against the silver streaking of rain in the lightning she saw that there, on the lawn was her godmother, dancing in the storm.

Chapter One

Allison (or Allie as she was called) sat in the front seat in the car next to her mother, Darla. She was too big for a car seat and yet too small for the seatbelt that rested on her cheek. Her view was limited to tree tops and clouds. She would have liked to fidget her seatbelt looser but she knew better. Instead, she sighed, "What is Aunt Brigid like?"

"I don't expect you to remember her. It has been a while"...Her mother seemed to say to herself looking ahead at the road.

"Since she moved to country we have stayed in touch but you haven't seen her for a few years. You were little she moved-"

"I remember," Allie piped, "That she gave me my stuffed unicorn, the carousel horses and that colorful rock collection-"

"And she always sends you beautiful flowers on your birthday!"

"And she sends those pretty satin bags with lace all around them. How does she make them?"

Allie was a smart girl. She always got good grades in school and made friends easily. Taking after her mother's family, she had thick, straight black hair. Because it never stayed in place, her hair was cut page-boy style, just under her ear lobes. Dark freckles that dotted the bridge of her nose. Her eyes were McKay blue. That is how her grandfather always described them. You can tell a McKay by the eyes. They were not just blue, they were dark blue but, when the sun shined upon the face of a McKay, those blue eyes sparkled liked sapphires.

Allie's laughter was infectious and could make anyone laugh even if they did not know why. She was a kind and thoughtful girl. In fact, being popular, she usually went out of her way to become friends with the children who were shy. Once Allie took to someone, everyone else did. She never said a bad thing about anyone. Not even about her father. Never about her father. No one, not even her mother, knew how many nights Allie went to sleep only after exhausting herself with tears. No one ever heard her whisper to herself between the tears, "Daddy, why can't I figure out what to say or do to make you change so we can all be happy again?"

By the time that 'last night' happened, her mother never knew Allie did not sleep much. She also did not know that most nights, Allie would clutch Mr. Taps, her cream colored teddy bear, to her head as she tried to shut out the arguments. In between the yells, Allie heard her mother trying to "Shhhhhush" her father as best she could. It never worked. He would only yell louder. Her father was not nice or quiet when he had too much to drink. It seemed when he drank, he thought people could not hear him. What was he angry about? Helpless to stop him and too young to understand, Allie did the only thing she could do. She blamed herself. No one ever saw her cry except for Mr. Taps. It was as if he knew when she was sad because, when she looked at him at times like these, his smile seemed not to be as bright. For her mother's sake, Allie kept her sorrow secret.

Allie's mother, Darla, agonized when she decided to go back to school. Much as she wanted to maintain a warm family life, she realized it just was not going to happen. It would not happen anytime soon, if ever. So, she did what a mother does. Planning for a more stable life for her daughter, Darla returned to school to finish college. She explained to Allie that today, women went back to school to be able to start careers for themselves. She was surprised when Allie did not ask her why she had to stay with her grandparents on the nights she went to school and was relieved. She did not want to have to explain. Sometimes children should not be told about real problems. So, Allie stayed with her grandparents on those nights.

"I know your Aunt Brigid will show you how she does everything if you ask her", she said suddenly remembering Allie's question of a few moments ago.

"Oh, I think I would like that."

The ride became silent again. It was close to the end of a long ride from the city and while Allie's mom thought back to those painful days, Allie began to think of her father. She wished they could all stay together like they used to be. But, her father had stopped being interested in her for some time and was never interested in her homework anymore anyway. It was as if he stopped noticing her grades and her. He used to love to look at her report card and help her with her homework. She missed that. During the school year, she would do her homework, take a bath and brush her teeth at her grandparents. Then her mother would pick her up and take her home where she would go right to bed.

Her mother always tucked her in and kissed her. Every night, before she closed the door, she told Allie how proud she was of her. Her father had stopped telling her that and did not spend time with heart all like he used to. It was as if he was not there anymore: that someone else was there instead and she missed who he used to be terribly.

It was the last night of her mother's classes. Allie did not stay with Gram and Grampa because Gram had a virus. Grampa brought her instead to Anita, a babysitter that Allie's mom used to hire when she went to dinner with Allie's father. Allie did not mind at all. She was happy in a way because she had not seen Anita in a long time. It was summer and she wondered why her mother went to school that summer when it should be vacation time. Allie made up her mind that when she was grown up, she would never go to school during the summer. She would spend as much time as she could with her kids. Just as they sat down to read a book, Anita's doorbell rang.

"Sam", Anita greeted with surprise, "How are you?"

"I'm doing good. Is Allie here?"

"Yes, she-" Sam brushed past her.

"Hey, my Cupcake!"

He had not called her Cupcake in a long time. Allie felt as if something heavy sank in her stomach. He walked over and kissed her on the head. She did not like the way he smelled. She also sensed that Anita did not feel comfortable either.

"I thought we could go and grab a burger and head home."

Wanting to think of something else, Allie repeated, "Mom! I asked you how does Aunt Brigid make those satin pillows smell so nice?" Pulled from her thoughts, her mother realized she had not responded right away to the question.

"She has the most magnificent garden in the summer and, she also has a green house. She can teach you how to grow things. Weren't all of her gifts to you interesting? So, what type of person do you think Aunt Brigid is?"

"Well..." Allie began then waited. She was not a rash child; after all, she was almost eight.

"She must be old because old people like perfumed pillows and lace."

They both rode in silence for a bit each deep in their own thoughts. Allie's thoughts returned to *later that last night*. That's when she heard *the* argument. She lay in bed praying it would stop and even Mr. Taps, her bear, could not comfort her or make her stop thinking she was just not enough to make her father stop drinking. Then she heard it.

"I am leaving you, Sam!"

"What do you mean, you're leaving me?" He growled.

"I was finishing school to be able to support me and Allie when I finally left you! Well, I am finished! Tonight was my last test! Haven't you ever wondered why Mom and Dad always watched her? And tonight, of all things, you go and pick her up from Anita? Drunk? Are you crazy? Face it, Sam you would not get help. You lost your job because of it and now your drinking has gotten worse! You

don't even realize you are a threat to your own daughter! Did you think for one minute that I was going to let Allie go through this with you forever? What were you thinking? Never mind. You weren't! You stopped thinking a long time ago! And you know what? I am not leaving! You are! You were the drunk one that decided to take Allie out and away from Anita! For what? This is the last time you will ever do that again! What did she eat for dinner? Did she have her bath? Did you bother to care? You are packing the few things you need and getting out now!"

"Or what?" He challenged.

"I will call the police and have you arrested on charges of neglect!"

After that all Allie heard were loud mutterings and the opening and slamming shut of dresser drawers and then the door slammed. He was gone and it was quiet."

Allie watched her mom a while as she drove. It had been a long time since she had seen her really smile. Mom used to smile a lot. She missed that too.

She repeated the last question her mother did not answer.

"Is she old?"

"Huh?"

"Aunt Brigid. Is she old?"

No. She is not. We are the same age- unless you think I am old!" Darla giggled. Allie liked the sound of her mother's laughter. Her grandfather always told Allie she had her mother's laugh.

"No! You are not old! It's just that it seems Godmother's are supposed to be older."

"Well, she is older than you." Darla laughed.

"We were best friends in school and grew up together. We still are the best of friends. Like sisters. You will soon see. "

"How much further mommy?" She whined. She was almost eight but the "seven" inside just needed to know.

"I know you are tired, but we are almost there."

"Almost where?"

"Why, to you godmother's."

Allie sighed impatiently, "Mommy-" she almost whined again but didn't because, after all, she was almost eight.

"I know I am going to Aunt Brigid's. I want to know where!"

She shook her head. What do grown-ups think sometimes, she wondered? All of a sudden, they were off that long dark highway. They turned onto another road and passed a sign that said, "Welcome To Livingston Manor, New York". At least the sign was high enough for her to see. She had to strain again against the seatbelt until she was barely able to see ahead of her. They were driving through a quaint town that reminded her of the ones she would see

on Christmas cards. Allie yawned, a good yawn. As she opened her eyes, they passed another sign that said, "Thank You For Visiting Livingston Manor."

"Mommy, it's starting to get dark. There are no lights. What time is it?" Allie whispered.

"It's almost nine-thirty and country. Only cities are well lit. We are going to bounce a little now because we are on a dirt road." She warned. Allie stretched her head up as far as she could. The trees on the mountains and in the valley began to darken into each other suddenly under a summer orange evening sunset that was quickly descending. As the sun finally began to set pastel glints no longer splashed between the now plum colored evening leaves of the trees. The open spaces between the branches began to fill with the color of night. Soon, only the headlights of the car lit the way through the darkness. It was the only light revealing the trees that were now faded into darkness. It was the second week of July. Until now, she did not notice that the roads had no lights at all. Once in a while, a porch light glowed revealing a house that otherwise would have been seen. In the city, the street lights would still give the illusion of daylight but after nine at night in the country? Well, it was just plain dark. Were it not for the headlights on the car she would have seen nothing. As it was all she was able to see was the road ahead. Allie had never seen such darkness in her life other than her room at night when the lights were out and she was seven. "Mom!" Allie shrieked.

“Oh my God, what’s wrong, Allie?” Darla slowed the car and pulled to the side of the road where she stopped.

“Are you okay, honey? What happened?” She brushed a strand of hair from Allie’s forehead.

“I-I- I saw glowing things, like eyes in the darkness. Like a monster!”

“It’s okay, honey. It wasn’t a monster at all. You are still not tall enough to see a full view. I wish you were. You would have been amazed! It was a deer! The glowing eyes were just a reflection of the headlights.”

“A deer? Really?”

“Yes, honey. A real deer!”

“Like Bambi?”

“Like Bambi at the end of the movie- big!”

“Wow! Do you think I’ll see deer at Aunt Brigid’s?”

“You might. They are very shy I hear but yes, you might.”

“That would so great. I can’t wait to get to there!”

“So, we are good to go? Not scared anymore?”

“No, not scared. I’m sorry Mommy.”

“It’s okay. Things are very different up here. You’ll see.”

After what seemed like a very long ride in the middle of night, they made yet one more turn and pulled into a very long driveway. At the top of this driveway was a house which could be barely seen because the only light was from within and that light was extremely dim. There were no lights on the outside. In the

dimness, the color of the house was unclear other than it being a pale color making it seem like a shortbread house cut out from the darkness. The shutters looked as if they were carved from chocolate. The dim lights from the windows glowed a soft melon color.

The car stopped and she heard the barking of what had to be a very big dog in the darkness. As she opened the car door, the first thing she realized was it was much cooler here than the city in July. The driveway was not paved, it was all dirt. It wasn't the gritty dirt of the city she was always told had germs, but a dark, muddy dirt that gave way with every step like wet sand on a beach. And, it had a smell! She never knew dirt had a smell. But, then again, she realized, this is all real dirt and not city dirt. Most of all it was dark, *really* dark. She was going to stay *here*? Then a porch light went on, to Allie's relief. As she and her mother walked toward the light, she heard a woman's voice command, "Down, Jupiter! Down!" Amidst the clacking of what sounded like the very big toe nails of a very big dog, the door opened. Jupiter was a huge black, wiry haired dog with gray blotches all over him. He rushed toward her so fast, she actually clung to her mother's pants! She hadn't done that since she was five! Suddenly, he was upon her! As she braced herself against her mother, Jupiter sniffed loudly and drooled happily lapping her face and he wouldn't stop. He was so happy to see her she couldn't help but laugh and giggle. The more she giggled, the more he drooled and lapped until the woman's voice said,

"Jupiter! She loves you too. That's enough!" She tugged on his collar gently until he quieted.

As they walked inside the house, Allie became aware of the smell of flowers. Jupiter lay on the rug in front of the fireplace and it was then that she realized just how big he was. His paws were bigger than her fist and when he lay down, his legs stretched over the rug, which was not small. The spots she thought were gray were actually silvery spots all over his head and body like quilt work. His fur looked coarse. Just the same, Allie knelt down to run her fingers through the fur on his head. Soon he was sleeping and snoring very loudly.

"I think Jupiter is great!" Allie laughed.

"Oh, good. Then I will send him to bed with you so I can stretch out on my own bed for a change", her godmother laughed.

"Don't go making those looks, Darla." Brigid chided gently. This is country and she will live country just like me. Right, Allie?"

"Oh, yes Aunt Brigid! So I can really sleep with Jupiter?"

"Let's all have some chocolate and get acquainted, hmmm?"

The walk to the kitchen was dim. Amber lights from burning lamps and candles glowed. As they walked past the candles, Allie then knew the smell of flowers was coming from the candles. The kitchen smelled of cinnamon and sweets. They sat at a small, round table covered with a handmade lace tablecloth that looked cream colored in the dim of the hurricane lamp's burning

wick. She noticed there was type of liquid in the lamp, oil perhaps that keeping the lamp burning like a candle? She noticed the tablecloth was not covered in plastic. Cups and dishes were already set. Not only did she get hot chocolate but there was also whipped cream on it! Allie bit into still warm peanut butter cookies! How did Aunt Brigid know peanut butter cookies were her favorite?

"Allie is precocious, Brigid..." her mother was saying. Allie frowned.

"I can see that she is very bright and wise for her age." Allie liked that. She was wise.

"Sometimes a little too wise, if you know what I mean?" Then Darla smiled at Allie,

"I want you to behave and respect Aunt Brigid."

"You make me sound like a brat!"

"Not a brat. Just-"

"I know...pre..co..cious."

She is smart indeed, Brigid observed.

Chapter Two

After Allie and her mother hugged and kissed goodbye, Allie sadly watched her drive down the dark driveway and back to Brooklyn. Within moments, the beam of headlights was gone and all was black again.

"I will try to behave Aunt Brigid".

Allie didn't know what else to say. She did not think she was a brat even though her mother made it sound as if she were.

"Allie, I don't think you are a brat. Perhaps you like to ask a lot of questions."

"Mommy says it's not polite to ask too many questions. She said some people might take it for being nosey."

"Not all people understand that a good start to learning is to ask questions."

"What does that mean, Aunt Brigid?"

"It means we will each learn what we do not know about each other and about ourselves." Allie frowned. She was a little confused by what her godmother said. Her confusion did not go unnoticed.

"We will get ask each other a lot of questions during your stay." This made Allie feel a lot better.

"Come, Allie. Let's get you settled for the night and we can talk a little. You must be exhasusted."

Brigid took some of her suitcases and began going up a simple wooden staircase to the second floor. Suddenly, Allie wished the house were brighter. All the candles and lamps seemed spooky. In the city, lights were brighter.

"Aunt Brigid, how come your house is so dark? Don't you have electricity? I mean are you poor and could not pay the light bill?"

After a warm laugh Brigid explained, "I have electricity, honey. We may be country but we are modern. Why, I even have running water!"

"I'm sorry...I-I didn't mean..I-I". Allie stammered with embarrassment. She might be nosey after all. Allie felt crushed in her godmother's hug.

"That is not why the house is dim, honey. It is dim to soothe the mind and body after a day of work. The days are still long and there is always so much to do."

"It feels spooky."

"But doesn't it also feel calm and warm and relaxed? Oh, here is your room."

As Brigid opened the door, Allie squinted. Suddenly, the room was brightly lit. Allie realized her godmother had turned the light on for her. Compared to the soft tones of the rest of the house, the light felt harsh to her eyes. She looked around the room. It was really big. The bed could fit three grown-ups. The quilt was made of patches that all had pink roses on them. The curtains were rosy pink and fringed in white lace. There were two nightstands, one on each side of the bed and a very tall light wood dresser. There was also a dresser with a big round mirror on it. It was a grown up dresser and a grown up room. The wooden floor shone in the light and the rug next to the bed was a soft rosy solid color. At the foot of the bed was a big chest.

"Thank you for turning the light on, Aunt Brigid but now, it seems too bright."

"I'll turn it off in a while. I just want to unpack what you need for the night. While I do that why don't you brush your teeth and wash your face while I turn down the bed and plump up your pillows. Turn right and go to the end of the hall. It is the last door on the left. There is a small table under the window at the end of the hall and Sally will be asleep on it."

Allie walked down the hall. Nightlights lit the hallway and she soon found out that Sally was a very big, furry black cat. She was curled as tight as a knot on the small table just outside the bathroom. Allie wondered how she did this. Since she was so fat, it could not be easy to do. She then turned left and went to the bathroom to brush her teeth.

When Allie got back to her room, the light was off and the lamp next to her bed was on. It too was rose colored. It was an old fashioned lamp with a glass globe resting on a matching globe underneath it. Only the bottom part was lit. Sitting against the pillows was Mr. Taps! How did she know? His white fuzz looked pink under the glow of the lamp.

"Call Jupiter. He likes a comfy bed at night but you had better get in first. He tends to hog up the bed."

Allie climbed into the bed from the top and squirmed down until her head was on the pillows. It was the most comfortable bed she had ever been in. She turned a little and it sank when she moved. It was soft and cushioned and it hugged her like a snuggle. She smiled a wide smile.

"I take it you like a feather bed?"

"Is that what this is? Oh, it is wonderful! I never felt anything like it!"

As Brigid unrolled the blankets onto Allie who said, "Blankets? In the summer?"

"When I open the windows you will know why. Even though it is summer, we had had very cool weather. Especially at night. There have been times I have to light the fireplace!"

"You can call Jupiter now. Brace yourself."

"Jupiter!" Allie called. It only took one call. She heard the massive paws rumble up the staircase and gallop toward the bed. Up he was with such a thump the whole bed shook. He went up to her face and put his cold snout against her cheek. She petted him and he settled down next to her. The only thing he was missing was a pillow for his head. Her godmother had partially opened the window during Jupiter's rumble and a cold breeze eased its way into the room. Allie had to admit to herself that the blankets felt really good with the slight chill in the room.

"Do you say prayers at bedtime, Allie?"

"Yes. I do."

"Shall we then? You say yours first and then I shall say mine."

"You still pray?"

"Of course. In the morning and at night and sometimes when I think of it, during the day." Allie had never heard of anyone praying so much.

She put her hands together and began "Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep. If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my

soul to take. God Bless Mommy, Aunt Brigid, Jupiter and Sally. Oh, and please make my daddy stop drinking."

Tears began to form in Allie's eyes. Brigid's heart hurt at hearing the last part of her prayer and seeing Allie near crying.

"It's okay to cry Allie. I'm here. You do not have to cry alone, you know."

Brigid wrapped her arms around her and held her as Allie cried within her hug.

After several minutes, sobs became long sighs.

"It's okay, honey. It's always okay to cry when you need to. I know how hard all of this is for you. I hope I can help you have fun this summer. You need fun, too."

"Thank you, aunt Brigid. I feel better. I do."

"May I take a turn and say a prayer?" Allie nodded her head.

"Creator light the path of those traveling this night that they reach home safely. Touch the lives of those in sadness in whatever way you will. My Lady and Lord bless the lost that they find their way and help our world be at peace. I thank you my Lady for helping me this day, for giving me the wisdom to be grateful for all you provide. I ask that Sam, Darla and my lovely godchild be blessed with healing. Thank you for the company she will keep me for a while. Thank you, for the blessings of this day and as I have been provided for so shall it always be. Blessed be."

"I never heard a prayer like that before."

"What did you think?"

"I liked it. I liked the way you just talked. Who are the Lord and Lady?"

"Well, you know how some people pray to Jesus and his mother, Mary? It is something like that."

Brigid hugged Allie to her as Jupiter picked up his huge head then flopped it back down on the bed. Allie slid down her pillows and yawned. Brigid gave her a soft kiss on the forehead. Allie slipped her slender arm under the mighty neck of Jupiter, her fingers finding the great head of Jupiter. She fell asleep stroking thick fur to the soft tap of rain falling on the roof.

Chapter Three

Allie awoke to the smell of bacon and pancakes. Jupiter was gone. The bed was warm and soft and she did not want to move but her stomach was telling her to feed it so she began her crawl up the thick mattress, pushing the heavy quilts aside as she got up. She had never climbed out of bed before! She noticed her robe was already on the foot of the bed. The room wasn't chilly anymore. She noticed that in addition to pancakes and bacon, there was another smell in the air. Something she never smelled before. She put on her robe and getting up, looked around the room. It was not dim as the sun, shimmering against the rose colored curtains still cast a soft light on the walls. She realized how pretty everything was.

She slid her feet into her slippers and began down the hallway to the stairs. Although it was day, the house was still dim looking. She noticed the walls were painted a sandy color and the floor to the stairs was wood. On the floor was a long narrow rug with fringes on each end. It was light blue with a tan border which left inches of wood to be seen along the walls. She went to the stairs and followed her nose down to the kitchen. At the bottom of the stairs the smell she did not know became stronger. Looking to her left she saw a fireplace blazing with wood burning. She closed her eyes and breathed in deeply taking in the scent of burning wood.

"Good morning, Allie!" Brigid said cheerfully.

"Good morning. The bacon woke me up. It smells so good. And the fireplace is all lit up and smells so good too. I never smelled anything like it before. In fact, I never saw a fireplace before."

"The wood is cherry wood. Every wood has a different smell but I like cherry wood the best of all."

Allie stopped and really looked at her godmother for the first time.

Sunshine beamed a path through the windows to Brigid whose hair shone like a brand new copper penny. Although it was pinned up, the ends of her hair curled wildly down to her neck. Her hair fell in loose, curly tendrils atop her head. She turned from the stove and the amber of her eyes sparkled like amethyst stones in moonlight.

"I was hoping it would. I didn't want to wake you anyway until breakfast was ready. Hungry?" She asked.

"Oh, yes!" Allie agreed as she sat at the table.

"Did you happen to look out of the window yet?"

"No, I didn't."

"Go out and take a quick look. It may not be there too much longer."

Curious, Allie went to the door. When she opened the door, she first felt what is the usual morning chill of Livingston Manor, New York. She quickly forgot this because she could not believe what she was seeing. Bowing the sky like a bridge was a rainbow! She had never seen one before. It was beautiful.

"Oh, Aunt Brigid! I always wanted to see a rainbow!"

"It is amazing, isn't it, Allie?"

Brigid smiled. Remembering Allie's prayer for her father last night, she was glad that the Lady had given Allie something beautiful for the day.

"It rained really hard last night. You slept through it all. You were so tired.

Sometimes after a rain, we do see rainbows up here. I had not seen one for a while. Here we go. Breakfast is ready, Allie."

Allie went back to the table and put butter and syrup on the pancakes already on her plate. She took a bite and she felt the pancakes dissolve in her mouth.

"These are the best pancakes I ever had! This pancake syrup is great! The stores up here have great stuff, huh?"

"I made these pancakes from scratch and the syrup is home made and fresh, right from a farmer that makes his own syrup from the sap of the maple trees-"

"What's that sound?" Allie interrupted as a furious tapping got her attention.

"Oh. I almost forgot. That's Jasper." Her godmother rose casually from the table and went to one of her cupboards taking out a small brown bag.

"Jasper? Who's Jasper?"

"He's my friend. He's a Red Squirrel."

"You have a friend that is a squirrel?"

"Oh, yes. I have many animal friends here. You will meet them all."

Brigid pushed aside the blue cafe curtains over the sink, and there, on the other side of the windowpane was a red squirrel tapping with an impatient attitude.

"Can I see?"

"Yes, but shush. He doesn't know you and I don't think you want to scare him away before I give him his peanuts."

"You are going to feed him? Oh, can I watch?"

Quietly, Brigid signaled her over with a small wave of her arm. In the bag were peanuts. Brigid took out a handful and the tapping stopped. Jasper sat on his hind legs waiting, paws poised like a mouse. When Bridged opened the window, he did not run. He took a peanut from her hand, held it to his mouth and with both of his little hands broke the shell. He quickly nibbled on the peanut. After the first peanut, he took the rest from Brigid's hand one at a time and lined them up in a row on the sill. They watched him eat them one by one and then he was gone until the next morning.

"He does this every morning. Now if he would only clean up after himself." She laughed.

"He is so cute!"

"Yes, he is. Later you might see him taking birdseed from the feeder too. He raids their food."

"Aunt Brigid?"

"Yes, Allie?"

I like your friends already!"

After breakfast, Allie got dressed and ready to go out for a walk with her godmother and Jupiter.

"Aunt Brigid, do I really need all this? The sun is out." She held a raincoat over her arm and an umbrella in her other hand as she slipped into golashes.

"The 'Manor' is a funny place weather-wise. Sometimes it rains here while everyplace else has sun. Storms move in quickly and this summer, it has not been like summer at all. In fact, it has been pretty chilly and it has rained a lot. When it does, it comes down so hard, there are waterfalls of rain pouring down from the roof!"

Allie clomped outside in her heavy rubber golashes and the moment they stepped outside, she decided Aunt Brigid was right. The rainbow and sun were gone. But that was not what caught her attention then. Her eyes opened wide-like saucers at what she saw. There were no houses around at all. All she saw were trees.

"These are all Christmas trees, Aunt Brigid!"

"Yes. They are. I have different types here-"

"It is...gorgeous!"

Brigid smiled. She liked the way her little niece pronounced "gorgeous" so clearly. In many ways, she was smart but wise beyond her years. She was too aware of the problems adults can have. And this was just not right.

As they walked, the mud slurped at their boots and Jupiter ran ahead of them and out of sight.

"Where is Jupiter?" Allie asked with worry. "Will he run into the street?"

"No, he will be around us. You'll see. He will run ahead so far and then he turns around, runs back and waits. Watch."

In a few moments, the big dog was back. He was barking and running ahead then running back and then he ran in circles around them, still barking as if to say, "Hurry Up! You're missing it!" He splashed mud as he circled them, collecting dirt on his longish, wiry fur.

Allie looked up at the sky. There was a crawling dark shadow in the sky and a faint rumble. Allie heard her godmother say softly, "Thank you for the beauty of this day. Thank you for the blessings that will come to us." Brigid said softly.

"Who were you talking to?"

"I was saying one of my prayers, honey."

"Just like that? No amen? Just a couple of words?"

"It is what is felt from the heart that matters. To me that is the best prayer."

"Do your prayers get answered?"

"I don't say prayers to get them answered because in time, what is best will be the answer. I just accept that there are some things I do not understand and never will. The answer to my prayer is being happy anyway."

"How do you do that? Be happy when things happen that you don't want or understand?"

"I have learned to trust that my Creator, Lord and Lady understand and that things work out for a purpose that I may never know."

"When you say Creator, do you mean God?"

"Yes, I think Creator is to me is what God is to others."

"What's the difference then? Why don't you say God like everyone else?"

"Because I cannot begin to guess what Creator is like. Most people see "God" as a elderly man. God may be or may not be. God could be a woman or maybe God is even something else. What Creator is does not matter to me-"

Brigid stopped. There was something in the grass that caught her attention.

"What is it, Aunt Bigid?"

"It's a toad. He must have been caught up by the rain. He needs to get back to the pond."

"You have a pond?" Allie gasped. Brigid gently picked him up, cupping him with her hands.

"Is he alright?"

"Yes. I think he is. He is trying to jump away."

"What are you going to do?"

"We will walk to the pond and put him there. As long as he is at home, he will do fine when the next rain comes in later."

"I see clouds far away. How can you be so sure it will rain here?"

Pointing to a big red maple tree, Brigid replied, "Look at the leaves. The leaves are pointing upwards. The leaves tell me when it will rain. I learned that from a Native American teacher I studied with."

Allie walked in silence thinking how really cool it was that her godmother would pick up a toad and know how to predict weather. Her mother didn't know how to do that but then, neither did she. They were city. Aunt Brigid was country!

"Listen Allie. Hear that?"

Allie heard "Caw, caw, caw".

"Those are ravens and crows!"

"Do you have a lot of them?"

"Oh, yes! They are amazing birds."

"I have a friend in school who thinks they are unlucky. She says they mean someone is going to die."

"What a sad thought! I believe the raven can see the past and future and when they show up, there will be changes."

"What kind of changes?"

"I haven't learned to speak raven...yet." Brigid giggled. Soon they were at the pond.

"Allie, would you like to be the one that sets him free?"

"What does he feel like?"

"Pet him while I hold him."

At first, Allie carefully extended a finger. She had heard frogs felt slimy.

As she touched his tiny head she exclaimed, "He is so soft! I thought he would feel rough and icky."

"No, he feels soft. In that you are right. But, we have to get him to the pond because he is what is called "cold blooded". In the wintertime, he will hibernate. By that I mean-"

"He will go to sleep", Allie added quickly.

"You are smart! So it's important that he be able to go home when he needs to so his body can stay a good temperature for him."

Brigid stretched her hand out for Allie to take the frog. Allie giggled. He was so squirmy, she had to cup her hands around him so he wouldn't jump. She stooped over and laughed as he jumped from her hands into the pond. Then he was gone.

Suddenly, the shadow in the sky that had been slowly crawling toward them was suddenly overhead and drenching them with rain. Allie now knew why her godmother wanted her to bring her raincoat. She put it on as quickly as possible. As she was pounded by the hard rain, the temperature had risen quickly and everything around her felt steamy. She began to sweat under the plastic cloth.

"It's getting so hot so fast, Aunt Brigid."

"It might cool off after this storm. So far, to be honest, it's been not like summer at all. We still have humid days once in a while. At least at home, we can put

on the ceiling fans and air conditioning when we go back if it stays hot. Oh, Allie- watch where you wa-"

Brigid had not been able to warn her soon enough. A confused Allie lay flat in the mud with a boot standing up in a deep puddle. Brigid laughed and laughed.

"Where did this mud come from?"

"I tried to tell you to watch out for mud. When it rains, there are parts of the ground that get soggy and wet very fast! Are you okay?" She knelt using a kerchief to wipe Allie's face.

"I'm sorry. I am all dirty!"

"A little mud never hurt anyone!"

As quickly as the harsh rain began, it stopped suddenly. Allie struggled on one foot as Brigid went to get her boot. The ground slurped as she pulled and tugged at it to take the boot out. With muddied boot in hand, she then took off Allie's muddy sock and put the boot back on her sockless foot. Brigid picked up a handful of mud and asked, "Now. We are not going to call this walk off because of mud and rain now, are we?" And she smeared Allie's coat with more mud. Suddenly Jupiter ran up to and past them hurdling himself into the pond.

"Oh, no!" Brigid moaned.

"Can he get hurt?"

"No. It's just that- say, have you ever given a dog a" Brigid paused then spelled in a whispered, "B-a-t-h? He really needs one now! I think Jupiter has earned himself a 'b'-'a'-'t'-'h'", Brigid spelled out the word, "bath" again. "I am hoping Allie, that one day, he does not learn how to spell! He has plenty of places to hide."

As big and grand as Jupiter was, he looked pitiful sitting in the bathtub with his fur slicked down by water and soap.

"Ponds have a natural slime and moss. Jupiter behaves when I bathe him but, he really doesn't like baths. That's right Jupiter. You did it again and you know that when you run into mud and jump into the pond, you must get a bath." She scolded lovingly.

Allie loved the feel of the soapy fur between her fingers. As they sprayed off the soap, it waved down his fur. Soap gone, his fur squeaked, just like Allie's hair did after a shampoo. Aunt Brigid held him as Allie tried to dry him. He wrestled underneath huge towel. Then Brigid warned, "Stand back!" she opened the bathroom door and as she did, Jupiter bolted from the bathtub, skidding on the tiles and rippling the hallway rug as he galloped down the hall and stairs.

"Aunt Brigid! He will break things!"

"No. He won't. He's very careful. C'mon. He is fun to watch after a bath!"

Downstairs, Jupiter rolled on his carpet, dragging himself (and it) along the floor. He snorted as he rubbed his head on the rug, stopping to turn over on his back, swaying his body back and forth. He rolled over, landing on the other

side and began dragging the rug again, snorting and head scratching over and over again. Allie and Brigid laughed at the sight of a big dog romping like a puppy. After some long minutes, he finally stopped. He panted from the exercise and finally plopped down and fell asleep. He never even heard the boom of the loudest thunder Allie had ever heard in her life. Nor did he hear the rain that pounded on the roof.

Chapter Four

Spaghetti and meatballs simmered in a quart pot on the stove and garlic bread was in the oven. The rain from the afternoon had not stopped. It wasn't raining as hard, but Allie could still hear the tap dance of the raindrops on the tin roof above. They were in the mud room off the kitchen to the right where Brigid was showing Allie her recycling system. The door to the kitchen was left open so they could smell the garlic bread when it began to toast.

"Now this blue pail is for cans and glass, the red is for plastic and the white tub is for paper. I tie up the newspapers so I can use them to start the fireplace in the winter." Brigid explained.

"Gee, you still do this?" Allie asked hoping she would not get confused.

"What do you mean, Allie?"

"Well, in the city, we don't recycle anymore. It is easier, don't you think?"

"So many people would rather do the quick thing than the right thing."

For the first time, Allie thought she saw a flash of anger in her aunt's dark amber eyes. It surprised her.

"Are you angry with me, Aunt Brigid?" Allie asked meekly.

"With you? Never. I just get upset when people choose not to care for our planet.

"Up here, we still recycle and even if we did not, then I would still do as much as I could and use what I could as fertilizer. Such as tin. Did you know metal was actually good for the earth?"

"No, I didn't." Gee Aunt Brigid was smart, Allie thought.

"Uh-oh. I smell the garlic bread. We better go take it out before it burns."

They went through the small wooden doorway and into the kitchen.

"Where is Jupiter?" Allie peeked into the living room. "Jupiter is not on his rug by the fireplace."

"Oh," Brigid giggled. "He is sulking. He does that after he wakes up from a bath."

"How long will he sulk?" Allie asked as she pulled out a chair and squeezed onto it as she sat down at the table.

"Until snacker time later."

"Snacker time?"

"Yes. It's what I call treats. A snack of 'crackers' or biscuits"

"That's cute!"

Brigid put the garlic bread on the table and asked,

"Do you say a prayer before eating, Allie?"

"No. We never have- except of course for Thanksgiving!"

"Well, I always say 'thank you'."

"For everything!" Allie added.

"Yes! You noticed!" her godmother teased.

"We are grateful for this food from your land. Help us to remember those who struggle throughout the world. Nourish them and help them. I ask that all who

labor and work and those who cannot be blessed with the light and love of your care and that they be provided for."

Allie bowed her head and listened carefully to the words. She liked the way her godmother prayed. She made it sound so easy. Brigid put a blue serving dish of spaghetti and meatballs on the table and uncovered the salad. The red and white of the pasta and sauce on the blue dish looked really good, like the flag, Allie thought.

"Tomorrow we will go to bring the trash and recyclables to the dump. Oh, and Allie, don't throw out the dinner scraps. Some of it will go for compost. Do you know what compost is?"

"No, I don't."

"Well, food scraps turn into vitamins for the earth and in the spring I use it when I plant my gardens of flowers and vegetables."

Yes, her godmother was very smart.

"Tomorrow, I will take you to see my little greenhouse where I grow herbs like parsley, oregano and basil. I also want you to see my garden."

"Hmmm. This spaghetti is delicious!"

"I used the basil from my greenhouse in the sauce. Fresh herbs taste so much better!"

"Aunt Brigid, what will the rest of the scraps be for?"

"Oh, for Arthur and Gwen, the skunks that live under the house." She said casually.

"Skunks?!"

"Does that surprise you?"

"Well...yes. But, I am sure you have a reason to feed them. You have a reason for everything." Allie said carefully. She did not want to offend her aunt.

"How right you are. You see skunks spray when they are frightened. They are terribly smelly but, it is kind of cute to watch. First, they stomp their little feet. Then they do a hand stand, bend their hind legs over their heads and spray!"

"Wow! Really?"

"Uh-huh. So, I decided to make friends with them. This way they would not be afraid of people. They live under the house and only come out at night. Allie-if you ever see a skunk in the daytime, run and get me. If Jupiter is with you, make sure he comes in too. A skunk is supposed to be out only at night. If you see them in the day, they are very sick with rabies and can make other animals and people sick. There are also other animals that should only come out at night like porcupines and possum. I just wanted to mention that before I forgot."

"When you feed Arthur and Gwen will they come out right away?"

"No. It is still too early for them. They are probably just starting to wake up. I feed them around the time they come out. In the spring, they bring me their babies to meet as soon as they can walk."

"Aunt Brigid!" Now this was too much to believe.

"Okay. I can see you have doubts. Come spring, you will see for yourself."

Allie ate seconds of everything and afterwards she helped clear the table, separating the salad and meatballs and spaghetti.

"Allie, come with me. It is almost dark. You'll want to see this. Oh, and bring those scraps for the skunks." Brigid took out a plain, white plastic dish out from the cabinet and scaped some of the leftovers on it. "This is the dish for Arthur and Gwen."

In a few minutes they were on the front porch then down the short steps and turned left. Close to the stairs against the base of the house was a hole that was about five inches all around, almost in a circle.

"Just leave the dish in front of that hole."

"Now, come with me. It is just starting to get dark. If we hurry, we can see them."

"Them?" Allie thought.

They walked to the pond where Brigid signaled to stop. Suddenly, "birds" started flitting wildly about, flying to the left, right, up and then swooping down.

"What kind of birds are these?" Allie asked.

"They are not birds at all. They are bats."

"B-bats!?" Allie shrieked.

"Calm down, Allie. These are not bad bats. These are good ones."

"There are good bats?"

"Well, all bats are good, in their own world, in their own way. But by good, I mean these bats help people by eating insects. I don't have many mosquitoes,

you know but I should because of this pond. That's because each of these bats eat over a pound and a half of mosquitoes per day."

"That's a lot of mosquitoes."

"Yes, think about it. We are at a pond where mosquitoes breed. And, this is the time they like to come out-"

"Just like the bats." Allie realized.

"Exactly. So they are going out to feed on the mosquitoes at the best time to eat them".

"But, aren't bats dangerous?"

"Some are dangerous for people. But these are not. These are brown bats. They are hardly ever rabid. Black bats tend to get rabies. Bats only come out at night also so if you ever seen one in the daytime-"

"Get to house and bring Jupiter with me and let know right away." Allied remembered the warning about the skunks.

"Your mom told me you were smart. You are a very smart young woman. We are going to have a lot of really great times together because I love just talking with you, Allie. Tomorrow, we'll go see the bat houses I built for bats to come and live here on my property."

"You built them houses?"

"Yes. I wanted to encourage having good neighbors! But two bats that I named Elizabeth-Patrice and Bob actually live under my roof!" Brigid laughed.

Allie looked up cautiously. "Bats in the roof!"

"Oh, look! Look over to the other side of the pond. Watch for something moving in the grass."

"I see something! It looks almost like it has white stripes but it not a skunk, is it?"

"No. It is a porcupine."

"A porcupine?"

"Yes. Porcupines have different types of quills. One type of porcupine has straight quills. They go in like needles when they feel they have to protect themselves. The other type has hooks on its quills. Remember, they are night creatures too. So when you walk about when it is getting dark keep an eye out for them. You do not want to get stuck by them!"

"Oh, I will be careful, Aunt Brigid. I hate needles." Allie joked.

"Alright then. How about we head back now?"

Chapter Five

"I can only guess at how hard everything has been for you, Allie. Your dad's drinking, you and your mother moving up here at all." Brigid picked up the pace of her walk as it was getting closer to dusk and she wanted Allie to see Arthur and Gwen eating from the dish.

"I really miss him! I want us to be together again. Why can't we just do that? Maybe that will make him happy again and be able to stop drinking!"

"I understand how you might feel and why you want everything to happen like that but, right now your dad is not ready to do everything he has to. He has-"

Brigid paused thoughtfully then continued, "an illness. Not an illness like the flu or a heart condition. An illness that makes it hard for him to stop-"

"Drinking." Allie said sadly.

"Alcohol does that to people. Like cigarettes. You know about cigarettes, right?"

"Yes. It is bad for you and sometimes people try to stop smoking a lot of times before they can stop. Some people never can."

"Allie, you must try to understand that it is the same thing with your father. It is hard for him to stop drinking. Many people do stop and become very happy, like they used to be."

"I want him to stop!"

"So do I, Allie. But, he has a journey to take on his own. Not a trip, a journey. A journey can also mean going from one point to another in life. Only your dad does not have a map right now. That is why I pray for him."

"You pray for my Dad?"

"Of course I do. Sam was not always like this. We have been friends for years. I pray he finds himself. I know there is that part of him that wants to be like he used to be. But, it is a hard journey and a lot of work to stop drinking, to stop smoking..."

"I don't know why he can't just stop drinking. I know it's hard, but that is what I want. I hate him when he drinks! I hate myself for not stopping him!"

"Never say hate, Allie. Hate destroys the heart and I know you do not mean hate, now do you? I think you mean you do not like how he is when he drinks and that is very different, you can see that, can't you?" Allie nodded reluctantly.

"And Allie, never, ever, say you hate yourself. You can be upset that you have not been able to help but never hate yourself. No one, none of us, can change another person's choice. We can only help ourselves make the right choices. So although you are upset because you cannot help, you must try to understand that there is nothing you can do. It must begin within Sam. It is his choice."

"How is daddy making a choice if he cannot stop?"

"Every time he took a drink at that moment, he chose to not stop. He chose not to get help either- so far."

Allie's eyes welled up. Rising tears glistened in her eyes.

"I was not enough!" Her little voice whispered.

"Allie. Never blame yourself or feel any of this has to do with you. Right now, he is suffering the loss of his family because of his choices. Whether he decides to get help or not has only to do with him. Hoping for what is out of your hands is too painful. You have a journey too. To go forward and learn to feel happy with yourself anyway."

"How can I do that?"

"By choosing to accept that sometimes part of life is accepting that things change. Sometimes they change and we do not like or want those changes. You feel you have lost your father. And I think he is afraid he has lost you. Still, right now, I believe he is, down deep inside, happy you are starting over up here. He may not like the changes that are happening either but, I 'm sure he feels it is for the best. Never take the blame for what an adult chooses. Adults know what is harmful and what is not. Adults also know what to do when there is a serious problem. Sometimes it is just very hard to do. Okay? You have a choice too, right now. And, that is to enjoy being a child and remembering not to live with blame because you have none."

"Okay," Allie sighed.

"How do you feel about your mom's plans to move up here? Leaving the city and going country? Your mom is making a choice right now. She truly believes with all her heart that a change for you both is best for you."

"Well, now that I am here, I don't mind at all! I love the country!"

"In time, I know you can be of great help to her."

"How?"

"To begin with keep showing her how much you love her. You both need to keep showing each other how much you love each other right now. This is very important because a lot of times, when families are in pain, they close up from each other because they think the pain will be less. But, by doing this each person feels very alone. This is why it is so important for you and Darla to remain close."

"I miss her."

"I know. She is your mother. She misses you too."

"I know but, right now I want you be a child. You have no blame to carry whatsoever. Think about having fun, like the fun we will have all summer."

"Yeah." Allie's eyes began to beam, almost greedily at the thought of country fun.

"I have secret."

"Really, what?"

"She's coming up this weekend."

"Really?"

"Yes. But please act surprised if you can. She wanted to surprise you. You can take her on walks with Jupiter and show her all you have seen-"

Brigid tussled Allie's hair with her hand.

When they got to the house, Allie checked the plate they had left for the skunks. There at the plate were two fluffy skunks, nibbling away at the meatballs. They stopped for a moment to look up at Allie and then, very calmly went back to eating their food. One of them had a big white spot on its head with a narrow white streak down the back and to the tip of its tail. The other one had a wide white band of fur that ran down the back to the end of its tail.

"Allie, meet Arthur and Gwen."

"They are soooo cute! And, they looked at me! They looked at me!"

"Yes, they will come to know you as they know me. Some people even have skunks for house pets. They take them to a vet and have the stink gland removed. I hear they are just like cats when they live with people. Isn't that amazing?"

"Do you think one day I will have skunks for neighbors like you do?"

"Well, that will be up to your mom. But, when you are all grown up and on your own I imagine you could, if you wanted.

"Peeep! Peeep! Peeep!"

"What is that, Aunt Brigid?"

"It sounds like a baby bird. Come on. I think it is on the lawn.

Chapter Six

They ran quickly to the front of the house. There, on the lawn, was a baby blue jay.

"Stay back, Allie. It's a very young bird. Somehow it must have fallen out of its nest. The parents will be around."

Allie stood back and as her godmother approached the baby bird crying in confusion on the lawn. Suddenly two big Blue Jays began diving toward Brigid. Wrapping her head with an arm, Brigid knelt down and gently picked up the baby bird with her other hand, nodding her head to Allie to go to the house. Allie opened the front door. Once inside, she noticed that her godmother's arm was bleeding.

"Aunt Brigid! You're hurt!"

"It's nothing sweetheart. The parents were only trying to protect their baby. But they would not have been able to get the baby back into their nest. I had to bring him in. We are his only chance to live and, if he makes it, we will have to keep him." She sat down at the table.

"Allie, please take off the tablecloth and bring me paper towels."

As Allie did this, Brigid gently held the bird in her hand, stroking it with the other. Allie put a paper towel on the table and Brigid gently placed the bird upon it.

"Allie, gently hold the baby while I scrub my arm."

Carefully, Allie placed her palm around the baby bird. It was so soft. She had never felt anything like it before. She knew what feathers felt like. They felt slick and strong but this bird's feathers felt more like the softness of a baby kitten than a bird. Allie was terrified of holding the tiny life too tightly. The bird began to "peep", rousing Jupiter from his sleep.

"Jupiter, you come with me. Can you keep the baby calm for a few minutes?"

Allie liked the way her godmother called the bird "baby".

Jupiter walked with Brigid to the sink where she scrubbed her arm down with dish soap. Blotting her arm dry with a paper towel she said,

"I have to get worms for him to eat." Worms, Allie thought. A few minutes later Brigid and Jupiter were back. Sitting down at the table once again, Brigid put a cup of dirt with worms, knife and long, thin tweezers on the table. She went to the sink and put a little bit of water into a small cup. When she came back, she slowly poured drops of water in the cup of dirt, tossing it gently with the tweezers. Jupiter watched with curiosity.

"Worms need damp dirt but if I put in too much water, they could drown. We have to be Baby's parents now. I hope he eats. I don't know if he got hurt in his fall. But, we will give him every chance we can. Birds are very fragile, Allie. But, we will try."

Allie watched her finely chop the worms. Picking up as many of the tiny pieces with the tweezers as possible, Brigid then dipped them into a little water and then brought the tip of the tweezers toward the baby bird's mouth. When

she placed the tip against the baby bird's beak it straightened its head up and opened its mouth wide, reaching for the worms. Brigid gently lowered the tweezers deep into the bird's throat and released the worms. Each time she repeated this delicate procedure the tiny mouth opened and as it reached for the tweezers, Brigid once again gently lowered the food deep into its throat. She repeated this for several minutes until the baby bird began to close its eyes. Allie was in awe as she watched and learned. She breathed slowly as if afraid to disturb the baby bird while it ate. She never noticed the tremor in Brigid's hand. Soon, the bird closed its mouth and eyes and began to fall asleep.

"There. You are full, now Baby Blue." Brigid cooed.

Allie liked that name. Baby Blue.

"Where are we going to keep him?"

"I have an unused birdcage. He can stay in there. I'll keep him in my bedroom which, now that Jupiter sleeps with you, is the quietest room in the house. We will cover it up so he can rest in my bedroom.

After Brigid retrieved an old bird cage and heat lamp from the basement, she put a small box in the bird cage then filled the box with some finely shredded paper. Gently putting Baby Blue into the makeshift nest, she covered the top of the box with an old, clean wash cloth. She tied the heat lamp to the outside of the cage and placed it in such a way that the light would not directly be over Baby Blue. As she brought Baby Blue to her room, Jupiter and Allie followed. They watched as she placed the cage on her dresser. Down the hall

on a small table outside the bathroom, Sally listened lazily. Ever vigilant, Sally heard everything from the lawn to now. So far, Sally noted, since coming upstairs the birdling had not uttered a peep. She curled her head up, chin pointed toward the ceiling, grateful to continue her nap.

“Allie, would you mind bringing the cup of worms, tweezers, knife and that small cup up here for me?”

Allie left to get them and Jupiter followed as if he too were on a mission. They both returned quickly.

“Thank you, Allie. Now I will be all set. Whenever he wakes up during the night, I can feed him right away. I have some cream for these cuts in the bathroom. Now that he’s all comfy, I can go put some on.” Allie stayed in the bedroom, eyes on the birdcage, watching for any signs of Baby Blue waking up and looking for food.

Passing what appeared to be a sleeping Sally on her way to the bathroom, Brigid said, “I know you heard the whole thing and I know you are awake listening to everything. Now, I will not be worrying about you scooting into the bedroom and upsetting the bird because you are curious. You hear me?” But all the big cat did was yawn.

Brigid washed her hands vigorously and scrubbed her arms once again. Then she rubbed a white ointment she made on her arms until the pasty cream was absorbed by her skin.

“Aunt Brigid, why did you cover everything up in the cage?”

“All birds, especially those that may be injured, need quiet and darkness to hopefully heal. When he gets bigger, we will bring the cage outside in nice weather. Of course, I will have to let him fly around the bedroom everyday too. I wouldn’t want to keep him cooped up”.

“Gee Aunt Brigid, I would have thought you would set him free in time.”

“Once baby birds require human care, they can never be in the wild again.”

Chapter Seven

When Allie came down the stairs the following Saturday morning she stopped on the last step. Overhearing her mother and her Aunt Brigid talking in the kitchen, Allie stepped down and quietly walked to the wall just around the corner outside the kitchen and leaned her back against it.

"Isn't it great that after all these years, we stayed connected?"

"That's why we are sister souls!" Brigid laughed.

"So? Anyone interesting in your life?"

"You know me. I enjoy my solitude and freedom. But that doesn't mean I won't meet the right person someday. It's just that I am truly contented with my life. I don't waste my energy fretting. Except of course for Allie, you and Sam. He was just such a great guy! What really happened?"

"When he got laid off, he couldn't handle it. And with me working, he got very depressed. It wasn't that I was working and he wasn't. He's not like that.

It's just that he loved his job. He was a great nurse and then they started firing people. Everyone says there aren't enough nurses and then they fire their experienced nurses to hire the young ones right of school for less money.

How is that for nonsense? Who'll teach these young nurses on the job?"

"It's the way of the world right now, I am afraid. Hereabouts, it's the same thing. I have friends that are nurses. They changed jobs several times in the last year for the same reason. It is really sad. And it is not only happening with nurses. It's everywhere."

“Then he began drinking. A little at first, then a lot once in a while and then all the time.”

“You didn't tell me anything about all this.”

“I was so busy working and going back to school to be a paralegal secretary, I didn't have time for anything. I had to think of possibilities. Getting this degree would be a better life me and Allie in case. I just tried to do everything I could for Allie. We needed more than a teaching assistant salary. As it was, since Sam lost his job, it was tight. I never stopped trying to convince him needed help though.” Allie heard her mother take a deep breath.

“That last night was really awful for me and Allie. It was a nightmare. After I making sure that Allie was well watched when I was in class Sam had to go and do that! He was so drunk, Brigid, what if she had gotten hurt by accident?”

“You did the right thing, Darla. You know you did.” Then there was silence for a minute.

Allie never thought for one minute that she could have been in danger. Her father, Sam, had become different, it was true, but she knew he would never, ever hurt her.

“He was so angry when I confronted him. I was so glad she never heard my threat to call the police. He was yelling so loud! What was I to do, Brigid?”

Stunned, Allie pressed her back tighter against the wall. Her mother was going to call the police.

"I never wanted Allie to go through all of this." Darla's voice made a sobbing sound. "That's what made reporting him so heartbreaking for me. With that mark on his record, he may never be a nurse again." Allie heard her mother sniffing.

"I had to report him, Brigid. I could not run the risk of his getting some type of custody. I could not trust his judgment anymore, Brigid. "

"What happened next?"

"He was found guilty of neglect. But, because he had been such a wonderful nurse and father up to that point, he didn't go to jail. Thankfully the judge gave him the choice of jail or living at a rehabilitation center for treatment. In fact, it's up here in Sullivan County. It's quite big, I hear."

"I think know the one." Brigid said.

Allie's heart began to pound against her chest the way it used to when she used to fold her pillow around her head trying not to hear the fighting, when she would cry into Mr. Taps who was the only friend she had to talk to.

"If it's of any comfort to you, I think she is having a great time here already."

Breathing as slowly as she could, as if they would hear her, Allie craned her neck around the corner of the wall until she saw them sitting at the table. Brigid extended her hand and held Darla's. Sally, the big black cat slinked past Allie, eyeing her like a snoop.

"It was all so fast. This all happened last week, just before the fourth."

"How terrible. Sam. I don't know what to say. Alcoholism is an awful disease."

“Sam may be messed up but, he adores Allie.”

“I have no doubt about that at all. His love for her-and you were never a question.”

“And I still love him too!”

“Have you seen him?”

“No, not yet. They have a rule of no visitors the first month. I keep in touch with the counselors. They don’t even allow him to get phone calls yet. In a way, I’m glad. I don’t think I can handle it. Maybe he won’t even want to talk to me. But, then, if he wants to see Allie he will have to I guess.”

“And Allie? Does she know he is getting treatment?”

“That’s what I want to talk to her about this weekend. She needs to know. She needs to know he is getting care in a place that can help him get better.”

“What if she wants to see him?”

“Well, at least for a month, she can’t, no one can. It is against the rules. Maybe after a month it could do them both good to see each other. But, I’m afraid if she sees him before he is feeling better, it will bring her unhappy memories.”

“No doubt. For my part, I will do everything I can for her to help her have a wonderful time. I’m looking forward to spending time with her myself. She is such a bright girl. This way, you can be at ease while you are getting everything together for moving up here. But, I am so sad for all of you.”

“No wonder everyone talked to you about their problems when we were growing up. You always knew what to say.” Sally stood on her back legs and

rubbed her head against Brigid's knee.

"Alright, Sally. Here ya go." She followed Brigid to the kitchen door. As soon as Brigid opened the door Sally scooted out. Her round belly waddled, swinging side to side as she left.

"Sally?" Darla asked with shock. "Don't tell me that's the same Sally you had way back when? Why, she would be ancient!" Brigid just smiled.

"It seems my daughter is sleeping rather late. I'll go and wake her up. I don't want to miss a second with her."

That was Allie's cue.

"Good morning!" She greeted cheerfully.

Acting cheerful was easy for Allie. In Brooklyn, no matter what, she always acted like nothing was wrong. In fact, she often acted cheerier than she might have. It was her way of not letting anyone know about her father. It was a way for them not to know about her too. She didn't want anyone to know that the father she adored drank and that she could not stop him. Instead, she smiled, laughed and joked all the time. So "cheery" was something she could hide all her problems behind, like a curtain.

"I was just going to get you, hon. I have to leave this early tomorrow and I don't want to lose a single minute with you!" Darla stretched out her arms for a hug and Allie allowed her self to be wrapped in her mother's loving arms.

As they ate breakfast, Brigid stared at her friend, occasionally leaning her head toward Allie. Darla finally gave in and explained what she and Brigid had

discussed. Allie heard the conversation but didn't act as if she had. She listened attentively and could feel her mother's pain and even fear at telling her. "Mommy, are you afraid I won't love you because of what you did?"

Darla was surprised by Allie's question. "Well, I think I am. I'm afraid you won't understand and be angry with me and couldn't bear that."

"I love you Mommy and Daddy. If this place can help him, I'll be happy. And maybe we will all be happy again. Then, could we all be a family again?"

"Maybe."

"Besides, Aunt Brigid helped me pray for Daddy to get better. Maybe this will help him too. Right, Aunt Brigid?"

"Maybe prayers will help him see a choice. Let's pray he chooses to take the help he's offered. Okay?" Tears began to glisten in Darla's eyes.

"Mommy. I'm sorry. I don't want you to cry. Please Mommy, don't cry!"

"No one has to be that strong that they never cry, remember?" Brigid reminded.

Allie got up from her chair and walked over to her mother. Wrapping her arms around her neck, Allie said, "It's okay to cry, Mommy. I love you!"

Allie kissed her mother and soon, she too, was crying again. Eyes beginning to mist as well, Brigid quietly got up and left the kitchen. As painful as it was to see, she knew Allie and Darla were beginning to heal each other. She knew that healing begins with facing your disappointments and heartache and having love around you for courage.

Chapter Eight

Even though her mother's visit had been short, it was wonderful being with her and showing her the skunks and bats and, of course, Baby Blue. They spoke again before Allie went to bed and since everything that really happened was explained, their conversations were lighter and filled with silly gossip from Brooklyn. Of course Darla kept Allie up to date on news about Sam but, there wasn't much to tell. He had to complete the first thirty days.

In the face all of this, Allie was able to enjoy her new routine. Allie began taking Jupiter out every morning for long walks on the property, bringing stranded toads and frogs to the pond and taking earthworms from sunny spots to cooler, damp ones. Her mornings started with Jasper at the window and began to wind down after dinner with feeding Arthur and Gwen. Sometimes she and Aunt Brigid would go out after feeding them to watch for bats. She was amazed at how they flew, as if leaves flitting about aimlessly on a wind. This particular day was cloudy as had been most of the days since Allie came to stay with her godmother. In fact, there were many days that were so chilly, Allie had to put on a sweat shirt. She was so glad that if she had to stay with anyone, she was staying with Aunt Brigid. She was like a second mother, which is what a godmother is supposed to be. She was smart and taught Allie a lot about animals and natures and besides, she was friends with a squirrel, skunks and bats! This particular day passed slowly under uncomfortable humidity and as Brigid and Allie slowly strolled the property, even the few breezes that kicked up

now and then felt warm. As they walked they talked about everything from flowers and herbs to movies. Allie also made a mental note about the leaves on the trees. They were pointing up. Just as she learned from her godmother, she knew the leaves were saying rain was coming soon. After their walk, despite the heat, Brigid taught Allie how to make oatmeal cookies. The ceiling fan in the kitchen swirled hot air around. Allie was surprised at how quickly the cookies baked. When they were cool they put the cookies in tin containers and wrapped them in wax paper. As the afternoon moved onward to early evening, the weather shifted to cool winds that would gust their coldness between the tiny mesh of the window screens. Those winds felt good. When Brigid opened all the windows opened, the cool winds blew out all the hot air. When she opened the door to put Jupiter on his line for a while, one of those gusts slammed the screen door against the house. Once attached to the line and out in the chilly wind, Jupiter happily ran the length of the line back and forth several times.

After having an early dinner of hamburgers and fries, Allie took the paper plates they used and went to the mudroom where she put them in the lidded container just for paper. As Allie prepared scraps of burgers, buns and fries and brought it outside for Gwen and Arthur's dish, Brigid washed their glasses and forks and then let Jupiter in. He was more than ready to be untied and brought in. The winds were getting stronger and overhead, the clouds coming from the next county over were looking black. Once inside the house, he was quickly at her side.

"He really follows you around, Aunt Brigid." Allie was munching on an oatmeal raisin cookie. It was soft and chewy.

"I'm not fooling myself. He really wanted in because the wind was really kicking up and he is hoping he will get what he is really waiting for in a few more minutes."

Allie smiled remembering "snackers".

Allie watched her godmother tell Jupiter to sit and wait, which he did. She then gave him his biscuits one by one out of a dog shaped cookie jar named "Dog".

"Allie you can give him some snackers too but, always make sure he sits first."

Jupiter stood up when the switch in mistresses took place. Taking two biscuits from the cookie jar and trying to sound like her Aunt Brigid as best she could, Allie commanded, "Jupiter, sit!" He sat and she gave him the other two cookies, just as Brigid had.

"It didn't take Arthur and Gwen long to come out to eat. I thought it was so cute the way they ate the fries first! Then they gobbled the leftover bun with ketchup so fast! I didn't know skunks like ketchup." The winds came and went several times. The gust made a "whoosh" sound and the branches on the trees crackled as they slammed into each other. Allie and Brigid looked out from the kitchen window over the sink. Clouds were rushing in quickly.

"I didn't know either the first time I gave them some on a roll some years back."

Sun disappearing quickly behind the closing clouds made it look later than it was.

"It's really looking late, Aunt Brigid."

"It's the storm moving in. It's only eight o'clock. We should have lots of light left but then, this day started slow and hot and then, it went by so fast." Brigid sighed, looking up at the clouds coming in.

"Perhaps you should take a bath now before the storm gets here. It's almost time for you to get ready for bed anyway and I have work to do."

"Are you going to work now? At night?"

"I don't have to leave the house to work because I work at home. Do you know how to use a computer? I bet you do."

"They teach us in school."

"Have you ever heard of an online business?"

"Yes, I have but I'm not sure how it works."

"Well, you know the stuff I send you? I make lots of stuff like that and people buy them from me. The sachet pillows, scented candles and herbs I grow I sell online as well as to some local customers. People go to my store on the computer, place and pay for their orders. I also have classes people take online to learn how to make candles and perfumes. In the fall and spring, I teach classes in arts and crafts at the community college. Tonight, I have to see what orders came in so I can plan on sending them out. After all, I kind of took the day off so, it's time to pay the piper and do the work! "

"Where do you make all of these things?"

"In my basement. Tomorrow, I'll show you my workshop and, if you like you can begin to learn how to do these things by helping me if you want."

"Oh, I want to! Everything you sent me is so beautiful!"

Allie felt very close to her godmother already and deep inside, there was a part of her that wanted to be just like her. Going to the bathroom to shower, she passed Sally, rolled like a ball, as usual, on the hall table. As she seemed to like to do most of the time, her chin was turned up toward the ceiling and Allie could barely see the tips of very white fangs. It seemed to her that Sally had a really good life even if she never showed any interest in anything. After her bath and brushing her teeth, Allie went to her bedroom. She opened the window a bit then crawled down under the blankets. There was a wind, not a breeze coming in through the window that felt refreshingly cold. She felt sleepy. Gram would always blame the weather. She would have blamed it on the weather here in Livingston Manor, for sure. She put the small throw pillow Gram made next to her pillow. Once she was nice and comfortable, she called Jupiter to her side. She heard the familiar rumble up the stairs and felt the sudden shake of the bed. Popping down clumsily, he stretched out. Since giving it to him, the small throw pillow never went unused by him. She never told Gram though. She didn't think Gram would appreciate this big, hairy dog, all sprawled out, sleeping with his huge head resting on her handcrafted home made pillow. He quickly began to snore. As she began to drift into sleep, she was awakened

suddenly by a rumble and crash. She quickly sat up. Startled, she trembled from the clamor of the violent storm that suddenly raged outside. Her room lit up like daylight as if someone put the light on then off in her room! The giant drum roll of the storm pounded again. She got up from her bed to close the window. Looking out she knew she had never seen a storm like this. Brooklyn storms seemed quieter. As she began to close the curtains, she noticed something outside. At first, she only heard the storm because it was so dark outside. The rain pounded on the roof like a roar. Sudden flashes of light changed night into day seconds at a time. She was temporarily blinded by the sharp brightness of lightening against the dark. Flashes of light continued and her eyes began to adjust. There was something down on the lawn. Straining her eyes against the silver streaking of rain on her window panes she saw that there, on the lawn was her godmother, dancing in the storm.

Chapter Nine

"Don't pick up that dirty worm!" Her mother scolded.

"But if I leave it here, someone will walk on it! I just want to move it to the grass, see?" Brigid said as she put it on the cool damp dirt alongside the park walk.

Her mother gazed up at the sky with a "What am I to do" type of sigh.

"It didn't feel dirty at all, Mommy. It felt cool and smooth."

"I just didn't want you to get germs, honey."

"You worry too much about germs, Mommy."

"Perhaps I do but you must wash your hands as soon as we get home, okay?"

"Okay, Mommy." She huffed.

It was Wednesday and spaghetti night. This was the night her father made dinner. The house smelled rich with garlic and bread when they all sat down to the table. "They" were Brigid's mother, father and sister, Marie. As quickly as Brigid would pick up a worm, Marie would be screaming. Whereas Brigid did not care that her red hair curled wildly, Marie was constantly running a brush through her silky, blonde hair. Brigid liked jeans and Marie like cashmere. The differences were endless. Although Marie was two years older, Brigid was the one that stuck up for her when other kids gave Marie a hard time. And Brigid had a temper. This summer day, she and Marie were walking through Prospect Park with their mother. They were walking toward the zoo at the other end of the park by Empire Boulevard and enjoying cherry ices. Suddenly, a girl walking toward them eyed Marie and bumped into her on purpose, causing her cherry

ice to fall onto her pink cotton blouse. Marie cried something awful and Brigid was gone. Their mother turned calling Brigid but Brigid, in her outrage, had quickly outrun her mother's call. By the time her mother shouted her name a third time, she had already caught up with the nasty girl and knocked her down. As her hair usually did when she was angry or upset, Brigid's hair frizzed as if electrified, her curls seeming to spiral more and more every second.

"Hey you!" Brigid yelled, "You had no reason to do that to my sister! You better learn that when you do something bad, someone might be there to-"

"Brigid!" Her mother said sharply with an 'I-don't-know-what-I-am-going-to-do-with-you tone' as she pulled her off the girl on the ground.

In the second it took for Brigid to turn her head toward her mother, the other girl was gone. She was a foot taller than Brigid. Her mother walked her away, holding her by the elbow scolding, "You could have gotten hurt! Why that girl was so much taller than you. I do not want you to ever do that again!"

They were all seated at the table when her mother spoke of the day's incident.

"But Daddy! That was Marie's favorite blouse. That girl had no right to do that!"

"And, as I said, I will get Marie another one just like it but, you must stop fighting every time you see something you don't like." Her mother scolded.

Annoyed, Brigid sighed loudly. She could not understand how she could stand by when kids picked on someone.

"If you knew how much fighting is going on in the world, honey, you would understand why Mom is upset with you. Children have to grow up to be peaceful people. It starts when people are young." Her father explained.

"Well, that girl is going to grow up to be one of the bad guys then!" Marie said, thinking of her ruined blouse.

"And she will have friends that fight too and there will no peace in her life because they will always cause trouble. But, if you choose peace, you will have peaceful friends and your world will be calmer."

Bored with the lecture and with a need to quickly to the point that really mattered, Brigid asked, "Am I going to be punished?" Her mother and father looked at each other.

"Well, you should be." Her father said. "You already knew how we feel about fighting".

"And you do have that temper, Brigid. You have to learn to control it." Her mother said.

"Thanks, Brigid for sticking up for me," Marie whispered.

"And you, young lady, should not be encouraging her! You are older and you definitely know better! So, you are both grounded."

"Daddy!" Marie protested.

"No more talk about it. Marie you are grounded for encouraging Brigid. Brigid-well, I do not have to explain more."

"Now, help me get the dishes done and we'll have dessert", their mother said.

Later in their bedroom, as Marie sat on her bed giving her hair one hundred strokes with her brush, Brigid said, "I'm sorry you got punished, Marie."

"It's okay. You got punished for me so I don't mind getting punished for you."

"I just got so mad!"

"I'm glad you're my sister and not someone else's. Daddy was right though. I am the oldest so come you're so tough?"

"Do you ever feel like you're looking for something and you get upset because you can't find it?"

"What did you lose, Brigid? I'll help you find it-"

"That's the strange part. I don't know. I didn't lose anything but I keep feeling like there is something I have to find. It's a feeling that is always inside. I guess I get mad fast because of it."

"Maybe you lost your marbles!" And they both laughed.

When Darla and Brigid met, they were in seventh grade. They liked each other right away. Soon they went everywhere together. They would walk up to the movie theatre on Ninth Avenue, see matinees every Saturday and talk on the telephone every night.

"I want to live in the country one day," Brigid was stretched out on Darla's bed gazing up on the ceiling as she usually did every Sunday afternoon.

"The country? When would I see you? "

"Well, it can't happen right away. I'm still in junior high and have high school and college to finish first. Then I have to get a job so I can buy a place."

"Hmmm. So you will have to older than thirteen, right?" Darla teased.

"I want to grow things and look out my window and see nothing but trees. And I will feed the birds and all the animals will be safe on my land! I will have Christmas card winters, Halloween colors in the fall and blue skies in the spring and summer. If I tell you a secret, promise not to tell or laugh at me?" Darla nodded with excitement.

"One day..."Allie paused and took a deep breath, "I want to dance in a rainstorm!"

Inseparable, they went to the same school and went to the same college. Brigid finished College in Fine Arts. Darla got her degree in education and met Sam. They both liked him right away. They thought it was so brave of him to want to be a nurse when all the other nurses were women. When they got married, Brigid was the Maid of Honor. When Marie had Allie, Brigid, of course, was the godmother. It was a perfect home. Darla stayed home with Allie while Sam began his career as a nurse. In time, Brigid got her house upstate and moved there but, through the years, they never lost touch.

Though Darla always knew Brigid was different what with reading all those odd books, in a way she did not want to know the path Brigid took. Fortunately for Allie, Darla didn't quite understand what Brigid believed. It didn't matter anyway. Darla loved Brigid dearly and whatever she believed she looked at as if it were just a change in religion. It was.

Chapter Ten

Allie slowly closed the curtains. What was her godmother doing dancing on the lawn in the storm? She knew Aunt Brigid was different than anyone else she ever met but this?

After standing a few minutes, she walked slowly back to bed. Jupiter never woke up from the thunder. He still lay, stretched out, with his head on Gram's pillow that she had given him. Back in bed, she sat up for a while puzzled. What makes a grown up dance in a storm? She heard the door downstairs open and got out of bed again. She quietly sneaked her way to the top of the stairs.

"Oh, Sally," her godmother cooed. "You are most amazing! Being in the rain with me! You are a darling. Here let me towel you off so you can dry off a little."

She heard Sally's meow then suddenly Sally was up the stairs and startled Allie as she passed her. She was not unaware of Allie on her trot to her perch outside the bathroom. Unknown to Allie Sally studied her as she curled up on the table top. Allie watched the odd cat who loved storms trot to the end of the hall where she jumped onto the tiny table outside the bathroom. As far as Allie was concerned, Sally did what she always did: curl up and go to sleep. Then she heard Brigid's footsteps begin up the stairs. As fast as she could, Allie tiptoed to her room. As she did, she heard "Peeep!" Baby Blue was up.

No sooner had she closed her door did she hear her godmother open her bedroom door and say, "There, there, Baby Blue. I guess it is time to eat." Soon afterward the peeping stopped.

Allie quietly opened her bedroom door again and went into the hall. Padding, barefoot, she silently inched to her godmother's bedroom door. She stood still at the door and listened. She heard Brigid humming. Putting her ear to the door, she listened. She heard what sounded like the striking of a match. Soon after a beautiful floral smell wafted under the door and into the hall. Brigid had lit one of her scented candles.

"My Lord and Lady, I thank you for a glorious day and for the cleansing storm this night. May our mother, the earth, Gaia, be cleansed and refreshed. I thank you for sending this storm and ask you accept my prayers for my godchild, Allie."

Allie appreciated her aunt praying for her but could not put seeing Aunt Brigid dancing on the lawn in a storm out of her thoughts. In fact, it was very unsettling. She heard the closing of a dresser drawer and quickly scooted back to her room. As she got inside, she slowly closed the door holding it firmly as the locked softly clicked into place. She heard the bathroom door open and shut and soon heard the running water of the shower.

Allie was really confused now. So much fun was happening! The frogs, Jasper, Jupiter jumping into the pond, his getting a bath, skunks, bats and Baby Blue.... Everyday was a great! She thought about this over and over again. But, no matter how wonderful she felt about everything that happened here, she

came back to one thought. "I have a godmother who dances on the lawn in a storm. Who did Mommy send me to stay with?"

Chapter Eleven

She first met Mistress a long time ago. She was supposed to. She knew that. In fact, she had left many a fine home because of her journey to find her. She was in a nice den at the time which she liked very much. The pets she adopted, especially the last childling, were very dear to her. He was kit sized, as pets go, and brought her to bed when he went to sleep every night. She could have stayed there and had almost decided to do so when, one day, as she sat on her pillow on the window she looked down onto the street and saw her. Mistress. The one she was to serve walked past the house. She was the one she had been waiting for. Sally knew she had to leave. The time had come.

Sally waited for her moment. She had to plan it perfectly and then move quickly. She felt bad that she had to leave and for the childling she had come to like so much. He had no way of knowing she was now called to work. She listened at the door. It was the time the tom-male came home. She jumped down and padded her way to the door. She heard his foot steps coming up the hallway stairs. Like a mouse, she hid behind the doorway by the door. She heard the metal go into the door and then the turning of the round ball. He came in. She ran out. "Blackie! Quick. Blackie got out!" He called. The childling was out the doors and down the stairs. "Don't fall!" he called to the boy. As the boy got to the bottom floor, two floors down, someone else was coming into the house. The front door opened and she was gone. "Goodbye, childling. Take care." She thought and was on her way.

The curly haired girl childing had just turned the corner. Tail straight up in the air, "Blackie" swiftly trotted to catch up and she did.

"Well, hello." Brigid said to the black cat that wove her way in and out of her legs. She heard her purr from the ground. Brigid liked this cat and had always wanted a black one. She was long haired, fluffy and soft. Brigid bent over to pet her. The cat stretched up on her hind feet, and stood to rub her head against Brigid's hand. The fur on her head felt like silk.

"Hey everybody, look what I brought home," Brigid called when she came in. Marie and her parents came to the door.

"That is the biggest cat I have ever seen!" Brigid's mother said.

"It's mostly fur."

"Uh, no." Marie corrected as she stroked her back. "This cat is just huge. Where did you find it?"

"It found me and it was as if it knew me."

"Well, it looks like it had been a house cat," her father said, noticing the silver colored leather collar. He removed the collar and looked inside.

"There is no information. We have no way of knowing who this cat belongs to."

"He belongs to me and I am not bringing him anywhere, especially a shelter!" Brigid insisted as if reading his mind.

"What if its family is looking for it? And they miss him?"

"Well, they shouldn't have lost him. That means they didn't care about him getting away!"

“She.” Brigid’s mother corrected.

“It’s a she.” As her mother held her, the big cat purred loudly and all went quiet.

She had dark orange eyes and, as she purred, she looked at each of them directly in the eye. Then she turned slightly, just enough to stare into the eyes of the woman who held her.

“I’ll call her Sally.” Brigid said suddenly.

“Sally. I like that.” Marie agreed

“Then, Sally it is.” Their father said.

“I feel like I got an early birthday present this year!”

“It does seem that way, Brigid.” Her mother said.

“That reminds me. We have everything for your party tomorrow!”

“I can’t wait!”

“So, when are you going to stop wearing jeans and dressing up like a girl? You are going to be fourteen!” Marie teased.” Ignoring Marie’s question, Brigid went to her room and took out some of her allowance money.

“I have to get to the store before it closes! I have to get food and something for a litter box!” Then she bolted out the door. Amidst all the noise, Sally jumped down from the woman’s arms, walked down the hallway and plopped herself down on Brigid’s bed. She fell asleep, seeming to smile.

Shortly after that, Brigid began to find history very interesting, reading anything historical. She found the history of art especially interesting. During long weekends, she would read from her books. One day she came to a

section in a book that talked about old religions. It also talked about tribal beliefs where certain people could do magical things with herbs and spells. Something inside of her had to know more. Sally purred. She was doing a good job. Brigid spoke to Sally all of the time right from the beginning.

“That cat is going to think it is human, the way she talks to it and tucks it in bed with her,” Marie laughed to their parents.

Brigid did not mind the teasing. There was something very special about her cat. She felt it and privately, her parents talked about how much calmer Brigid had become since she got Sally.

“Jim, I really thought we made both girls feel special in the same way and now that I see Brigid with Sally, I wonder if we did something wrong. After all, she’s not as short-tempered as she used to be and she seems, I don’t know, softer somehow. Don’t you think?”

“Beth, we have always known that Brigid loves animals. One day it was going to be something other than fish or turtles. Maybe what is making her softer is that she gets to love something. I think we did okay. And I think she is okay. She’s always been a little different. Even her teachers say that although she is popular, she is independent. It will be interesting to see who she becomes one day, don’t you think?”

What Brigid became, under Sally’s watchful eye, was a witch and this witch-to-be needed help getting there.

Chapter Twelve

It would never do for a witch to have a bad temper. There had to be a balance of soft and hard, knowing right from wrong but the path had to be peaceful. Sally could feel Brigid's changes in moods from the beginning so, at first, she soothed. She would amuse her by laying like a fool on her back. Brigid had to laugh at the huge wad of fur lying like that. If that did not work, Sally would rub against her, purring to soothe her nerves, quieting her spirit. When Brigid bought books, Sally helped her decide the right books to read by sprawling on them and was able to help Brigid feel what books were not worth reading. Sally worked very hard from the day she met Brigid.

The night Brigid fully understood began with a thunderstorm. She loved storms. She always had. She opened the window on her side of the room to feel the moist, cool breeze brush over her. She felt alive at the sound of thunder and the flash of lightning. Then she went to bed and fell asleep.

Suddenly, she was at the window looking out at the storm again. It was amazing. Sitting next to her, on the windowsill, was Sally. At first Brigid was afraid that Sally would jump out of the window in fear of the storm. That fear was gone in an instant. Looking down, she saw Sally looking up at her.

I must be crazy, she thought. This cat looked strange, it was as if Brigid could almost see through her. She seemed not real and, it seemed as though she was talking to Brigid without even meowing! She could not look away from Sally's orange stare. What? Brigid thought. Guide? Protector? Dreamtime? Yes. I will

remember dreamtime, dreamtime, dreamtime. Brigid repeated to herself over and over again. The she turned to go back to bed and saw Marie asleep on her bed and then Brigid saw herself sleeping on her bed too!

Suddenly it was the next morning and when Brigid woke up the next morning, she was in her bed with Sally, fat Sally, curled up in the crook of her arm. What an odd dream I had, she thought to herself. The oddest part of the dream, she thought, was seeing myself asleep on the bed.

“Sally, I dreamed I was at the window and when I turned around to go back to bed I was in bed, as if I had never gotten up. Then I walked over to myself and got into myself and- that was the strangest dream I have ever had! And you were in the dream too! Dream! Dreamtime! I dreamed something about that. What is dreamtime?”

Brigid began looking for dreamtime in any book she could find and learned all about Dreamtime. It was during the time when people slept. She learned some people can travel into the world of spirit for lessons, teachings and wisdom. Some people called it astral travel because the spirit leaves the sleeping body to travel around. At first she thought it was creepy, like dying and she did not want to have her spirit floating around. What if it got lost and never got back? The more she read, the more she wanted to know. All the while she didn't know she under Sally's watchful and subtle guidance.

One day, as Brigid and Darla were watching a program in her room, she began to talk about Dreamtime.

“Do you want to know what I think, Brigid? All of this interest in stuff like this started when Sally came here, right? You never talked about, what is it? Dreamtime? How did you even know to read on that? I never heard of it before, had you?”

“Never heard of that and a lot of things yet, it’s like I wake up and know what I want to read about. It’s really strange, looking for stuff I never heard about before and then actually finding information!”

“Well, Brigid”, Darla looked at the cat who had been looking at her all afternoon.

“She’s big and black and ... maybe she’s a familiar!”

“She could be at that! I will have to read up on it some more.”

“And that doesn’t bother you in the least?”

“Nope. Guess I’ll have to read up on that too. You mind if I change the channel? Are you watching this football game?”

“Sunday afternoon with nothing interesting to watch. Didn’t we do this last week? How about we go for some pizza? Check out some of the new shops that opened on Seventh Avenue?”

They left, turning off the television on their way out. Good, Sally thought to herself. They shut off that noise. Now, I can get a good nap.

Darla did not realize it at the time but she had helped Brigid begin to learn what Sally wanted her to know. Soon, Brigid understood. Sally was a familiar, a protector, and a magnifier. Sally also helped her understand that she had the gift of Dreamtime travel but did not have to do it.

Soon, Brigid learned Dreamtime could be a trip around the world, a swim with dolphins and seeing earth from the moon. She did it all and, as Brigid became older and studied more and more, Sally helped her travel in her sleep to heal others.

At the time of Allie's visit they had been together for sixteen years. Theirs was a loving partnership. Their thoughts, usually in sync, were often alike-with the exception of Sally's wanting to chase birds and chipmunks when the feeling moved her. Still, she listened to her mistress's requests. After all, she was well fed and also enjoyed the same things- warm sunny days and the power of thunderstorms. Although Sally was getting older, she showed no signs of aging. There were times Brigid worried about what she would do when Sally's time came. They began together. It would a terrible loss but, Sally was not going anywhere. She would not move on until she was good and ready. Now, there was this new childling. Sally knew there was to be another Brigid one day so she would be around for quite a while more so Sally felt purposeful.

Chapter Thirteen

Allie awoke to find herself alone and with the sun peering through her closed curtains. She sat up slowly, glancing at the clock. It was eight o'clock. She thought about staying in bed but decided since yesterday was so much fun she wanted to get up. Aunt Brigid was going to show her the workshop where she made all of the things for her business. Aunt Brigid. She stopped and wondered if she had been dreaming the night before. It was a strange dream if she had been...that Aunt Brigid was dancing on the lawn in the storm. She got up from her bed and went to the window. Moving the curtains aside, she looked out. There was a very big silver pot on the lawn. Then she saw her godmother. The rays of the sun made her hair shine like a fire. She walked over to the pot, picked it up and went back into the house. Allie felt uneasy. Maybe she should call her mother and tell her about Aunt Brigid. But, she was confused because she liked Aunt Brigid so very much and she did not want to cause trouble. She knew there was a good reason for all this. There had to be.

"Allie! You up, honey?" Her godmother called, "Breakfast is ready."

"I am up." Allie called back. "I will be down in a minute."

Allie walked slowly down the stairs. How would Aunt Brigid seem today? Allie wondered if she were afraid. She could not tell other than her stomach felt tight like when her father was drunk. Allie walked carefully into the kitchen as if trying to sense if something were different. But it was as yesterday. Brigid was humming a tune as she waited for the waffles to pop up from the toaster. Jupiter

sat by her side, his big eyes hoping for a scrap of anything. Jasper was sitting on the sill outside the window above she sink chomping on peanuts.

Remembering the rescue on the lawn the night before, Allie asked, "How is Baby Blue?"

"I kekpt checking on him during the night while I was working downstairs. When I went to bed I got up several times through the night to feed him. He has a good appetite", Brigid laughed.

"So, he will be okay?"

"Well, I certainly hope so. A good appetite is a good sign. As soon as he grows his flight feathers, we can see how far he can fly. I am hoping to see him fly on his own in a couple of weeks. But," she sighed, "He can never be wild. He would not survive outside anymore. So, this will be his home."

"I was really surprised when you told me that last night. I thought for sure we would let him go." Aunt Brigid knew so much and Allie remembered everything she said.

"I wish we could. Anyhow, like all babies, he will grow the most at this age." "By the way" Brigid said, changing the subject, "Did you sleep okay? That was some storm last night."

"Yes. It sure was a big storm. The thunder woke me up." Allie was tempted to make believe she was so tired that she never heard the thunder.

"Did it frighten you? Are you afraid of thunder and lightning?"

"I never saw a storm like that one in Brooklyn!"

Allie sat at the table. The waffles popped up and in between the "ouch!" and "hot", they were finally all placed on the plate.

"I love storms, Allie!"

"You do?" Maybe she had nothing to hide, Allie hoped. She didn't know whether or not during the flashes of light, her godmother had seen her at her window.

As Brigid slid into her seat, she added in a whisper, "You might think it odd but I love storms so much I often just go out and let the storm be all around me! I love to dance in the rain! I feel so alive when I do that, especially if I am tired."

Allie gave a soft sigh. Her godmother was not going to hide anything. She was just more special than Allie thought.

"Did you do it last night?" Allie asked carefully. She knew she had. She just wondered what she would say.

"Yep! I did! It was great fun and the rain felt sooo cold! "

"Aren't you afraid of lightning?"

"I can tell how far lightning is by how long it takes for the thunder to come. The longer it takes, the farther away is the lightning. When it starts to get close, I go inside. But, I do not want you to ever, EVER, go outside in lightning! Not under any circumstances, okay? Do you want to know something special about storms?" Allie nodded enthusiastically. Brigid lowered her voice as if to share a secret, "Storms like last night are the best times to make wishes!"

"Make wishes?"

"Oh, yes! Think about it, Allie. You have wind, rain, thunder and lightning. We all know how much force bad weather can have." She cut a piece of buttered waffle off and put in her mouth, sipped her coffee and continued, "I like to think my wishes are carried up in the wind and carried to the gods themselves to answer."

"Maybe...." Allie began. She swallowed the piece of waffle in her mouth and said sadly, "Maybe I should have made a wish last night."

Brigid got up and went to the counter by the sink. As she pulled a dish towel off a big round object, Allie saw the silver pot that her godmother brought into the house. Brigid dipped a saucer into the pot, leaving little water in the saucer and brought it to the table.

"I thought you might like a little of the storm." From Allie's expression, Brigid knew she did not understand.

"I collected this rain during the storm. I believe all the energy of the storm is in this water. It's special. Since you did not get to make a wish for Sam last night, you can make one now. Just put your fingertips in the water and make your wish. A good wish never hurt anyone. What will you wish for, Allie?"

"I wish for my daddy to change so we can all be together then it won't matter where we all live." Brigid was quiet a moment. She remembered a sad little girl's prayer for her father...and her tears.

Allie put her finger tips in the water and closed her eyes. She remembered how it used to be with her father. So, she wished he could be that way again.

"When you are finished wishing, we take the water outside and set the wish free on the lawn. It might take time, you know."

Allie nodded her head. Then she felt it. The water was making her fingers tingle. She never heard her godmother say "amen" but, not knowing what else to say she said "Amen" and quickly took her fingers out of the water. She followed her godmother when she got up and noticed Brigid had taken the saucer of water and sugar in a cup with her.

When they got outside Brigid instructed, "Now, pour the water onto the ground, and put some sugar where you pour the water. When you ask for a gift, you must always give a gift back. That way Gaia, our great Mother Earth, keeps her balance so she can fill another child's wish."

Allie did not really understand what her godmother was saying. It did not matter. She just felt good, really good.

"Maybe one day, we shall dance in the rain together as long as there is no lightning, if you want."

Allie hugged her godmother. She did not care that she liked to dance on the lawn in a storm.

Chapter Fourteen

Allie still found herself taking lost frogs and toads to the pond every morning when she took Jupiter out for a long walks. There was also the important job of moving caterpillars to trees where they would go through the change of becoming butterflies. She even took a couple of spiders outside of the house. It was amazing how they hung, suspended at the end of their fine, invisible seeming threads, from her finger. It was easier than you ever thought to take a spider outside. She learned to just sweep her hand high above the spider and the thread of the web would stick to her hand. Then, she could carry the spider out, suspended by its invisible thread, and place the thread on the porch. Although Brigid had a special place in her heart for spiders, she warned Allie about brightly colored ones. They could have a nasty bite but, she never saw one and if she did, she knew her godmother would handle it.

Jupiter was always with Allie as he took it upon himself to follow Allie wherever she went. Allie enjoyed being with him and for the first time, in a very long time, Allie began to feel light inside. In fact, she was beginning to feel happy.

Aunt Brigid's greenhouse and flower garden were past Jupiter's run line a little beyond the back lawn (which was not small) behind the house. The first time she went into her greenhouse, Allie felt like she did when she went to the Botanical Garden in the Bronx with her parents. Within the extra large one floor building, which at one time had been a barn, was the greenhouse. It felt

familiar, moist, warm and hot as the sun shone through the windows which were almost ceiling to floor. The roof was in the shape of a huge “v” and had a lot of skylights. But this greenhouse wasn’t filled with flowers but with herbs and she realized that “green” had a variety, of smells. Some plants smelled like dirt, others smelled like certain teas and others smelled like plants she had never smelled before. She learned part of Aunt Brigid’s business was supplying tea companies with English and Irish blends of tea. She also sold many dried herbs like dried sage and lavender to herbal and specialty shops. Many shops wanted oils, incense and something call tinctures, which Brigid said she would teach Allie how to make in time. There were so many herbs, she could not remember all the names right away but she loved how they smelled. Immediately she wanted to learn how to help Aunt Brigid harvest them, tying them into bundles and hanging them upside down to dry. Behind the greenhouse was Brigid’s garden. It had potatoes, tomatoes, onions, cabbage, cucumbers and so many fresh vegetables she lost count of them all. Brigid’s flower garden had roses, lilies and Tiger Lilies which were just a few of all the many types of flowers she grew.

There were flowers growing wildly in the fields and on the lawn. Brigid told Allie these were flowers that were called perennials, which once planted, came back year after year. Allie was also shown the well between the two gardens. In this well there was a pump which ran on electricity from the house. Brigid had the electric installed underground by an electrician for safety purposes and, with

this, she could turn the pump on. She taught Allie how it worked. When the pump was turned on, water went through a garden hose and both gardens could be easily watered. Brigid showed Allie the switch to the pump for watering and gardens and soon Allie was making sure there was moist dirt for the gardens every day. The first time Allie ever really smelled grass was when Aunt Brigid mowed the lawn shortly the first big storm. She never knew grass had a smell until then. What little grass there was in the city had no smell that she could recall. She only remembered smelling bus fumes.

Allie really enjoyed helping Brigid cut flowers for the house and making bouquets for the various vases and walked everyday to these places just to inhale all of the different smells. But, she also made sure everything was watered and helped Brigid pick the vegetables that had ripened which they usually had with dinner.

Allie and her godmother were always very busy. They took turns feeding Baby Blue, which of course Brigid did during the night and Allie began working with Brigid on her craft business. The first time Allie saw Brigid's basement, she was amazed. It wasn't damp and dark like the way she thought basements were. There was white wood paneling over the walls and bright overhead lights. There were shelves labeled "lace", "glue", "old jewelry" and "ribbons" just to name a few. On the counters were clay statues and figurines from angels to cats to dogs to faeries. There was also a counter of only various colors of paint. Allie learned that the old round container on the floor was something called a

kiln which actually baked the clay figurines. After they cooled, they were smoothed out by filing, coated, painted or glazed and decorated. At first, Allie spent the day getting things for Brigid to use as she worked. Within a couple of days she knew when to get what was needed and when it was needed depending on the level of finishing a project. Allie learned so quickly, she began smoothing down any rough edging on the figurines by using emery boards before glazing in a very short time. A couple of more weeks after Allie came to stay with her godmother, working in the basement most afternoons was part of her routine. She would hand Aunt Brigid the new figurines for the kiln and, as they baked, Allie helped her godmother file the cooled ones just as she learned. Brigid also quickly realized that Allie had a talent for organization. She would line things up needed in the order in which they would be used easily and efficiently. Before long, Allie even glazed and decorated some herself, adding final touches to those that were ready to be finished. As days went by, it was clear Allie had a talent for art so her godmother began teaching her how to mix color. Soon, there were many colors she mixed perfectly, so she began painting figurines as well. And soon after that, Brigid helped Allie learn to make big, round, scented candles.

Allie loved the talks they would have about decorating ideas for the statues they worked on. When they worked in the basement, it was as if this were the only place that existed. By being asked her opinions and having the

independence to decorate certain orders herself, Allie began to feel almost like an equal.

Allie's days were full and when she went to bed, head on pillow, she said her prayers which she began saying like her godmother. This was turning out to be the best summer she ever had. Of course, she still worried about her father, Sam. But, she had so many things to do, she usually fell asleep going through the next day's list of things to do.

As Aunt Brigid said all along, the weather was really odd in the "Manor", and this particular week, it stormed almost every other night that week. Usually they didn't last very long but, each time she awoke from the boom of thunder, she just rolled over and went back to sleep. Allie did not have to get up to know her godmother was dancing on the lawn in the storm again.

Chapter Fifteen

Allie spoke with her mother every night after dinner. They talked about her mother applying for work near Livingston Manor, what room was packed up and which one she would pack next and where she would store all their belongings. They would be stored upstate so when she found a house for them, it would be easier to move everything from one place in the area to another.

Allie in turn told her everything she did everyday from Jupiter's antics, to what she helped her godmother make, to about the nights it would pour and then stop. She began calling it the "crazy Manor weather" as Brigid did. What bothered her more and more was that her mother said she could not speak to her father on the phone yet. Whenever she asked why there were different reasons. At first it was because he needed to learn accept the fact that he had a problem, a disease. At one point, he was having a problem with that. Then it was because he was having problems believing something greater than himself could help him.

"What do you mean, Mommy, when you say 'greater than himself'?"

"It means God, honey."

"I don't understand."

"They don't care what you believe in but, it is important to believe in something more powerful than yourself that can heal you."

"Sounds like they believe what Aunt Brigid believes-that it is important to believe."

“In your dad’s case, for him to find the strength to stop drinking, he has to believe it is possible. It is only possible if people believe their God can help them because they aren’t able to by themselves.”

The last time they spoke, when Allie asked again about calling her father, her mother simply said, “He has realized he has a problem now and that he cannot handle getting better by himself.”

“That’s good news, right Mommy?”

“Oh, yes! It is wonderful news! It means he has the chance he needs right now to get better.”

“So why don’t you want me to call?”

“It’s not me. He is so upset about what his drinking did to all of us as a family, when I spoke to one of the counselors he felt his realizing how hard he made it on all of us is was part of his accepting his problem and that he needed more time to think about this and to feel bad.”

“But, isn’t that mean, Mommy? To want someone to feel bad?”

“I have reading books about Daddy’s sickness. Allie and this is what everyone says is “rock bottom.”

“What does that mean?”

“It means the person has to feel so bad, he can’t stand it anymore. It means that it is the point where someone chooses to make themselves better because they cannot stand being what drinking made them.”

“That’s terrible. Isn’t Daddy very sad? Oh, Mommy! I don’t Daddy upset-“

“I know but this is the kind of upset that makes someone want to get better.

Look at it this way. If someone finds out they have a heart condition, wouldn't they feel upset?”

“Well, I guess.”

“And what would that person do?”

“Go to a doctor.”

“Why, Allie?”

“To try to get better.”

So this upset is what will make Daddy want to get better. Can you understand that, Honey?”

“But this is different-“

“I know it's hard to understand. This is what the counselors and the books say is going through the 'Twelve Steps' but, when I see you, and that will be very soon, we can talk more and I am bringing pamphlets written just for kids on Daddy's problem, okay?”

Reluctantly, Allie agreed to wait until her mother's visit within the next couple of days but when they hung up, she gave an impatient sigh.

Chapter Sixteen

It was a warm August Friday morning. Her mother, Darla, was coming up the next day. Although they spoke every night Allie could not wait to see her and show her all things she was doing. She had a box ready for her mother which she filled with things she made herself. There was potpourri stuffed into the little sachet pillows, dried herb bundles, a small angel figurine she made (except for going near the kiln) and the three special candles she made that week. One was white and smelled like vanilla, the second one was green and smelled like lavender and the third one was red and smelled like strawberries. This visit, she especially looked forward to giving her mother this gift box.

She was so busy, other than praying for her father from time to time during the day and at night just before going to sleep, her time was occupied. And, because of the talks she had with her mother, she and Brigid spoke more and more about her father Sam's problem. Over time, she began to accept that each person makes a choice and she did not have anything to do with Sam's illness or ability to recover. That had to be up to him and him alone.

As a result of the daily long romps with Jupiter, she didn't lose weight. She just got leaner. Although her hair was Black, glints of dark auburn streaks began to run through her hair from being outside so much. Unknown to her, she also grew a little taller. Her hair grew from being just below her ear lobe to being halfway to her neck. In Brigid fashion, she began to just use pins to hold

whatever strands of her hair up that would stay up. As for the rest, she just them dangle just like her godmother.

She stretched and found she was able to get out of the bed more easily. A warm breeze made its way into the bedroom. It was summer warm but not hot. Seeing her arise from the Jupiter, Jupiter's head perked up and then he got off the bed, extending his front legs and paws onto the floor and then "walking" off the bed by putting one back leg and paw down on at a time. As usual, he left the room, his mighty body running down the hall, curling the rug into waves and romping down the stairs. Allie just straightened the hall runner rug out by dragging her feet as she went to the stairs on her way to the kitchen.

"In the fall you'll be starting school up here", Brigid said as she poured hot chocolate into Allie's mug. Allie had chosen a mug with a Blue Jay on it in honor of Baby Blue. It was eight o'clock in the morning. Although the ceiling fan spun around warm air, it still felt good.

"By then we will have all of your vaccination and health records. We will also have your grades from your old school going to the new school."

"There's a school near here?" Allie perked up. She liked school.

"No. There isn't a school near here at all. But the bus will take you."

"A bus? I will ride a bus like the kids in movies?"

"Yes, you will. Just like in the movies."

They sat and talked about the day until it was nine o'clock.

"Allie, I am going up to feed Baby Blue." Allie nodded as she chewed a piece of waffle.

"After Baby Blue eats, you should be finished with breakfast and you can take Jupiter for your romp. Or should I say he will take you for a romp?"

Suddenly Brigid kissed Allie on the top of her head.

"You are such a dear, Allie."

A few minutes later, she was back. She finished feeding Baby Blue very quickly, Allie thought as she turned quickly around. Her godmother had been crying. Her eyes were still red. She held a tissue in her hand and blew her nose.

"What is it?" She was afraid she knew.

"Come, Allie. Let's sit down." her voice stifled a choke.

"Is it Baby Blue?" Allie asked quietly.

Brigid took her hands in hers and then pulled her close sniffing,

"Yes. When I went in the bedroom, he did not peep for me. I went to his cage and...and...his spirit had left him."

"Nooo!" Allie screamed and then began to sob. But she did not cry alone. Her godmother held Allie close and they cried together for a long time.

After they could not sob any longer, both were very quiet for a few minutes.

Brigid managed to finish her cold coffee and Allie her juice. After a while Allie pleaded for an answer.

"Why. Aunt Brigid?" She so wanted to see him fly about on his own.

"I don't know, honey. Birds are fragile and he was a baby. He must have had more injuries than we thought because it looked like he was doing so well. We must try to think about that because at least he died where people loved him, took care of him, and fed him. Imagine what he would have gone through if he had fallen somewhere else."

Allie nodded her head trying not to think of what would have happened to him if they had not found him-or if Sally had .

"We'll take him to the back and bury him. Would you like that?"

"Really? In the city, I have seen people have to bring their animals that died to a shelter."

"Some people have them cremated and others have them in animal cemeteries but some people simply cannot afford that. I have all this land. I can only imagine their heartbreak."

"Me too." After a few minutes of thinking of all the land she and Jupiter wandered through, she wondered. "Where will you bury him?"

"We have to walk through the woods a bit but I have a burial ground for animals there. Any dead animal I find I bury there whether it was a friend of mine or not. Jupiter's mother is buried there. I call it "Memory Park."

"That sounds so pretty."

"Oh, it is Allie. Where my beloved animals rest, they have helped grow the most beautiful plants and flowers. They become part of the life of Gaia, the spirit of

the earth. In fact, it is so filled with flowers when the wind blows, it is as if they are waving to me. I go there sometimes to just think and talk to my animals."

"You do? But, aren't they dead? Can they hear you?"

"Allie, you know there are many different beliefs and most of them believe in life after death. Some people call it Heaven-

"And Hell", Allie added.

"Well, yes. But I do not believe in Hell. I have a different belief."

"What do you believe, Aunt Brigid?"

"Now, I am not telling you have to believe what I believe. You understand. I am just saying what I believe for myself. Okay?"

"Okay, Aunt Brigid."

"I believe we are all alive forever on the inside. So, I believe people and yes, animals, have souls. And, when we die, we leave the shell that is our body and our insides or spirits continue to learn and grow but few people ever see us.

Then, when we want to, we come back again and live in a body once more.

Yes," she added to the yet unspoken question, "Animals too."

"What about Baby Blue?" Tears began to rise in Allie's eyes.

"Birds are extra special, Allie. They become... messengers! They fly here on earth so imagine how high they fly when they are spirits who can even fly to another galaxy!"

"Wow! Really, Aunt Brigid?"

"Well, that is what I believe. I believe Baby Blue is flying higher now than he ever would have had he lived. Think how close to Creator he could be right now! But, now, let me get him and here is what you can do-"

Allie and Jupiter went to the flower garden and picked some lilies and gardenias. She took what she now knew was fern and tied it with some blue ribbon from the workshop downstairs, in honor of Baby blue. What Aunt Brigid said made her feel better but she could still see sweet little fuzzy Baby Blue stretching out his little neck and opening his mouth to eat. Why did anything have to die, she thought angrily.

Allie and Brigid walked slowly to the edge of the pond and into the forest. Without saying a word, Brigid pointed to a small hill. At the top of the hill were deer standing very still and watching them. Allie was amazed but, afraid of scaring them away, she said nothing. They continued to walk in silence. Allie, her godmother and even Jupiter walked in a line. Aunt Brigid carried a small cardboard box from her workshop. It was Baby Blue's tiny coffin. She also had a small canvas bag on her shoulder.

"This is it." She said softly.

As Aunt Brigid put Baby Blue and her shoulder bag on the ground, Allie looked around. This was not a sad place at all! It was beautiful, just as her godmother said! All around there were wild flowers of white, blue, purple, yellow and even pink. She thought "Memory Park" would be cold feeling, like cemeteries. But, here, there was only life! She did not know if animals and

people come back or not. But here, in "Memory Park", she saw for herself that life does indeed come from death.

Brigid took a small triangular shaped tool from her bag and dug the small hole where Baby Blue was to be buried, Jupiter lay quietly on the ground. He had been here before. Taking dried herbs from the bag, she sprinkled them on the box and said, "May your flight be free of obstacles and may you find wholeness and freedom in your new flight, in your new life. Allie, would you like to say something you about Baby Blue?" Jupiter sat up and remained silent, as if he knew what was going on.

"I remember how soft you were. I remember how cute your little 'peeeps' were. I remember wanting you to grow strong so we could see you fly. I wanted to see you fly around. But, I think Aunt Brigid is right. You are free now. If that is so, then-", she coughed down a sob. "Then I am glad you are healthy and not sick anymore."

"Oh, Allie, that was beautiful and so loving. What a beautiful way to wish him freedom!" Aunt Brigid put her arm around Allie's quivering shoulders. Jupiter gave a low whine.

"After he is buried, we can plant flower seeds for him if you like."

"Can I finish burying him, Aunt Brigid?" Allie asked. She did not know why she needed to do this. She just did.

"Of course. Let me know if you want me to take over, though, okay?"

Allie nodded her head and knelt down. She stretched out her hand and her godmother gave her the triangular gardening tool to use. Allie pushed the dirt onto the box and began sobbing.

"Allie-"

"I'm okay, Aunt Brigid. I-I n-n-need to do this-" She gulped.

"I understand."

Her godmother did understand. It was a loss. How long had she felt abandoned by her father? How long had she blamed herself for not being able to help him stop drinking? Then, there was the sudden separation and relocating. Yes, within this loss were many others that needed a good cry. Crying is good for the soul and Allie needed to have a good cry.

Chapter Seventeen

Allie, Aunt Brigid and Jupiter walked back to the house.

"The flowers you picked looked so lovely, Allie."

"Aunt Brigid, Memory Park is so pretty and peaceful. I thought it would feel sad but, it doesn't. It feels- it feels like.... love"

"Allie, you have a way with words. I could not have said it better myself. It feels like love. I could never find the words to describe it before and that is perfect. It feels like love." Aunt Brigid repeated.

Allie felt really close to her Aunt Brigid. She loved her mother and in a lot of ways, she and Aunt Brigid were alike. She remembered her mom talking to her like a grown up. Her dad used to also before he began to have all the problems. She could not wait to see her mother the next day. She and Jupiter went to bed early that night firstly, to make the night go faster so she could feel as if she were seeing her mother faster and the other reason was that she was exhausted from a long, a sad day and a lot of crying.

Allie woke up to hugs and kisses from her mother.

"Mommy!" She squealed. Sitting up quickly and, suddenly wide awake, she hugged her mother back.

"Oh, Mommy! I am so happy to see you! I missed you!"

"My darling! I have missed you too so very much. It felt like months to me! Now, stand up so I can look at you and make sure you haven't grown five inches!"

After a few moments Darla joked, "You have grown five inches!"

"Oh, Mommy!"

"And your hair has grown and look at the streaks the sun is putting into your hair!

I really thought your hair was too dark for that to happen. You have a tan too!

Oh, you look wonderful!"

"Oh, Mom!" Allie hugged her mother tightly. "I have been having a great time, but, I missed you so much!" A cold nose began nudging itself between them.

"And who is this big beast?" Darla pretended she did not remember the large dog by Allie's side.

"This is Jupiter! Don't you remember?" She said with impatience.

"Oh, yes. Now I remember. Jupiter!" She petted the gray spotted head of Jupiter.

The sun shone brightly that morning. Its glow lit up the room and Darla's hair shone in streaks of wheat and gold. Her eyes were also the darkest blue and shaped like saucers, just like Allie's.

"Now, how about getting up so we can all go down for breakfast?"

"Mom-stay still."

"Why?"

Allie got up and then up jumped Jupiter, shaking the bed. He jumped off the bed this morning instead of crawling off as he sometimes did.

"I see what you mean!"

"The minute he sees me move, he is out the door!"

They heard the big toenails ripple up the rug outside the door and a slide and thud as he slipped in his hurry to get downstairs.

"He is usually quieter than this!" Allie said.

"Is it me? Is he like this because of me?"

"No. Aunt Brigid must be making bacon. He loves bacon. That's the only time he acts this way in the morning." Her mother laughed as she watched Allie put on her robe. Stopping at the door, Allie warned, "Be careful. Watch."

Darla watched Allie slide her feet along the rug, smoothing it out and did the same until the rug was in place again. Then they walked down the hall to the stairs, holding hands and swinging their arms and laughing, like they used to all the time. Allie was so happy to see her mother laugh. It was a laugh from her heart. Her mother seemed happy and that made Allie happy. As they went down the stairs Allie asked, "What time did you get here?"

"Well, I left Brooklyn at five in the morning. It is now seven-thirty. Is this too early for you? I mean you are on vacation and all."

Reaching the bottom of the stairs Allie moaned "Oh, Mom" and ran into the kitchen.

"Aunt Brigid! Mommy's here!" Jupiter was next to Brigid, chomping on a crisp slice of bacon. When he saw Allie, he wagged his long, furry tail but did not move from her godmother's side. He was going to wait and hope for another slice, which he got.

They all sat down to scrambled eggs, toast and bacon. As Darla drank coffee she explained to Allie,

"I have been so busy, honey what with so much packing to do and then putting almost all of it in storage. It hurt so much that I couldn't get up here sooner!"

Allie knew this because her mother said this to her every night when they spoke but, she guessed she needed to tell her again and didn't mention it."

"We had a bit of a sad day yesterday, Darla." Brigid said and Allie began to tell the sad story about Baby Blue. As if she were only three years old, Darla pulled her to her lap and put her arm around her as she told her about Baby Blue, Memory Park and how beautiful the funeral was.

"I am so sorry, Honey."

Then they both cried, clinging to each other. That's what mothers do. They know when to hold and not cry, no matter how much they want to, and when to hold and cry with their child. This was one of those times.

After a few minutes, they were both only sniffing when Brigid came up with a plan.

"You know, I found at times like these, regardless of the time of day-"

"Wait, I know this one! Allie I think you will love this! Go ahead."

"Butter pecan vanilla ice cream with a swirl of chocolate syrup works wonders! Can I talk you out of chocolate, Allie?"

Allie pouted a pretend pout. "Just this once, though."

Allie put the spoon of ice cream with just a dab chocolate syrup in her mouth and wondered where this had been her whole life.

Chapter Eighteen

“Allie, I feel like taking Jupiter for his walk this morning, okay?” This was Brigid’s way of giving Darla and Allie a chance to talk. Then she was out the door with a barking, bouncing Jupiter.

Darla rubbed Allie’s head then ran her fingers through its thickness lovingly.

“I found out more about Dad’s treatment where he’s living, Allie. It’s very interesting.”

Allie sat up straighter in her chair. “What kind of treatment is he getting? Medicine?”

“No, hon. No medicine. None at all.” This seemed strange to Allie because if someone is sick they always got medicine.

“I learned a lot about Daddy’s illness. Do you know what a drug addict is?”

“Yes.” Allie was getting nervous. What did her father’s disease have to do with someone else being a drug addict?

“An addict cannot stop using something his body has gotten used to. Like drugs, alcohol and even some types of medicines doctors give...like ice cream!” She joked then became serious again.

“In order to begin to control this illness. We all have to accept it can’t ever cured, Allie. It can only be controlled-“

“Like a heart condition.”

“Right. But, it’s different in Dad’s case. You see, he became addicted to alcohol from using it. Now, not everyone who drinks, even a lot, becomes addicted some people say. But many, like Daddy, do. The only way to control the need to drink is to stop. Since Daddy can’t stop on his own, he was sent to a place where he would live for a while and not be able to have a drink at all.”

“That sounds like a really good idea. But, what if he leaves to buy a drink?”

“Well, this is country, not city.”

“So, he can’t just go to a store.”

“That’s right. And, while he is living there, he has to work with a counselor to go through what everyone calls “steps”.”

“What does that mean, Mommy?”

“Well, it’s like learning to walk. These steps will help him stop drinking but, Daddy has a lot of work to do. They will help him with his problem.”

“Is this what you said he was having trouble with?”

“Yes, hon. It’s not easy. Why, they’re not easy for many adults without the problem Daddy has.”

“So, these steps will help him control himself?”

“They are teaching him that he can never control himself if he has a drink. First, he has to clean his body out of all the alcohol. That’s one reason he’s where he is. But, many people do these steps on their own without having to live in a special place like Daddy.”

“Then, why is he there and not with us, together?”

Darla took a deep breath. "Because the last time he was drunk, something could have happened that might have hurt you."

"You mean when he came for me at Anita's?"

"I-I called the authorities because I did not want you alone with him while he was drunk ever again. I wanted him to get better."

Of course Allie knew all of this. She remembered how she felt the day she overheard her mother and Brigid talking about this.

"He is there because of my call. He had to go before a judge. If he didn't go here, he would have gone to...gone to...jail." Darla almost whispered the word.

"It's okay Mommy. At least he is nearby and we maybe we can see him soon, right? So, that's a good thing and maybe he can't stop drinking by himself like some other people, right?"

"Right." Darla was amazed at how much Allie understood.

"So why can't we see him or talk to him?"

"People have a hard time cleaning their body of the alcohol. They can really cranky and even sick because the drug is leaving the body. It is also giving him time to think. Going through this hopefully will help him see what he has to do to recovery. They call it 'recovery' because they teach that someone like Daddy will always have the disease but, if he doesn't drink, his life will be happier again. Man call it working on the steps. The first thing is his knowing he has no control over the drinking and how it really messed up his life. Most people want

to think they are so strong, they can control themselves but, in cases like your Dad, they can't. He was having a hard time seeing it."

Darla got up from the table, poured coffee into her mug from the coffee pot and then put it in the microwave to heat. In the meantime, Allie went to a cabinet behind her and took out a tin of home made cookies. These were chocolate chip. When Darla got back to the table, there was the tin of cookies, opened with wax paper unwrapped.

"Brigid always did make the best cookies!" Darla took a couple from the tin and placed them on a napkin next to her coffee.

"The next thing surprised me. Daddy has to believe that there is a Greater Power that can help him make a new life without alcohol in it."

"You said something about that."

"I found that really interesting because I would think most of us believe in God and would turn to him when we are sad yet, when we need this kind of help, we don't seem to think of it."

"Aunt Brigid believes in believing, a lot."

"Yes. But, I guess when you have to work on a problem you don't want to believe you have, turning to God isn't easy."

"Aunt Brigid always talks to her Lord and Lady. That what she calls them. Oh, and Gaia, Mother Earth. That's how she prays. I hear her talking to them all the time."

"She decided a long time ago to make what she believed a part of her life so

where Daddy is having a hard time he will need to putting his will and life in God's hands."

"How many of these 'steps' does Daddy have to take?"

"Twelve. And," Darla took pamphlets out of her shoulder bag which hung on her chair, "Here is the information I told you I would bring to you. I read them already and I know it will help you understand what Daddy is going through. They will also help you."

"How?"

"You will understand better how you have nothing to do with Daddy's illness or his not being able to stop. Read these a lot and these will help you. We can talk about these when we talk during the week. Next week I will have a book for you to read the next, okay? When I am up here, we can go to meetings for families that have someone like Daddy with this problem."

"Meetings? What are they like?"

"I haven't had a chance to go yet but, we'll go together. Okay?"

"I pray for Daddy all the time, like Aunt Brigid prays. She let me put my fingers in some water she got from a storm and pray for him. She dances in the rain, Mommy!" Allie wondered what her mother was going to think.

"You know, when we were kids in Brooklyn, she always said she wanted to do that. I guess she does now, huh?" With a shared wink and a smile Allie was glad

her mother knew.

Allie took the pamphlets and put them on the table. They heard the deep

“woofs” of a very big, hairy dog and the turning of the door knob to the kitchen. Jupiter galloped in and went to the water bowl where he eagerly, and sloppily, began drinking water. If Brigid saw the pamphlets, she acted as if there were nothing unusual on the table at all.

“He almost jumped in the pond again! But, I stopped him just in time. Too bad, Darla. Afterwards I thought it could have been your turn to give him a bath!”

Brigid walked over to the coffee pot on the stove and picked it up.

“Oh, good. There’s still some coffee left!”

Shortly after, she sat at the table with a heated cup of coffee then saw the cookies. “Any left for me?” She joked. Grabbing a handful, she began to eat one.

Chapter Nineteen

"Now that everything almost being stored, I can be coming up every weekend to look for a place. We'll look together. It has to be perfect for you. I want you to have a big room with lots of windows and sunshine!"

Allie listened as she focused on another cookie.

"Are we looking today?"

"I have to get local newspapers. Then, during the week, I can read the ads and ask your Aunt Brigid for the places to call that are nearby. I want to make appointments for us to look at some next weekend, how is that? For now, I want to spend real time with you this weekend. It seems so long since I've seen you."

"I want to spend time with you too. I want to show you everything and the basement and," she stopped, waited and began again, "I have surprises for you, Mommy!"

"Really? What are they?"

"Nope." Allie shook her head firmly.

"Not now. Make believe it's Christmas. You can't know until I give them to you!"

"Why you little-" She started tickling Allie.

"No!" Allie insisted in between giggles.

"Okay. I see you can withstand torture. I guess I will have to wait." Darla sighed.

Brigid poured another cup of coffee. As Darla sipped she became more serious.

“I have to look for work up here too. I sent a bunch of resumes and am waiting for some replies. As soon as they nibble, I will bite.”

“What are they, Mommy?” Allie ignored Jupiter who sat by her side, eyes begging for bacon.

“When you look for a job, you write a letter and list everything and everyplace you worked so people can decide if they want you to work for them.”

“Who wouldn’t want you?”

“Different jobs need different people. But, I will work anywhere. I hope I find work before school starts.”

“That’s a hard call, Darla. No body just hires right away like they used to. But it will all work out. Don’t worry.”

“That’s why I will keep working in the city. I moved in with Grandpa and Gram for the time being, Allie. They will come up after school starts for you to celebrate you going to a new school.”

“I know. I speak to them every week.”

“They love everything you have told them about but are eager to see you and all the new things you are learning to make with Aunt Brigid. Which reminds me, I want to see everything you have told me about!”

For the rest of the weekend, Allie showed her mother the work shop in the basement and explained everything she did with Aunt Brigid. She showed her how she set the counter tops up with the supplies they would need in a day and showed her how she filed the rough edges off figurines before painting and

decorating them. They took a walk to Memory Park where Allie showed her mother where they had buried Baby Blue. She told her about his funeral and what she said before he was buried.

“Are you okay now, Allie?”

“I think I am. I like the way Aunt Brigid looks at things.”

“Yes. She always had a wonderful way of looking at things. Memory Park. I remember when all of this was just a dream she had when we were growing up.”

“Maybe dreams come true, Mommy?”

“I think they do.” But, she knew the dream her little girl was holding onto.

“I can’t wait for when I will be up here for good, Honey.” Darla was putting the box of gifts Allie made her in the back seat of the car. Allie was so happy she liked what she made. Her mother was thrilled with her presents and hugged her when she opened the box.

“You really do have talent, Allie. Just like your Aunt Brigid said.”

They spent a fun day together. That Saturday night they stayed up late watching movies and eating more butter pecan vanilla ice cream with chocolate syrup.

“Remember how we had a song for every guy we liked?”

“Oh, I remember. But maybe it will be more like old, old times!”

“And the time we tried to give each other a perm and our hair fell out in clumps when we washed it out?” Brigid and Darla sat and just giggled, lost in a point in the past.

“Hmmm. You didn’t dance in the rain back then, did you?”

“Your point being?” Brigid raised a brow.

This all sounded awful to Allie but, they were both laughing like schoolgirls who knew a secret. Allie sat, pretending to watch the movie but, she was really really listening. She never gave it one thought that her mother was ever a kid. She always just thought mothers were mothers. It would be fun to see a side of her she never knew...and listen in on conversations. Yes indeed, when the time came she planned to be sneaky. Very sneaky.

When it was time for bed as Allie rolled down the quilt and blankets, her mother picked up the hand made pillow and was about to put it on the cedar chest when Allie confessed.

“Mom, er- that’s Jupiter’s pillow.”

“I see.” Darla frowned.

“Don’t tell Gram, okay?”

“You mean she might not understand?” Allie hoped her mother did.

“Well, what she doesn’t know, I will never tell!” Then she laughingly tossed the pillow toward the head of the bed.

“Over here, Mom. In the middle. That’s where he sleeps.”

“I guess I will have hug Jupiter in my sleep, instead of you, huh?”

“Now, we can’t call him until we are both in bed and under the covers.”

Under the covers, Darla asked, “Now what, Allie?”

“Jupiter!”

The loud rumblings of the big dog got louder and louder as he ran up the stairs, toward the bedroom, only becoming silent with his sailing off the floor and landing onto the bed, causing it to shake for a few seconds even after he landed. As frighteningly clumsy as he could appear, he had a good eye and landed right in middle of the bed, in his spot. Allie gave him a big hug while her mother scratched his head.

"I will give him this: he has a good aim!"

Sunday morning was suddenly Sunday afternoon. Standing with one foot in the car, Darla looked around and took in a deep breath. "It is beautiful here. I had such fun this weekend! And, I won't tell Gram." She gave a wink to Allie. "Remember when I call the program this week I will call you to let you know how your dad is doing."

"I will keep praying for him, Mommy."

"You will? I think that is wonderful. Everyone can use a prayer, don't you think?"

"I-I" She stuttered, "I am learning to pray like Aunt Brigid. Every time I think of daddy, I say a prayer for him, which is a lot of praying."

"Yes. Aunt Brigid prays a lot and she is very good at it."

"I pray for you too Mommy."

"You are the best daughter in the whole world, Allie. I love you too and can't wait for us to get our place. How about that?"

"Great!"

Brigid brought a bag with cookies and gifts for Darla's parents to car, opened the back door and put them on the back seat.

"Don't stress out about work and place live for when Allie starts school. You stay here, you hear?" Darla hugged her friend.

"It will be like old times!"

"Like old times? That would be so nice."

"Like in high school?"

"Like in junior high!"

"I have to say, weekends up here are a lot less boring than when we would hang out bored, flicking for something to watch on television."

"I will be up again next weekend, Allie." Darla turned and kissed her on the cheek. She slid into the driver's seat then closed the door to the car.

Darla had to force herself to leave. Leaving her daughter behind, while she took care of things that had to be done, left her feeling like her heart had been left behind in that old house, with that big dog. As she drove away she prayed, "I do not know who you are that Brigid prays to but I want to thank you. I have a safe and fun place for Allie. Whoever you are, I trust you to care for my daughter too." She suddenly felt calm and even happier. As she drove back toward Brooklyn she thought, "I have to ask her who she prays to one day."

"What are you thinking about, Allie?" She was not aware how quiet she became at dinner thinking.

“I was thinking about the whole weekend and what you said about Mommy staying here too until she finds a place.”

“Not a problem but, is she okay with sharing the bed with Jupiter or should the question be does Jupiter mind?”

Chapter Twenty

As Brigid and Allie saw Darla's car fade from view, Brigid turned to Allie and asked, "What new movies have you not seen? Do you like cartoons?"

"Aunt Brigid, I am seven. Almost eight! I like some cartoons but not cartoon movies."

"I'm sorry," Brigid apologized, trying not to giggle.

"I just thought we'd go to the video store, rent a few movies that are new releases, get some burgers and fries and pop some popcorn and just stay up late like we did this weekend."

"Real late?"

"So late, we'll bring our blankets and pillows downstairs just in case we fall asleep! But, even so we still have to get up early to do everything we have to do, okay?"

"That sounds great!"

At the video store, they went up and down the aisles looking for movies. Brigid carefully looked at all the ratings and brought a stack of video covers for Allie to look at.

"This one isn't new but I liked this one, Allie. It's about identical twins that never know about each other because their parents get divorced when they are babies. They meet at sleep away camp and then decide to switch places and it's a lot of fun."

"Are there any movies about magic?" Allie asked suddenly.

"Er, no. Not in this pile."

"I want to see a movie about witches!"

"Let me think...."Brigid paused.

"Have you seen all the movies about the boy wizard yet? Here's the latest one. It's about Indian shamans, who are like witches, and you learn a lot about what they believe in. It's very much like I believe."

"Then I want to see something like that and-." She looked through the other tapes Brigid had selected, "And this one. I like movies about outer space."

"Alright then. We know what we are getting."

As they waited on line, a chubby woman with short frizzy blonde hair walked in. Upon seeing Brigid she became angry and shouted, "You shall go to Hell!"

Brigid realized her pentacle was the cause of this outburst. It didn't happen often fortunately but she was sorry that Allie witnessed such bigotry. To Allie's confused look, she said simply, "Don't let her bother you. We are going to have fun time tonight!"

On the ride home, Allie asked, "Why did that woman say you were going to Hell?"

"I'm sorry you had to witness that, Allie. You see I wear a medal a lot of people do not understand. Everyone knows what a cross stands for and what a Star of David is but, my star is different and so some people think I'm a bad person."

"That's stupid!" Allie said in her defense.

"Honey. People are not stupid because they do not understand something. They just do not understand."

"Didn't it bother you when she said you would go to Hell?"

"Only because it bothered you. I don't believe in Hell. I cannot believe that Creator or any god, no what matter what you call him or her, would ever torture people forever or at all. So, for myself, I am not bothered. I just have a different belief. You see, I can't go somewhere that I do not believe in now, can I?" I

"I still think they are stupid!" Allie pouted.

"Allie. Everyone here is supposed to fulfill something. None of us know what it could be. Even that lady in the video store. I am sure she works hard at her church and helps many people. I will not judge her just because she does not understand anything different than what she believes in. And, I do not want you to judge her either. Being like me has never been easy for anyone. But, in being different you accept that and work very hard at understanding even people that do not understand you. What I believe is not pulling a rabbit out of a hat, Allie. It is how to live in peace everyday, no matter what. It's trusting that what hurts you today will not hurt you tomorrow."

"How do you learn that?"

"By learning one very important thing and that is all things are connected. I am connected to that woman by just sharing the earth and this life with her. We have that in common. Think of how upsetting it must be to get so angry. I feel

bad for her and hope she finds laughter this day. In any event you have one job, okay? Your job is to enjoy!"

Once home, Brigid and Allie stood at the popcorn machine in the kitchen eagerly waiting to fill the bowl.

"Aunt Brigid?"

"Yes?"

"I want to learn more about what you believe."

"Allie. You have a good idea of what I believe in already."

"Yes. But what does that star stand for?"

"It is called a pentacle. It is a way I remember I am connected to everything in the world. I am part of the world. Four points stand for earth, wind, fire and water. The fifth point stands for spirit. It stands for my spirit and the spirit of anyone who wears it as well as the spirit that is everywhere that we are connected to."

"I want you to teach me."

"It doesn't quite work that way."

"Why not?"

"Some people are born and raised by their families to believe what I do-like Jewish and Christian children. Others decide for themselves like I did. They are kind of called to a different belief. It's as if, they feel something is missing and they decide to look at a lot of religions and then they decide."

"But, if you do not teach me how will I know what to believe?"

"What does your mom believe in?"

"Well, she prays to God and Jesus and Mary."

"That's wonderful, Allie! Everyone needs something to believe in so they can get strength when they need it. And Mary is very much like what I believe in. She is a powerful mother figure and everyone can use a mother now and then, can't they?"

"Is that Gay- Ga-the one you talked about when we buried Baby Blue?"

"Yes, she is one mother figure I believe in. It's the same thing. I will not teach you but, if you have questions, I will answer them so you can understand me but if you want to be taught, you must speak to your mother. Okay? I don't want to do anything if she wants to you learn another faith first."

"But, how will I know what to believe in?"

"Listen to your heart, Allie. Listen to your heart and it will show you your own path."

"Are you a witch?"

Brigid laughed, "Little butterfly flits from wall to wall and hears more than she admits!"

"I'm sorry. I did not mean to eavesdrop but I heard her say that."

"What is a witch to you?"

"Well, they fly on brooms, cast spells and some people say they pray to the devil." Allie whispered the last part.

"Well, Allie, I want to ask you a question. Did your mother ever tell you about the 'Boogey Man'?"

"No. But some of my friends believe in him."

"How come they do and you don't?"

"My mom and dad never told me about him."

"So if some of your friends are afraid, are you?"

"No."

"Do you believe in Santa Claus?"

"Sometimes. I am beginning to wonder though."

"Good enough."

"Now, what if I told you witches were around before Jesus and the Jewish people? What if you knew they lived in different parts of the world and never heard of the Devil until Christian religions began to teach people that they prayed to the Devil? Does that mean those witches prayed to the Devil?"

"No. I guess not. If you don't know about something, why would you pray to it?"

"Exactly. Many witches learn to use herbs, or grown and make teas. Most just believe in being good to our Mother Earth, helping people if they can, loving their families and children like most people and respecting all life. Now you can do this already without me teaching you a thing, can't you? And, you do not have to be a witch to do all this either. Do you understand?"

"I guess."

“Remember Allie, just like anyone else of any religion, a witch can be a mean person too because they are human.”

After a few moments Allie said, “Well I guess there will no flying on a broom tonight then?”

Then the popcorn machine popped very slowly until it finally stopped.

“Here we go and it's nice and hot. Let's go through our list. Pillows?”

“Check.”

“Blankets?”

“Check.”

“Cups and juice?”

“Check”

“Bowls?”

“Check.”

“Jupiter?”

“Oh, Aunt Brigid!”

“Well,” Aunt Brigid chided pretending to be serious.

Allie ran to the living room and checked Jupiter's rug. Within seconds, she was back.

“Check.” She said with seriousness too.

“Well, then. Let's go!”

Allie surprised Brigid by staying awake for two movies but, at the end of the second movie, she fell asleep as the credits rolled. Brigid turned off the

television and the VCR. She straightened out the covers on the sofa and fixed the pillow under Allie's head. Allie had a beautiful and bright spirit. Brigid sighed and, knowing what Allie's calling would someday be, she bent over and kissed her on the head.

"Goodnight, Allie and Blessed Be."

Chapter Twenty-One

The summer thus far in the Livingston Manor really felt like autumn. The nights were so chilly nights winter blankets were used. Allie didn't mind. She enjoyed the gusts that came through her half open window and with Jupiter at her side, she always felt warm. There were frequent rain storms but apparently this was not unusual for the "Manor". Once, there was even hail! So when Allie awoke this particular morning she discovered she kicked her blankets off during her sleep. It was a rare summer feeling day. Although the bright sunlight made her room vibrantly alive with color, the bedroom was quickly up filling with humidity. Getting up out of bed she noticed Jupiter must've long gone downstairs to be let out. It was, simply put, uncomfortably hot. She threw on a white cotton tee shirt, shorts and slipped into sandals. It was so warm droplets of sweat began to form on her forehead as she dressed. To her relief it felt a little bit cooler as she went downstairs.

"Good Morning, hon." Brigid's hair was pinned up in an attempt to control the unruly curls that seemed wilder with the humidity. Allie had to work hard not to giggle because her godmother's hair curled like some of the wigs clowns wear at a circus.

"Did you sleep okay? At least it didn't start to get hot until about an hour ago. We are going to finally have a hot summer day, I think."

"It feels cooler down here."

“Well, heat rises so the upper floor is going to feel a lot warmer than here. If it stays hot and humid, tonight we camp out downstairs and lay under the fan.

How does that sound?”

“Sounds great!”

“Aunt Brigid, I see Jasper is at the window. Didn’t you give him his peanuts?”

“If you hadn’t come down when you had, I would’ve but, I was hoping you would want to feed him this morning. He’s seen you with me everyday now so I think he just might take peanuts from your hand.”

The bag of peanuts was on the counter next to the sink. Allie took the bag and saw that Jasper stopped tapping and looked at her curiously. She put some peanuts in her hand and stretched on her toes as far as she could, trying to not make jerky movements. She did not want to scare him away. Brigid opened the window screen a couple of inches so Allie was able to rest her hand on the window sill. As she strained to stand still Jasper came over and with tiny paws that felt like a bird’s, he greedily took the peanuts from Allie hand one by one and rested them on his side of the window sill. Allie could barely hold in shrieks of glee. As she brought her back hand in, Brigid slowly closed the screen and Allie was able to stand normally. She stood a while at the window watching Jasper eat. She waited until he finished the last one. Then he jumped to the nearest branch where he began whatever his day’s purpose was.

In order to not make the kitchen hotter by cooking breakfast, Allie and Brigid had bagels with cream cheese and jelly for breakfast.

“I was thinking we could take a little trip to Liberty again today which isn’t that far. That’s where we rented the videos, remember? Some friends of mine have a really special shop I think you would like to see.”

After riding on the “17” highway, they got off exit one hundred and made a right turn onto Main Street in Liberty. Allie saw the video store where that mean lady said her godmother would go to hell. Despite the talk they had about people like her, Allie still felt angry thinking about that. As they rode down Main Street Allie could see how the heat affected the few people that were on the narrow gray sidewalks. Everyone walked so slowly, if they went any lower she thought they would just stop and not be able to move again. There were frequent wipings of the forehead, advertising flyers used as fans and people disappearing into stores to get cold drinks. She noticed small shops with old furniture (in the city they would have been called junk stores). One even had a really weird clown in front of their store on the sidewalk. On the right Allie noticed a gas station and then a car dealer. Then she saw a theater. She couldn’t tell whether it was open or not.

“It’s a little past this theater on the other side of the street.”

Allie strained her eyes but she really didn’t know what type of shop she was looking for. She saw not one person on the street. They pulled up and parked in front of the theater. Taking Brigid’s hand, they crossed the street. Allie was amazed at how little traffic there was.

“Here we are.”

Allie's eyes widened as she looked into the store windows. The glass shone like a mirror. She could see herself in the glass. In the window to the right she saw different round balls resting on silvery claws or wooden pedestals. She saw statues of figures she had seen in art books. There were different types of a woman whose hair was so long it curled around her nude body. They were all standing on a sea shell, just like in the art books. She looked into the window on the left and saw a sword! It reflected all light and the handle of the stone had a ruby-red looking stone in it. There were more statues in the window. There were faeries, there were more glass looking balls, there were brooms but not the kind of brooms you clean a house with. These brooms had all different types of shapes and they were not very big. Allie wondered what brooms like these could be used for. Allie was distracted from her awe when Brigid said, "Shall we go in?"

They walked through the door and Allie stopped suddenly. Although the store was air conditioned, she felt waves of warmth envelope her whole body like a hug from a grandmother. She felt at home even though it was as if she were in another world. She felt the way she felt when she read all the wonderful books and stories about worlds where unicorns and faeries live. It was as if these worlds decided to live on the shelves and walls of this place.

"Blessed Be!" Brigid greeted Paula. Allie smiled at her and she smiled back, as she stood up from her stool behind the glass counter.

Paula was a tall woman, well figured and strong looking yet, her face glowed a loving gentleness. Her short brown hair was cut into waves that were growing out of their original cut. Still, the waves enhanced her face and pretty nose. Her bluish eyes were serene yet could not cloak her mischievous spirit within a sharp mind.

“Blessed Be, Brigid.” And what have we here?” She towered over Allie until she leaned onto the glass counter.

“Blessed Be! My name is Paula.” Not knowing what else to say Allie replied, “Blessed Be, my name is Allie.”

“So this is your goddaughter you were telling us about.”

Allie’s eyes became fixed on the jewelry within the glass case. There were medals just like what Aunt Brigid had. Some were small, some were big, some were silver some looked like gold and there were dragons! She never thought for a moment that people would wear dragons. Looking up behind Paula, she saw velvet pouches of all colors and carved boxes with beautiful patterns on them. She did not know what they meant but she knew they had to mean something. There was row after row of what looked like playing cards but they had beautiful pictures on them-magicians, angels, faeries- cards she had never seen before. On the small shelf next to the counter were vials of scented oils. Incense was burning and Allie breathed it all in. She felt...what? She could not be sure of what she was feeling but it felt wonderful!

“Blessed be, Allie! I’m Carol.” She turned to see a petite woman with very pale, shoulder length blonde hair. Her pale, light gray eyes sparkled like crystals. Her eyes were gentle but once she looked at Allie, Allie instinctively and marveled at the peace she could feel within her wise gaze. Allie did not know how she knew this. She just did. She also knew Carol was as loving a soul as Paula.

“Thankfully the police haven’t called me for a while. It is very upsetting when they need me to work a case.....” Paula was saying to Brigid but Allie didn’t hear the rest. She turned around and saw yet another glass case filled with figurines of all types. There was one of a man with horns and the legs of an animal. He held some type of instrument.

“Aunt Brigid-“

“Yes, Allie?”

“Is this man supposed to be the Devil?”

“Oh, no! Remember we don’t believe in him. He is Pan, a woodland spirit.”

“And what are all these glass balls?” Overwhelmed with questions, Allie did not realize she forgot to say “Excuse me.”

“They are crystal balls.” Carol said.

“You mean like gypsies have?”

“Anyone can use them.”

“Do people really see things in them?”

“If that is the person’s gift, they will.” Paula answered then added, “Say, you want to see a magic mirror?”

“Like the one Snow White’s evil stepmother used?”

“It is only the intent of the person that makes an object for evil.” Brigid explained.

“May I look around the store? There is so much to see!”

Carol bowed gracefully, waving a hand toward the rest of the store.

The first thing she saw was yet another glass case and it was filled with dragons and wands just like the ones from that series of popular books and movies about the children in a school for wizards! One caught her eye. It had vines carved all around it.

“Carol? Do these wands have magic?”

“Anything and everything has magic if you know how to call it to you.”

As Allie walked around toward the back, Brigid whispered to Carol to pack up the wand that Allie liked so much. Strolling about she saw candles of all sizes and colors, huge jars filled with stuff which she guessed were herbs like the ones Aunt Brigid grew. There were statues of knights, cats, dragons why there were even swords mounted on the wall and daggers enclosed in yet another case. She saw a room with a small table, covered with a black velvet tablecloth. There was a small crystal ball and a deck of cards.

Allie had taken a while to walk around the store marveling at all she saw. When she arrived at the front, Carol, Paul and her godmother were talking about scented candles and herbs they wanted to order from Aunt Brigid.

“Well,” Paula smiled, “What do you think?”

“I think this is the most wonderful store I have ever been in. It feels-it feels” she groped for words, “So right. I love the feeling in here!”

The three women eyed each other knowingly.

“May I ask a question?”

“Of course!” Carol loved children and especially loved teaching them the path.

“What is the back room used for?”

“I knew you would get around to that!” Paula laughed.

“I can read people’s fortune and I use that room for clients.”

“Wow! Can I learn how to do that too?”

“Remember what we talked about Allie. We have to talk with your mom when she moves up here with us, okay?”

“Can we come back here, Aunt Brigid?”

“Of course we can!”

With a wink to each other and a “Blessed Be”, before they left the store, Allie took a flyer from the counter with a smile. As she read “The Broomstick” to herself, Brigid decided The gift of the wand would wait until dinner. As Allie left the store, it was not the humidity that hit her hard so much as she was in another place that didn’t feel so good. But, she remembered the feeling she had when she walked in and the aroma of the incense and held these memories in her heart. She knew these were the things made the “real” world, or the way the world was meant to be. Allie knew anything outside of feeling like this could no longer be part of her world.

Chapter Twenty-Two

Allie stood outside with her godmother. Brigid was hanging clothes which would dry quickly in the heat of this first really hot summer day all season. Allie held the wonderful wand her godmother had given her the night before and traced the vine etching with her finger. It was beautiful and Allie never would have thought anyone could just buy wands. She imagined herself as a young witch and flicked the wand in the air, imagining a unicorn materializing in front of her. Of course it came from a land invisible to the human eye- where imagination lives and breathes and all things said to be make believe really exists. Allie was pulled away from her unicorn.

“Go into the house and get Jupiter. I’ll meet you by the pond. Oh, put a leash on him or he will jump in the pond on a day like this. The bathroom is too hot to have him fight us to give him a bath.”

Despite the heat Jupiter was pulling Allie eagerly toward the pond where Brigid stood hoping these few minutes out under a torrid sun would not give her a bad sunburn. Allie face was red with heat and she was panting almost in time with Jupiter.

“He’s a handful, even in the heat, huh?” She took out a pink plastic bottle of sunscreen.

“I tried to make him walk slow but he just wouldn’t.” Allie sounded a little frustrated and cranky.

“I know it is really hot but do you think you are for a walk somewhere on the property?” She lathered the sunscreen on her face, arms, chest and neck then handed it to Allie.

Catching her breath, Allie nodded her head as she took the small bottle and began to put the cream on herself as well. Brigid took Jupiter by the lease. He was different dog walking with her godmother. They walked slowly, stopping to rest for a few minutes under the shade of any tree that provided cover from the burning rays of the sun. There was a lot of brush along the path they took except for the path they walked on. Along this path there were what looked like pebbles. Soon Allie saw the field where Memory Park was. Now she remembered how she would walk there and see deer where they were walking.

“Aunt Brigid? Did you mow down all of this to make a path to walk on and for the deer?” Brigid gave a hearty laugh.

“Actually they made the path for us. This is what we call a deer path.”

“And what kind of little stones are these?” Allie bent to pick up one.

“No, Allie! I don’t think you want to pick any of those up.” Brigid laughed.

Standing up straight Allie’s eyes asked the question.

“Those are droppings”

“Droppings?”

“Let’s say they are deer poop pebbles.”

“You’re right. I wouldn’t have wanted pick those up!”

Memory Park fading behind them Allie asked, “Where are we going?”

“To cool off.”

In five minutes they were under the lushness of thick pine trees. Allie could feel how much cooler it felt under the trees. She also heard a rushing sound. She followed Aunt Brigid and Jupiter, now off his leash. Under the sun, the water rolling over the rocks looked like silver. There were gaps of dirt between the rocks that looked like sand. Allie bent down and grabbed a handful. It really did feel like the sand on a beach.

“This feels like the cool sand on a beach, Aunt Brigid.”

“After who knows how many millions of years, stone and rock have become crushed so fine, they have been made into sand. That’s what sand is.”

“Wow! This is like a little beach”

“And what do beaches have?”

“Cold water!”

“Well, what are we waiting for?” Jupiter didn’t need any coaching to jump in and cool off!”

“We don’t have bathing suits-“

“This is country and besides I think cold wet clothing will keep us nice and cool on the walk back.”

The water was extremely cold because the source of the stream flowed down from the mountains. They splashed and lay in the water for sometime and indeed, just as Brigid said, the walk back was much cooler. Allie took special

care not to step on any “droppings”. By the time they reached the house, their soaked clothes were dry.

After dinner, they went to the basement. By now Allie was very good with weighing herbs so her job was to package herbs by weight, label them and write the name of the herb on the packet.

It had been a hot day and by eight o'clock Jupiter was snoring on his rug. Allie doubted if he would hear her if she called him upstairs but, they were sleeping in the living room under the fan. The overhead fan had been on since they went downstairs and the lack of air coming through the windows seemed to have shifted into a slight breeze.

“It will cool off wonderfully tonight, I hope. That’s why I brought down the blankets.

“Here in the Manor, we usually only have a couple of weeks where it is super hot day and night but I don’t think that will be the case this summer.”

Allie lay next to the great Jupiter, her stomach against his back. She slipped his small pillow under his head, rested and arm under his elbow and onto his chest and fell asleep remembering the stream and droppings.

Chapter Twenty-Three

Allie became really good at making candles and peanut butter cookies. In fact, she seemed naturally good at it. They had gone back to The Broomstick a few more times and Allie felt as if she were truly part of the friendship of the witches. After numerous talks with her godmother about that first day, Allie began to understand what truly good majick was supposed to feel like. Unknown to Allie, Paula and Carol they each agreed that Allie had gifts. Brigid knew it would be a matter of time and of course, there was Darla. Although longtime friends, Brigid could not gauge if Darla would mind Allie learning more about magick. Every time she and Allie talked about majick, even if only about a novel or movie, Sally would appear out of nowhere and suddenly sit on Allie's lap. Allie was flattered but Brigid knew the truth. She knew what Sally knew: one day...

It was the second week in August and the Tiger Lilies had begun to dry up as they prepared for disappearing until next year. Frogs still got lost and butterflies began to appear. There were orange butterflies, black ones, white ones, spotted ones. There were so many different butterflies Allie stopped counting the different ones she saw. The pond had a muskrat family living there, as did turtles and ducks. Aunt Brigid still danced in the rain and promised Allie that soon, she could go out too if there were no lightning. She and Jupiter took long walks every morning and she often went to Memory Park. He had not jumped in the pond for a whole week so at least he did not have to have the

baths he hated. As usual, Jupiter would bolt ahead and run back. When they got to Memory Park, he always sat next to her as she sat on her "thinking rock". This rock was small but wide enough for her to sit on. It was just on the edge of Memory Park and soon, she began to just sit on the rock and let her thoughts run through her mind. She always felt better after sitting on that rock. Although it was an animal cemetery, she felt at peace there. She knew Aunt Brigid believed the love of all the animals was there and now, she thought the same. They had not spoken of religion since the night they went to the video store but, she began to understand her godmother's ways and began to look at everything as an enchantment, a gift to be treasured. As promised, her mother came up every weekend and gave her news of her father. She told Allie about his good days and his bad days but soon it would be a month and maybe he would ready to see Allie then. Allie wanted to see her father very much. She missed him so much but she also loved her vacation with Aunt Brigid. She and her mother also looked at apartments every weekend. What Allie loved about the country was that an apartment could be a house that you rented. The houses they looked at were big and most of them had fences. But, they would not be empty for a few months. Allie was happy when her mother said they would stay with Aunt Brigid if nothing came up before school started.

The deer became used to seeing her and Jupiter. In the beginning, they would stand off in the distance and watch, ready to run in a second. As the weeks went by, they just lifted their heads and, seeing them, would go back to

eating as if to say, "Oh, it's only you." Allie was able to see that their coats were getting darker. Aunt Brigid said that meant there would be an early winter. Her godmother was smart and she wanted to be just as smart one day.

It was a cool day. As she sat on the rock, the warmth of the sun came in waves in between the cool breezes. She felt cool then warm, cool then warm. When she opened her eyes, she saw it. She had not noticed it until it was almost upon her. He was walking funny and his spiny body shook now and then. "Oh, No," She thought. It was too early in the day for porcupines to be out. They were supposed to come out at night. As it got closer, she saw foam on its mouth. She picked up her feet and spun around her rock to get distance between her and the porcupine so she and Jupiter could run home and get Aunt Brigid. But Jupiter had put himself between the porcupine and her.

"Jupiter!" She yelled. "Jupiter!" She yelled again.

"Jupiter, No!" She tried to command.

Running to grab him by the collar, she was not fast enough. Jupiter was upon the porcupine and, although Jupiter yelped in pain, he did not stop his attack until the porcupine lay lifeless and bleeding on the ground. Jupiter screamed in pain. When Allie went to him to comfort him she saw hundreds of porcupine quills in his mouth, ears, head and body.

"Oh, Jupiter! Why did you have to be so brave?" she cried, tears running down her face.

She called to him hoping he would be able to walk back to the house. She did not want to leave him but he would not get up. Then she saw quills in his paws. Once she realized he did not want to move, she ran to the house screaming for her godmother. Brigid came running out and Allie told her what had happened.

"Okay, Allie. Now this is what you will do. You will go back and keep him company while I call the vet so we can bring him in. I am getting blankets to keep him warm because he could go into shock. My truck can get back there. Now go!"

Allie ran back as fast as she could. Please help him! She prayed very loudly to whoever Aunt Brigid prayed to.

"Jupiter, you will be alright. We are getting you to the doctor right way. Oh, Jupiter! Why? We could have gotten home so fast! You wouldn't be hurt right now!" Fighting against herself not to keep crying she petted the one spot on his face that had no quills, the bridge of his nose.

Soon Brigid was there. She jumped out of the truck with a cooler. Putting on rubber gloves, she threw a towel over the porcupine and put it in the cooler.

Allie heard ice shift around as her godmother put in the porcupine and covered it with ice as well. Allie and Brigid cried when Jupiter yelped in pain as Brigid wrapped him in blankets then lifted him into the jeep. Allie sat in the middle of the back seat. Jupiter was on one side and the dead porcupine in the cooler was on the other.

"The vet is waiting for us right now." Brigid said briskly.

"Why did you put the porcupine in the cooler, Aunt Brigid?"

"The rabies virus dies very quickly when the animal dies. Heat especially kills the virus very fast. His brain needs to be tested but, if I let him get hot, we would not know. They will do other tests too. But Jupiter has all of his shots so I am not worried about rabies."

Allie sensed something in her godmother's voice. She was not telling her something. She was afraid to ask yet had to.

"Aunt Brigid, Jupiter will be okay, won't he?"

"Right now, we do not know if he has straight quills or the hooked ones, which will take a long time to take out."

"The hooked ones are the worse. He also has them all over his body. I am hoping they are not too deep." She was really hoping the quills had not punctured an organ in his body. "Is he conscious?"

"He is looking at me and blinking."

"Good. Very good."

"Allie, remember when I brought the storm water into the house to bring some of the storm to you so you could make a wish?"

"Yes, I remember."

"Think about that time. Remember how the water felt on your hands when you made that wish. Now, wish very hard that Jupiter gets better. Keep the thought

in your mind. Hold it. Think of nothing else. Do not let fear or doubt enter your mind at all. Okay?"

"Yes, Aunt Brigid." Allie said with trembling lips.

It felt as if time stopped. She remembered Baby Blue. She was terrified for Jupiter. She remembered how he startled her when she first met him. She remembered the day he jumped into the pond and how funny he looked, sitting in the bathtub, all soaped up. He was her pal and he slept with her every night. As she thought of all of these things tears fell freely down her face and although the vet was only twenty minutes away, it felt like they would never get there. Allie forced herself to see Jupiter running back and forth, as he loved to do. Allie wished so hard, sweat began to fall down into her eyes.

Chapter Twenty-Four

Dr. Bob heard them pull up. He rolled a gurney out and helped Brigid gently place Jupiter on it. He rushed him into the office.

"Allie, can you handle the cooler? Bring it along. Hurry!"

The cooler was a little heavy but, for Jupiter's sake, Allie found the strength to drag it into the office in a couple of minutes. Dr. Bob's secretary was already on the telephone.

"Yes, we have the animal. It was put on ice right away. I will leave it outside for pickup."

"Allie," Brigid called in from a room, "Come in. Remember what I told you. See him healthy!"

Allie took a deep breath. Dr. Bob had unwrapped Jupiter. His blankets were wet with blood and Jupiter began to shake.

"I have to work fast. His blood pressure is dropping so his heart rate is up and he is going into shock. That happens with this big a blood loss. As he ran the gurney through the door, down the hall and into his operating room he called, "I have to transfuse him immediately and then begin surgery."

Twenty minutes later, a vet tech came out.

"How-how is he doing?" Brigid asked softly.

"His blood pressure is very low. He has an IV for fluid and antibiotics and is getting a blood transfusion. Blood was drawn. Doc wants to know when and how this happened."

Allie told the story tearfully.

"There is no way of knowing how long this will be. Why don't you two go and get something to eat." Then he left.

Neither Allie nor Brigid said how scared they were for Jupiter or that they were not hungry. Allie liked Dr. Bob right away. He was not old and had brown hair and gentle eyes that told how worried he really was and she did not like that.

"Well, let's walk up the road. There is a place for us to sit and maybe have something light to eat." Her godmother suggested. Allie nodded sadly. As they left Dr. Bob's, they noticed the cooler was gone.

Brigid and Allie sat in silence in a dinette. Brigid closed her eyes, holding her hands palms up. Then she put them together in the shape of a triangle and turned to the direction of Dr. Bob's. Allie did not want to interrupt so she did the same thing. She thought of Jupiter, healthy and running around. She put her palms up and when she did, she felt them begin warm up as if something were shining a light on them. Somehow, she seemed to know when to put her hands together in the triangle. Pointing her fingertips to Dr. Bob's, she felt the warmth leave her hands through her fingertips. She kept thinking of Jupiter being himself again.

"This is Brigid. How is Jupiter doing? Can you tell me anything?" Allie's concentration stopped. A voice was on the other end of the cell telephone but Allie could not make out what was said.

"We are staying around until Bob is finished. We want to see Jupiter before we go home." Brigid replied and then hung up. She turned her attention to Allie. "It will be a while. He has so many hooks. Dr. Bob is removing them one at a time and stitching him up before removing the next one. He is taking one quill out at a time so Jupiter does not bleed much more. He will not be finished for a while but his blood pressure stayed stable after they transfused him and his heart is sounding really good."

"Was that a problem?" Allie asked. She never thought his heart would stop.

"Well, Jupiter is a big dog. Just because his body is big does not mean his heart is. I mean his 'heart' is big with love and bravery, but his heart is still the size of a regular sized dog. With shock and anesthesia, his heart could have been a problem." Brigid took Allie's hands.

"But, we both sent him healing, now, didn't we?"

"Is that what we did? I was just trying to do what I saw you do."

"We put all of our thoughts and energies together to go to Jupiter. We gave that to him to keep him strong. Now let's go back and wait in the office. The closer we are, the faster he will get our energy."

They sat in the doctor's office. It was a big office with soft blue cushioned chairs around tables. The rug in the waiting area was plush, soft and light blue. The hallway was tiled and on the walls were all types of pictures of vets and dogs. Brigid sat down on the rug to pray. She patted the rug with her hand.

"Come, Allie. Sit with me. We'll put our arms on this table, hold hands and do just what we did in the dinette."

Allie nodded her head. They sat down and as they held hands, Allie felt goose pumps rise on her skin. Her godmother's hands were shaking yet, they felt warm. It was a strange feeling and Allie was tempted to pull away.

"Allie. This is good, what we feel. Now we have to focus on sending all we feel to Jupiter. Think only of Jupiter. See him whole and healthy. Focus as best as you can and as hard you can. We must help Dr. Bob work quickly and help Jupiter during all of this."

Allie gasped when her Aunt Brigid squeezed her hands more firmly. Soon, Allie's hands were shaking with warmth as well.

"Now, we will let go. Push your hands straight out. Keep Jupiter in mind and all that energy will go to him. On the count of three. One...Two...Three!"

They let each other's hands go and both pushed out. Suddenly the shaking was gone and Allie saw Brigid's forehead was wet with sweat just as hers was.

"I am still afraid." Allie whispered.

"I know. Now, let's just sit and pray."

Allie sat quietly and prayed to herself like Aunt Brigid does all the time.

"Please. Make Jupiter well. He is my friend and I love him. I do not want to lose him! I could not bear it! Not after Daddy and Baby Blue! Please! He got badly hurt trying to save me! Don't let him die. Please!"

She heard a door open and close. She opened her eyes. It was Dr. Bob. He was taking off a bloodied surgical gown. Allie's heart pounded. Brigid stood up quickly and stood very straight as if bracing herself for a punch. Dr. Bob took off his surgical mask and underneath it was a smile.

"That dog must be made of iron!" He exclaimed proudly.

"He will be alright, then." Brigid said more than asked.

"He made it through the surgery but he still has recovery and we will watch him carefully. He is on antibiotics to fight infection."

"Can we see him?" Allie asked

"Yes, you can. He is coming out any second now but he will still be very groggy so he won't know you're here."

Turning back to Brigid he said, "Some veins were ruptured but not an artery. He bled a lot and he has hundreds of stitches inside and out but, the veins are sealed and all of the quills are out. By tomorrow, we can be more certain. He has a fever right now. Ah, here he is."

Allie ran to the gurney. He was being moved back to the kennel part of the office. Jupiter's fur had been shaved just about all over. She saw spiny stitches all over his body. The IV hung above him. She gently touched the bridge of his nose. She thought she saw the tip of his tail try to wag.

"You will make sure he has no pain, right?" Brigid was asking Dr. Bob.

"I will give him medicine for pain and-," he added before they could ask the question, "Call tomorrow and we can let you know when you can visit him."

"He will be alright?" Allie asked. She needed to be sure.

"That is one very strong dog!"

It was too quiet when Brigid and Allie returned to the house.

"I miss his barking and rumbling," Brigid said.

"I will miss sleeping with him tonight." Allie sighed. Then the phone rang.

"His white blood cell count is off the wall, Brigid." Dr. Bob was saying. "He is still running a bad fever also. The tech will be sure his IV runs the medicine on an exact schedule. I will call you in the morning." Reluctantly, Brigid told Allie what Dr. Bob had said.

"No!" Allie began to cry. "It's not fair! He was doing so good!" She sobbed.

"Allie. Sometimes, with healing as we did, blood work gets a little weird because of the energy sent. This can be a very good thing. So, do not give up. Remember we must see him healed every time we think of him. "

"I am so scared for him. How can I do that? How can you?"

"I have learned to take my feelings at times like this and put them in ...like a box inside my heart. That way I can pray the best way I can. Afterwards, I open the box and let myself feel it all. Jupiter needs to sense we believe he will get better so he does not give up."

"Can he do that?"

"All animals can. They sense things we cannot. Therefore, how about, for his sake, we save these tears for another time. Okay?"

Allie pulled in her tears, thought about a dresser drawer, and cried into it in her mind. Then, she slammed the dresser drawer shut.

"A box isn't big enough for me. I put all of my tears in a dresser drawer." But, her eyes still glistened anyway.

"Then how about we just sleep downstairs tonight? We can find something to watch to keep our minds busy. Okay? I'll make some herbal tea that will help us calm down."

Chapter Twenty-Five

Aunt Brigid made apple tea and Allie sipped it. They settled in to watch a movie. She and Allie lay on the rug and Sally was there too. She had come down from her perch atop the table in the hall outside the bathroom to keep them company. Soon, as her godmother had hoped, the relaxing tea helped Allie fall asleep. Brigid's nerves had calmed also. She knew she should be asleep soon too but wanted to make sure she checked on Jupiter before she did.

Brigid lay on Jupiter's rug. She lay on her back and put her pillow under her head. Pulling her blanket up to her chin, she stretched out, arms beside her. She stroked his rug with her fingers. His rug would help her get to him. She lay on her back and began to breathe deeply. As her fingertips touched his rug, she rose gracefully and began walking to the door. She turned around to check on Allie. Allie was fine and she saw herself on Jupiter's rug, also sleeping. She would be gone only seconds.

Brigid stood over Jupiter who whined slightly in his sleep. Although Sally usually traveled with her, this time she remained behind. Jupiter, as animals can, was able to see her ghostly form. She placed her ghostly hands upon him and he awoke. He stirred and looked at her. He sighed and then went back to sleep. Good. At least he knew she'd gone to visit him. She returned home in what to us would be a wink of the eye.

"Jupiter will be fine." Brigid knew.

She was back. She had only been gone a couple of seconds real time. Since spirit time stands still, Brigid was able to do more healing on him. Sally, had remained perched on the sofa standing watch over a sleeping Allie. When she saw Brigid return, she yawned and stretched. Brigid sat back down on the rug and slipped back into her body. She opened her eyes and saw Sally who was sitting on the sofa.

"My dear, fat Sally." Brigid cooed. Sally purred loudly as she went to Brigid.

"You had your work cut out for you tonight, didn't you girl?" Brigid said as she scratched Sally's ear. Sally had been her guardian for so many years and knew her job well. She remained behind to guard them both the moment Brigid was gone.

"Thank you, Sally, for guarding us both." Even though she had only been gone moments, long enough to work on Jupiter and zip back, she was grateful for Sally's protective eye. As briefly as she was gone, she had done much for so much could be done on spirit time. All that work which was but a split second, would have taken a long, long time in real time.

Brigid was truly sleepy now and turned on her side. Sally decided to curl up next to her and yawned, which was her favorite activity-yawning and going to sleep. Mistress had traveled in her sleep to see the big, clumsy one, Sally thought simply. Sally was very fond of him. His was a magick of love. That was a great gift he, and his kind, had in common. Sally tucked her front paws underneath her and fell asleep watching the childing.

Chapter Twenty-Six

The telephone rang jolting Allie awake. She heard her godmother on the telephone in the kitchen. Allie got up and walked nervously toward the kitchen. As she walked in Aunt Brigid was hanging up the telephone. Brigid turned as if to go into the living room and saw Allie standing there, eyes wide with fear.

"I wanted you to sleep longer but I see the phone woke you up." Brigid smiled and said, "Give me your hands."

"Oh, no!" Allie thought.

"Jupiter will be fine! He is going to be okay!" Brigid's face lit up and her hair flew wildly about her face in its curly way and she swung Allie around and around in a joyous circle! Allie laughed and felt happy, really happy! After they stopped twirling Allie asked, "What about all those tests Dr. Bob was worried about?"

"He said it was the oddest thing. He said it was like a miracle. That Jupiter was so sick yesterday, the tests should not back to normal so soon! But, WE know, don't we?" Allie smiled and nodded her head. She loved that she "knew", she loved that she helped and she loved being part of her godmother's secret ways.

"Oh, you know what we have to do now, right?" Allie said as she hugged her godmother's waist.

"What do we have to do?"

"Why we have to give Ga- Gay- Mother earth something in return for the energy she gave us to help Jupiter! What can we bring her?"

"Her name is Gaia. I have cornmeal right here. Get a couple of apples too and we will head out right away!"

"Look Aunt Brigid," Allie said seeing Sally sitting on the kitchen counter when they walked into the kitchen.

"Sally must have stayed here with us last night! I bet she was worried about Jupiter too!"

As Brigid got cornmeal, she gave Sally a couple of scratches behind the ear and grabbed a couple of apples from the bowl. Allie chose a big red maple tree as the spot to thank Gaia.

Outside Allie began, "Thank you for using some of your energy to help Jupiter, Gaia." She put the apples down and continued, "We are giving you this so that you can give energy to another animal that gets hurt, okay?"

"That was beautiful, Allie. Gaia, we thank you for the blessing of helping Jupiter. Accept these small offerings of our thanks."

"Dr. Bob said we could see Jupiter today at about three o'clock. He will have a free room at that time."

"I wish we could see him sooner." Allie pouted.

"Me too but, we will be busy enough to pass the time today. We have to go to the dump, get to the post office and do some shopping. Why don't you run upstairs and take your bath now since we were too tired to bathe last night. Then we can get ready to go. How about breakfast out this morning?"

"That sounds great!"

"Oh, and fold your blanket and leave everything on the sofa. I have a feeling we will be sleeping down here again tonight."

Before leaving to do errands and then see Jupiter, Allie helped Brigid load the bed of her pick up with the recyclables which she had separated and the garbage they would bring to the dump. The lazy looking little town of Livingston Manor was still little in daylight. Allie could see the beginning of the town and the end just a couple of blocks away. The post office was a small pastel tan colored building just outside a small parking area for people going to the grocery store or the bank. Inside the post office, there were rows of post office boxes and a community bulletin board with flyers for penny socials, an auction and a strawberry festival, whatever that was. Through a second set of glass doors was the post office counter itself. No one was there until Aunt Brigid rang the bell like you would at a motel. Within moments a pleasant and pretty young woman was at the counter in response.

"Hi. How are you doing today?" She had her blonde hair up in a pony tail with wisps of bangs framing her large lake blue eyes. Allie liked the way it bounced when she walked over to them.

"I'm doing great, René and you?"

"When the weather isn't wacky I'm fine."

"We've hardly had any sun this year, huh?"

"Well, that's the Manor for you."

“No one believes ever how odd the weather is here until they really stay here a while. I had no idea what people were talking about until I moved here.” Brigid laughed.

René was weighing and stamping the various packages Brigid brought in to mail.

“Yesterday, I was going to the store in Liberty. It was raining and right there on the highway there a line showing where the rain ended. It was so strange. I drove over that spot and suddenly there was sunshine.”

“I’ve noticed that too!”

“How’s your little one, Megan?”

“She just turned eleven!”

“Eleven! Time is making the children grownups and I am losing track! René, you don’t look old enough to have eleven year old! You look the same. You never age but, Megan must be disappointed with this summer.”

“Yeah. Too chilly for pools and lakes most days.”

“I know. We only had that super hot day a couple of weeks back. Most mornings we need heavier clothes.”

“Here ya go.” René smiled and gave Brigid the total for her mailings. Brigid explained everything that had happened and how they would see Jupiter today.

“How horrible! I had a dog that had porcupine quills. It breaks your heart.”

Looking at Allie she added, “You must be the godchild he protected. Jupiter is wonderful and now a hero!”

“I wish he hadn’t done it though.”

“I know. But dogs are like that. When they want to protect, there’s not much you can do. I’m not surprised he is doing so well so fast. Your home made liniment really helped my mom. Oh, I almost forgot. She wanted me to ask you for more, okay?”

“I have more for her by the end of the week. Well, we have to go before the time bandit that is making Megan grow up, takes away the day!”

They both laughed and wished each other a “great day”.

“Wow. That lady is real nice.” Allie noticed. “In Brooklyn, post office people don’t say anything but ‘next’ and it is always crowded.”

“After we eat and before we go to see Jupiter, we’ll go to Peck’s and get somethings. What shall we get? We need celebration food. What’s yours, Allie?”

“Ice cream.”

“Butter pecan?”

“Yes!”

Although there were some new cafes on those few Livingston Manor blocks, which, Aunt Brigid said, opened only a little while ago, they went to the established Robin Hood Diner for something to eat. The diner was just up the

road from town. The outside of the Robin Hood Diner looked very simple with plants and garden angels and gnomes on either side of the entrance. Inside, it was a regular luncheonette just like in the city with counters and seats and booths. Aunt Brigid brought her to another room of the diner. This room was huge. It had a dance floor, tables with red tablecloths and a bar. The tabletops had glass covering the tablecloths and they were already set up with plates, glasses and cups.

"Are we allowed in here? There's a bar." Allie asked. There were no other people in this room.

"Sure, we can! It's daytime so we'll just take this table here, right off the luncheonette so the waitress doesn't have to walk too far. The bar doesn't open until night time."

The waitress came, and handed them breakfast specials typed on a yellow sheet of paper.

"I will have pancakes and sausages." Brigid said.

"Me too! I'm starving!"

"It feels good, doesn't it, to know we don't have to worry about Jupiter. As soon as I knew he would be okay I felt hungry right away."

"Aunt Brigid, do you think our praying had much to do with his getting better?"

"I have no doubt, Allie. I have no doubt."

"Do all your prayers get answered like that?"

"Remember, a prayer is always answered whether we know it or not. Sometimes the answer is not what we would want but, what is for the best."

"You mean like Baby Blue?"

"Yes. Like Baby Blue. Some things come into the world for one reason only. To give a lesson and then leave. Sometimes the lesson is to teach someone to learn how go on not in sadness but in peace."

"Like the way we felt after we buried him and cried?"

"Yes."

"And Jupiter?"

"Like all of us, animals have choices too. He chose to protect you. And, because he did that, I think we were allowed to help him get better."

"Do you know what I think, Allie?"

"What?"

"I think your prayers are very strong. Why you prayed your dad would get help and, even though it was the hard way, he is getting help, right?"

"Do you think if I prayed he got cured, that would work?"

"That kind of falls in his hands. He has to decide to take his cure everyday-"

"You mean to choose not to drink."

"Exactly. But, I don't think it will hurt if we pray that he gets the strength he will need to do that. That's help too, don't you think?"

After breakfast they went to the dump. Allie had never seen one before. They put all the glass bottles into one big green metal bin and the plastic and

metal in another. There were only a couple of bags of garbage, which Aunt Brigid had to pay for to have dumped. The dump was pretty clean, which surprised Allie. It seemed country people were not sloppy at all. Aunt Brigid was especially fussy about garbage. Allie thought she would be confused about the way Aunt Brigid wanted stuff put in different pails but, after a couple of times, it was easy. Aunt Brigid burned all used paper plates and cups to avoid attracting creepy things. Allie asked why she did not use foamy plates and cups. Her godmother explained that Styrofoam does not break down and is very toxic for the earth and that it should never be burned because it pollutes the air.

"I don't think people should use Styrofoam at all." Allie agreed.

Allie anxiously waited with her godmother in the spare room at Dr. Bob's. She couldn't wait to see Jupiter.

"Now, Allie, he may still be groggy so don't be upset, okay?"

"I know. I will just be so glad to see him."

Their eyes widened at the familiar sound. Allie did not expect to the giant toenails that clacked on the tile floor in the hall, getting closer to them. It sounded like he was walking the person and not the other way around. The door opened.

"Jupiter!" They both cried out." Jupiter, for all the fur shaved off and all of his stitches, was as peppy as ever. He lapped Allie's face and jumped up on Brigid as if there was nothing wrong with him at all.

"Easy boy," Brigid coaxed. Of course, he would not listen. His eyes seemed to say, "Take me home. Take me home now!"

"Wow! The minute he heard your voices, he perked up something fierce!"

"Won't he pull his stitches out?" Allie asked with worry.

"No need to worry about that!" Dr. Bob said as he was pulled by the big dog on the other end of the leash.

"You know, when my tech went to get him, he was up and jumping! And we thought we would have to wheel him out! It's a good thing I make strong stitching. I stitch in a way that I stitch over the stitches so they will not be broken. Just look at this guy! He almost as good as new!"

"Well, how long does he have to stay?" Brigid asked.

"To tell you the truth, if he were another dog, he would be here for at least five days. But, he is doing so well! Look at him, he really wants to leave. I think he would rest better at home too. However, here's what we will do. Tonight I will take out the IV and start him on pills. I'll retest him tomorrow and, if by the day after tomorrow he is still doing well, I'll let you take home.

Later, they got ice cream and bought take out dinners from the Chinese restaurant. Jupiter got a wonderful report that night--and the next morning. At three o'clock the next day they went to visit him again. He was excited but he was also still wobbly. Brigid and Allie held him up so he would not fall down wagging his tail. After an hour Dr. Bob came in.

"He is doing great! I still can't get over it so if he continues to do well tonight and tomorrow, you can take him home tomorrow at ten o'clock."

At ten o'clock the next day Allie wrung her hands with impatience to take Jupiter home. Dr. Bob was very pleased with Jupiter's recovery. Handing Brigid two bottles of pills, Dr. Bob instructed,

"One pill in the morning and at night of this one to stop infection. This one is also twice a day for inflammation. Give a treat with this one. Start tonight. Come back next Friday to have stitches taken out."

Jupiter had pulled and clacked his giant toenails, skidding into sitting positions on the hallway tiles as he rushed to leave the building.

"He is doing much better! He's back to his old self, trying to get away!" Brigid laughed.

Once in the truck, Jupiter jumped in the back seat. Allie sat with him. He dropped his huge head into her lap and went right to sleep. When they got back at the house and opened the truck door, Brigid put a leash on him.

"I'll get him into the house while I pull out my old dog line so he can be outside safely for the next couple of days. Hang out with him inside while I do this?"

Once inside, Allie gave Jupiter fresh water, which he quickly drank. He walked with her to the living room and lay down on his rug. Allie put her pillow down on the floor next to him. "Jupiter, if my praying for you helped you, I am glad. I guess if prayers work only sometimes, maybe that is better than not at all."

“Here we go! Celebration food!”

“I love that you love ice cream so much! We only had it once a week at home.”

Brigid sat down with butter pecan ice cream and turned on the vcr.

“Now you tell me! Hmmm. Will I be in trouble with your mom?”

“I think my mom thinks your are great no matter what!”

The video tape had rewound from last night. It didn't matter. They could just watch it from the beginning and finish it this time.

Chapter Twenty-Seven

Brigid put Jupiter on the dog line so he could run up and down and left a bowl of water by the run. He began to roll and crawl along the ground on his back.

"Won't he break his stitches?"

"Those stitches are really strong but since he is healing, he's feeling very itchy. I'm going to get some ointment for those stitches."

Brigid returned with a bottle of green goop in a jar and began to dab it on the stitches. Offering the jar to Allie, she too began to dab the itchy spots.

"It feels cool, Aunt Brigid."

"This is an ointment I made. It has lanolin and peppermint. The lanolin will keep the skin moist and the peppermint will soothe and take away the itching."

"I will have to add this to the list of things I want you to teach me how to make."

They spent the rest of the afternoon in the basement, making pillows, candles and decorating statues of unicorns, angels and birds. People were waiting for these items. Altogether, twenty needed to be mailed. Together, they completed the final steps on these orders. Some were ready and packed and addressed for tomorrow's mail. Others needed to stand to dry so they would go out in another day or so. When they finished, they went up to the dog run to let Jupiter into the house. When they got there, he was sitting up as if to say, "Well, it's about time!" Brigid noticed that he drank all of the water she had put by the dog run.

"Good he drank all the water. He needs that water to help the medicine work."

Brigid said as she unhooked his collar from the line.

Inside, Jupiter walked slowly to his rug and they watched him flop down, and promptly go to sleep.

"Poor Jupiter, he feels better and then overdoes it. The sleep will do him good."

"I'm just so happy he will be okay!"

Late afternoon and evening passed calmly. Jupiter enjoyed his "snackers" especially that night. His pills had been wrapped in cheese. Brigid and Allie stayed downstairs again. This time it was because they didn't want Jupiter to rumble up the stairs or to jump on Allie's bed. The stitches were well sewn but they were also very tight.

It was eleven o'clock. There was no moon and no rain. It was just dark. The only light inside the house was coming from the television and the nightlight in the kitchen for any walks to the downstairs bathroom. Brigid was lying on the sofa watching an old movie when Jupiter lifted his head and growled. At the same time, Sally stood up and arched her back, fur standing on end. She looked four times her hefty size. Quickly, Brigid shut off the television. Now the only light on was that of the kitchen. Sally ran to the back door in the kitchen and Brigid swiftly followed and opened the door. Sally disappeared into the black night. Brigid went to her junk drawer and took out a fat bundle of white sage and matches. As she went into the living room, a wobbly Jupiter was

standing up guarding Allie, who slept now under his belly with his four legs posted on the outside of her body.

As Brigid walked in, she saw through her window, the distant beam of two headlights go out. She heard the very slow sound of crumbling gravel on her driveway. Someone who should not be around was driving down her driveway toward her house. She stood very still. Sally had finished running a circle around the house and sat on the rail of the outside porch, ready to work. Jupiter stood his ground. The little bit of hair left from his surgery stood on edge along his body.

"Aunt Brigid-" Allie was waking up and she found herself looking up at Jupiter's chest for he was standing with his two front legs on one side her and the other two legs on her other side. She was safely underneath him.

"Do not say a word." Brigid said in a whisper.

Allie saw her godmother light the bundle of sage and walk around the room muttering something. Then she went to the middle of room, where the coffee table was and made circles in the air with the sage. Smoke rose from the tip in cloudy swirls.

"Hear me, Great One, Mother of the night.

I ask your protection this dark moon night.

Empower my words so they may come to be

Keep all of this family in safety!"

Brigid then closed her eyes and turned around in slow circles, chanting,

"Though you seek this place to harbor thee, this house to you is unseen
Spin around, turn around and you will see this house is not here, but across the
street!" Brigid did this several times, then the slam of a car door was heard. As
the car turned around, the crumbling sound of the gravel began once more. It
faded. Suddenly then was a screech of tires and a bang. The car had crashed
into the telephone pole across the road.

"Aunt-?"

"Shush!"

Brigid quickly raced around the room with the smoking sage and walked
a circle once more only this time, it was in the opposite direction. In just
seconds, she walked a circle and went to the telephone to call emergency.

"An intruder was here, then left suddenly. I think he crashed into the telephone
pole across the road from me." Brigid gave her address and telephone number.

The operator told her the sheriff would be there shortly.

"Allie, Sally wants to come in now." Allie heard Sally scratching at the kitchen
door and as she went to open it, she knew something was wrong.

"What happened? You said you heard a car pull up then turn around and crash
into the telephone pole!"

Small towns like the Manor are good for quick responses from the fire
department and the sheriff and Allie's question was not answered right away.

"You said you heard a car pull up with no lights on then turn around leave your
driveway and then you heard the crash?"

"That's right officer."

"Do you know how lucky you are, m'am?"

"I am sure I am. He had to be up to no good to come here at this hour of the night!" Brigid huffed.

The young state trooper walked further away from Allie and Brigid followed.

"You heard about the prisoner that escaped on the way to prison?"

"Why, no. I didn't. Our dog was seriously injured and had surgery so I was not listening to the news the last few days."

"Well, he was a convicted felon. Murder."

"I would say then we were very lucky!"

"We're going to test him for drugs too. He came up with this stupid story about how your house moved from one side of the street to the other. Seemed he was more upset about that than getting caught!"

"Imagine that! My house moving across the street."

"Well, at least we had a chuckle instead of a tragedy!"

"Thank you again, Officer." Brigid said as she closed the door.

As she turned around there was Allie, waiting.

"How about that. Weren't we lucky that guy ran himself into a pole?"

"Aunt Brigid. You had something to do with that. And Sally too, didn't she? She is never out at night. And Jupiter-"

"Jupiter, as weak as he is, watched over you."

"I saw you with the sage walking circles. You were saying something like poems and then you ran around in a circle again. After that I heard the crash."

"Okay, Allie. Let's have hot chocolate and talk.

Brigid and Allie sat at the little round table in the kitchen. Although mugs of hot chocolate sat before them, they did not drink.

"You wanted to know about witches, remember?"

"Yes, I do"

"Well tonight was one of those times when I had to work a spell."

"A spell?"

"Yes. You see, Jupiter woke up first. Then Sally poofed her fur up, you should have seen her, and ran to the door. Now, this told me for sure that there was danger. Sally is a helper of mine. She helps people like me-"

"You mean witches."

"Yes, she helps witches do their work."

"You mean spells."

"Not everything I do is a spell, Allie. That is the least of it."

"Go on." Allie made up her mind she was finally going to know what her godmother really was. Spells were bad, weren't they? And didn't that man's car crash into the pole?

"At eleven-thirty at night who would drive up to someone's house, turn off their headlights and drive slowly toward the house?"

"Someone bad."

"Exactly. What I did was a protection spell. Sally went out to run a circle around the house so he would not get through. I made one inside so I could cast my spell."

"Did you make him crash the car?"

"Not exactly but this is what I did do. Sally helped me create an illusion. Do you what that is?"

"It's when something is there but, it's not?"

"Yes. Allie, real magic is all in the mind. It is in my mind, your mind and that man's mind, for example. I did not cause the accident. He was running away from the police that were taking him to prison. He was dangerous."

"Prison?" Allie then knew how serious this could have been. What if he had kidnapped them? What he had hurt Jupiter?

"I did not harm him. I made him catchable. Sally and I made him think he made the wrong turn. We made this house invisible to him and made it look like it was across the street. That's when he turned around and crossed the road-

"Right into the telephone post." Allie added.

"My main purpose is for you to be safe. I knew Sally and I could handle ourselves and Jupiter? Well, he was there to protect you. His crashing into the pole was the design of the Great One."

"Who is that?"

"Let's just say it is like someone else's god."

"Like a guardian angel!"

"Yes. Definitely a guardian. I know this has been an exciting night, to say the least but, how about we try to make believe we are not wide awake!"

"Can we put a movie on? How about a boring movie?" Allie asked.

"You know, we watch 'way too many movies but, okay so which boring movie would you want to see?"

"How about a romance?"

"A romance it is!" Brigid agreed as she got up to put a movie into the VCR.

They both lay on the floor with Jupiter who, once again, fell asleep, snoring loudly and soon Allie was too.

Chapter Twenty-Eight

Jupiter continued to grow strong. The porcupine had been rabid. Allie was glad that her godmother always had him and Sally get their shots when they were due. It was Saturday! Allie's mother, Darla arrived early as she had every weekend since Allie began staying with Brigid.

"Oh, no! Jupiter! He looks like he had a really bad time with that porcupine. I'm glad he'll be fine and that he was so brave!" Darla knelt to pet the still pitiful looking dog.

"Oh, Mommy. He is much better! He saw Dr. Bob yesterday and all of his stitches were taken out."

"You told me what had happened, honey, but until I saw him, I could not picture how badly hurt he was. He protected you! I will love him forever for that!"

Darla, Allie and Brigid sat at the table eating toasted bagels with butter and jam. Brigid told Darla what had happened earlier in the week about the would-be intruder and Allie told of how Jupiter stood over her, as weak as he was, to protect her.

"First porcupines that are rabid, now prowlers....."Darla's voice trailed off. Was the country life as safe as she had thought, she wondered? Everyone sat quietly at the table.

"Mom, everything is fine! We were all fine!" Allie sensed Darla's concern and was afraid her mother might change her mind about moving to upstate New York.

"Allie," Brigid interrupted, "Let your mother take all of this in. This is overwhelming for her especially since she was not here. Why don't you take Jupiter for a walk to the pond and back. No further, okay?"

Although she did not feel like leaving the kitchen, she took Jupiter out with her. Sally came into the kitchen and sat by Brigid.

"No, Sally. You know there are only certain times when I need you. This is not one of them." As quickly as Sally had come into the kitchen, she was gone.

"I remember when we were kids and you got Sally, I teased you about her being a familiar, remember?"

"I remember," Brigid said with a smile. Their younger days had been a lot of fun.

"Yes. She was full grown when she found you, wasn't she?"

"Yes, she was. I think about that day a lot. You know, my parents were not in favor of keeping her. I wanted to. They wanted to report her missing to a shelter so that whoever lost her could claim her. I remember my mother holding her and she looked at my dad, then Marie and then me. Suddenly, it was as if they forgot what they were talking about. Shortly after that, it seemed we could just think and it was as if we spoke words."

"I know there were times she gave me the creeps when she would just sit in front of me, purring like she can and staring at me with those orange eyes. Look, Brigid, the rabies thing, well that could have happened in the city. Not the porcupine though. But this escaped prisoner?"

"I've heard of prisoners escaping in the city too."

"But Brigid, we are not alone in the city. We lived in an apartment. There are people all around."

"Darla, I would not even think of saying not to worry. Allie is your child, your baby. You are her mother and, of course, I will stand by whatever you decide. But, you, well, know me and you know I am never alone. I do have Sally after all and then there are those who protect us both."

They sat quietly for a few minutes; neither saying a word. Brigid waited, giving Darla time to sort through her worries. Brigid understood Darla's right to be worried and she, herself, had grown to love Allie very much. Regardless of Darla's decision, she would never lose contact with Allie.

"Look, I don't know a whole lot about what you believe and I think I should have learned more about it with you so, I don't know a whole lot about what you can do. I have always known Sally was strange as well ...because who knows how old she really is. I know you have your place here and it is beautiful and Allie is so happy here."

"You never asked me anything about anything, Darla."

"I never needed to. It never mattered. You have always been my best friend, my daughter's godmother. Whatever you believed in never mattered to me before."

"And now?"

"Are you really that powerful a witch? Are you telling me that everything you did that night, and Sally too, really happened?"

"Yes, Darla. It did. Just as she said it did."

Darla laughed and then asked, "So, are you a good witch or a bad witch and is my 'Dorothy' really not in Kansas anymore?"

"She's not in Brooklyn, if that's what you mean. But, you can call me 'Glenda'."

"You know, I thought you believed in nature and growing flowers and herbs and now I am finding out you are a 'wiz'."

"Darla, you chose not to see. Remember all those concerts that were close to being called off because of rain? Remember me saying they would not be because it would'nt rain until we got home? Don't you remember me saying not to worry because I had spoken to the winds and asked them if we could have good weather for a more hours?"

"Sure. I remember the conversations, Brigid, but I really thought you were just fooling around."

"Exactly. I never held anything back. I always wanted you ask but since you didn't, I didn't do anything more than drop hints."

"I'm sorry Brigid. Here you were, finding a whole new way to look at and master life and you felt you could never share all of this with me. If I had been more aware then, maybe I wouldn't so confused now."

"What are you afraid of, Darla? I am the same me I was all along."

Darla did not answer right away. She thought a minute and said,

"I think I am afraid of you and your power. Do you ever hurt people? I mean look what you are able to do that night with that prisoner!"

"What you really want to know is if Allie is safe with someone like me."

"I have to think. I feel all mixed up! Brigid, you know how much I love her! You know how much I love you!"

"Darla, you don't have to feel guilty for being a mother. Take the weekend, enjoy your daughter and we'll talk some more later or tomorrow."

Darla dabbed her eyes with a tissue. The last thing she wanted to do was hurt her friend.

"My feelings are truly not hurt, Darla. Life is filled with choices. It is not up to me to decide anything other my own choices."

"The truth is, Brigid, I don't know what you do or how you do what do you or who you pray to. I only know that Allie has been really happy and that you kept her safe when there was danger. That is all that matters to me. I cannot think of anyone else who could have protected her like you did."

"Mommy, Aunt Brigid! Jupiter is starting to run again! He ran back to the back of the house, back where the skunks live and then ran back to me."

"Oh let's hope he doesn't decide to tangle with a skunk! I would hate to have to give him a bath right now. What do you say we play it safe and keep him on the line until the next vet appointment? Then, he can run as much as he wants."

Brigid said.

"I think that's a good idea, Aunt Brigid."

"Allie talks about you all the time, Brigid. She told me what your pentacle means and the crafts you are teaching her. She will have hobbies for life. I think when

I'm here, I want to learn more about you and your beliefs. They are certainly helping Allie and that is all that matters."

"Have you spoken with the rehab center about Sam?" Brigid's tone was serious

"Yes. In fact I spoke with Sam this week. Finally."

"How is he?"

"Well, from what his counselors tell me he is very upset about everything that happened and that he is especially worried about Allie. He also wants to see her."

"This is all good, right?"

"They say everyone gets upset about being so restricted and then they remember how badly they behaved. They said the guilt might come and go as he struggles with accepting his illness. That's normal after detoxing. They also said it does not mean a person is cured. His drinking problem will be life long."

Darla's voice sounded very tired.

"What did they say about his seeing Allie?"

"They would like them to see each other tomorrow for about an hour."

"Won't that be hard for you? Did he sound angry with you?"

"He just sounded so sad, Brigid. So sad."

"Everything has been sad but I keep praying for a happy solution for everyone.

Any possible places for you to look at?

"No, I haven't found a place yet that's in and around this town but, I will have everything in storage this week."

"Look regardless of finding any places to look at here, pack the few things you need for yourself and stay here with Allie and me. It'll easier for you to find a place if you are up here all the time and you can take Allie to a meeting beginning next week. I think we can still wear each other's clothes! How about that! Borrow anything of mine you like, okay?"

"Oh, Brigid! What would I have done without you?"

"You would have done what needed to be done. You did it before when you went back to school and you would have done it again. So, next weekend we will celebrate. You can tell Allie the great news."

"I just realized something."

"Oh, what's that?"

"You are definitely a good witch!"

Allie and her mother had driven about an hour on the way to visit Sam.

"Allie, next weekend I am coming up to stay with Aunt Brigid too."

"Really? Mommy that's great! We will all be together and you and me can take walks all the time!"

"We will have to share your bedroom. Is that okay?"

"Oh, that will great! Like a pajama party every night! Oh, and Mommy-"

"Yes, hon."

"You will be sharing the bed with me and Jupiter."

"Well, of course. Now how could I have not realized that?" Darla laughed.

But Darla was worried about what the rehab center would be like. She had passed some as she went back and forth in the city and frankly, the people looked like a lost and sad lot. Her heart had always ached for them long before she came to know the disease herself. She prayed that Allie would not get upset and that Sam might be more like his usual self.

"Here we are, honey," Darla said with relief.

As they pulled into the driveway, they saw what looked like a fancy hotel. The front lawn was huge and well kept. The entrance was nicely decorated with hanging plants and flowers. Allie also noticed a basketball court and a swimming pool. The people were all nicely dressed and clean. She could not tell the counselors from the people there for help. Someone was playing a guitar in the distance.

"Mrs. Corey?"

"Yes.". Darla turned and extended a hand to a tall, tan Hispanic man dressed in white jeans and white shirt.

"I'm Johnny, Sam's counselor. And," shaking the hand Allie offered him, "You must be Allie. Sam talks about you all the time!"

"He does?"

"Oh, yes! It's 'My Allie can do this and she gets the best grades.' He loves you very much."

"I am glad he still loves me and didn't forget me."

"No," Johnny said as he stood up, "He didn't forget you but, do me a favor.

When you talk to him, tell him how you feel. If you miss how he used to be, tell him. Be honest with him. He needs to know."

"I don't want to make him feel bad," Allie replied.

"He needs to feel a little bad so he will want to get better. Getting better means he won't feel bad anymore. But, he is an adult and needs to know he hurt you.

Do you know why?"

"Not really."

"Because you deserve an apology and he needs to apologize to you. That way everything evens out."

"It sounds almost like something my Aunt Brigid would say."

Johnny flashed a white smile then waved to someone on the first step of the building. It was Sam.

Chapter Twenty Nine

"You stay here, Mrs. Corey. I will walk him over and then he can talk with Allie for an hour. They will not be alone. I will stand far enough away that they can talk privately but I will be nearby in case Sam needs support."

"Thank you Johnny." Darla turned to Allie.

"You're seeing your Dad!" She fixed the bow on her ponytail even though it was fine.

"Aunt Brigid said I was a good wisher! She said I was! She was right, I am!"

Sam stood with Johnny about twenty feet away. He was clean and wore blue cotton slacks and shirt. As he went down on his knees and stretched out both of his arms, Johnny walked out of hearing distance. Sam was crying. Darla held her sobs in as Allie ran into her father's arms. Allie felt safe in her father's arms. He smelled so nice. He was so different from the last time.

"Daddy!"

"How's my little cupcake?"

"Daddy! I am so happy to see you! I missed you!"

"Oh, Cupcake, I missed you so much! I'm so sorry about what happened!"

"Me too, Daddy." Standing up, Sam took her hand and led Allie over to a bench where they both sat down.

"I heard you are living upstate now."

'Yes, but I am staying with Aunt Brigid until we are all settled in and Mommy will move in next weekend. It will be easier for her to look for a place if she stays up here too!'

"Will you live up here, Daddy?" Allie asked hopefully.

"That depends on your mother." Sam said quietly.

"How is that?"

"Well. She left me, you know."

"Yes." Allie said quietly, feeling her stomach begin to tighten up in that familiar way.

"She made me leave and then called the police on me and they put me in here!"

Allie sat quietly. The happiness she felt, especially seeing him, was quickly slipping away. This was not a happy feeling. That quickly faded. This was like she used to feel and she did not like those mixed up feelings.

"Your mother does not want us to be together, Allie. It's her fault I'm here." He folded his hands together in his lap and looked down.

"Are you very sad, Daddy?" Allie asked.

"Yes. I am."

After a few moments, Allie asked, "What are you sad about, Daddy?"

"I'm sad that I am in this place. I'm sad I can't be with you without someone watching. I'm sad your mother took you away from me and I'm sad you're

going to live upstate while I don't know where I am going to live. Your mother hasn't been nice to me, Allie."

Allie took a deep breath. As she did, she thought about all the talks she and Brigid had. Allie took another deep breath and said, "Daddy. You are not sad about the right things."

"What do you mean?" Sam picked up his head in surprise.

"The things you should be sad about are you having an illness that made you like somebody else. It made you somebody that made Mommy sad and angry. It made you somebody that made me sad. A lot. I am happy here and having a wonderful time. You should be sad that your illness made Mommy do the things she had to do. This made us both sad too. "Cupcake-"

"Daddy, do you know how long it has been since you called me that? It always made me happy when you called me 'Cupcake'. Today was the second time in about a year. That made me sad, Daddy."

The knot in her stomach was gone and suddenly, Sam began to cry. He pulled Allie to his arms and cried as if he were the child. Allie put her arms around his neck and hugged him as hard as she could, whispering into his ear, "I love you, Daddy. I always will. Please make yourself better. Please." She pleaded.

Sam unwrapped Allie's arms from around his neck and looked into her eyes. He saw love and at the same time, he saw wisdom. Embarrassed, he wiped his eyes on his shirtsleeves. As he did, he realized he had been fooling

himself but he could not fool Allie. What kind of father had he become that he would try to use my daughter against her mother, he thought. He knew everything Allie said was the truth. He was upset about all the wrong things. He was still blaming everyone except himself.

"Allie, you are so right, my darling. About everything. It's me. You helped me really see that. I promise I will do everything I can to get well so you can be proud of me again. I promise!"

"Daddy, you don't have to promise. I know that your illness is hard to fight. Just try."

"Alright, Allie. I promise to try. Can I still call you Cupcake?"

"Yeah." Allie smiled as she gave her father a hug and kiss. "You can still call me cupcake. I will always love you, Daddy."

As Allie and Darla drove away, Allie strained and watched her father wave goodbye from the rear view mirror. She waved back through the open window until he was out of sight. When Johnny came to tell them the hour was up, her father seemed tired but not upset anymore. Johnny said she could see him next weekend again if he had a good week.

"How did your visit go, Allie?" Darla had seen Sam wiping his eyes on his sleeves.

"I guess it was okay. He was very sad though at first."

"Sad?"

"Yes. At first he said he was sad because everything was of what you did."

Allie did not notice her mother gripping the steering wheel until her knuckles were pale. "How dare he put the blame on me!" Darla thought angrily. "Do you think everything is my fault, Allie?"

Allie would never know the power she held at that moment. Allie did not know her mother could be crushed by one little word. What if Allie said, "Yes"? Darla held her breath.

"No. I don't and I told him. I told him he was sad about the wrong things and that he should be sad about what happened because of his illness. I also told him that he should not be sad but happy because I am happy now."

"What did he say when you told him that, Allie?"

"He cried a while." Allie said as she lowered her head.

"I am so sorry about that, Allie."

"It's okay Mom. Grownups can cry sometimes too, don't you think?"

"Yes, I do. I think that sometimes a good cry is good for everyone."

"Mommy, where will Daddy live after he leaves?"

"I don't know. I think the program will help him get a place and then he will go for therapy as an outpatient. An out patient is someone who still needs help but comes into the program for visits instead of living there like he is now."

"He seemed worried about that. Exactly where would they get him a place?"

"I imagine wherever he wants."

"So, if he wanted to stay here, he could?"

"I'm sure he could Allie. I know he would want to be near you. You would like that"

"I would like anything that will let me see him. Would you mind, Mommy?"

"I wouldn't mind, Allie. Just remember that for a while, you'll have to have someone with you when you visit or see him."

"Why is that, Mommy?"

"I guess it's to help him remember how sad he is when he doesn't see you and that he can't just pick you up and have an adventure with you. I also want it that way Allie. For now, I have to be sure that -"

"He's getting better. I know Mommy."

Chapter Thirty

"Yes, Allie. I'll be moving in with Aunt Brigid too next weekend!"

"Oh, I can't wait!"

It was Sunday. Brigid placed the last pancake on the serving tray for breakfast. Jupiter sat next to her, hoping for something to fall off the plate, as usual. Disappointed that nothing did, he slowly walked to the living room and lay on his rug. As Brigid walked over to the table, Allie tried to whisper, "You know Aunt Brigid has a way with...she...well, she can heal...she prays.....she lights candles...." Allie simply could not find the words.

"Your mother knows all about me, Allie", Brigid said as she sat at the table. Allie blushed.

"I did not mean to say anything bad about you, Aunt Brigid."

"And, you didn't. Your mother knows, you know and now we shall have a lot of fun together when she comes up for good next weekend. You can both take your time looking for the perfect place. Not far from here, of course!"

"When you come back next week, Jupiter will have all of his stitches out, Mommy!"

"And it will be good to see him without them! His fur will grow back quickly. I'm sure he'll be back to his handsome self in no time. And, we can all sleep in the bed!" Darla laughed.

"You mean you didn't like sleeping on the floor with Allie and Jupiter?" Brigid teased.

"I didn't mind it. After all, I wanted Jupiter to get used me sleeping with him and Allie. But, my back! My back doesn't seem to like the floor anymore."

"You mean you are getting old?"

"Brigid! Don't you dare say that! We are the same age. Which reminds me, how come you look so young? You don't even have a laugh line yet!"

"I haven't had the stress you have had. When you come next week, I will make a jar of my special face cream for you. How about that?"

"As long as it doesn't have eye of frog, I will used it."

"Mommy! Aunt Brigid is not that kind of witch!"

Darla left after breakfast and Brigid and Allie waved goodbye as she drove away back to Brooklyn. Overhead, gray clouds were drifting in.

"It looks like it's going to rain again." Allie said, pointing up to the clouds.

"I think you're right. Should we check the weather or be surprised?"

"Let's be surprised, Aunt Brigid. The last time, it was fun running out to get the laundry and getting all wet."

"Alright but, if it rains before my clothes are dry, *YOU* will get the laundry, deal?"

"Deal."

Allie lay on the floor with Jupiter on his rug and Sally slept atop Brigid's stomach on the sofa. It was one of those chilly, cool days that made comforters feel so cozy you wanted to just pull them over you head and take a long snooze. "BOOOOOM! THRASH! CRASH! CRACK!" Brigid woke with such a start, she rolled off the sofa. Sally stood hissing, her long, black fur standing on end as

if starched. Jupiter jumped up and "Woofed!" while Allie's head rolled off his back and onto his rug.

"Wow, Aunt Brigid! Wha-what was that?"

"The storm you predicted made a sudden appearance. I'll get the laundry."

"I have to get the laundry! A deal is a deal!" Allie jumped up, ready to get the clothes from the line.

"No, Allie. Lightning was not part of the deal. I will get the laundry and, if you don't mind, you can get the basket and bring it to the door. Then, we'll put them in the dryer downstairs.

As Allie opened the door to take the wet clothes from her godmother she dropped them in the basket. She felt a cold wind gust chilling rain into the doorway and on her. In between the armloads of clothes handed to her, Allie closed the door just keeping it barely open. She peeked through the crack and saw her Aunt Brigid fighting with the billowing sheets in the wind. Her hair was all wet and curling down her face and neck. She looked very wild in the rainy wind. As she grabbed sheets and clothes, Allie saw her laughing and yelling, "Weeeee!" She was having a wonderful time. She was having such a wonderful time, Allie thought of running out too. However, it was dark now. That cloud overhead was nearly the color of coal. Amidst the dark, Allie saw a lightning bolt part the blackness and decided against running out in the storm. She was frightened.

"Aunt Brigid! Come inside!"

"What?" Brigid called back but the thunder continued to drum and the lightning continued to divide the clouds. Allie tried to pick up the laundry basket but it was too heavy for her so, she tipped it over, letting the wet clothes fall onto the floor. Although she was afraid, she took a deep breath and grabbing the basket, opened the door and ran to Brigid, slamming the door behind her.

"Aunt Brigid!" Allie called loudly but Brigid could not hear her above the sound of the pounding storm.

"Allie! What are you doing out here?" Her godmother did not sound pleased.

"Put the rest of the clothes in here, Aunt Brigid and we can both go inside. I'm scared and I don't want you to get hit by lightning!"

"You brave, brave girl!" Brigid said as she quickly gathered the rest of the clothes, rolled them carelessly and dropped them in the basket.

"Aunt Brigid, I put the clothes you had in the basket on the floor. I'm sorry," Allie yelled, "I wanted to get out to help you fast. I hope you're not mad?"

"Mad? Allie, I have the bravest goddaughter in the world! You came out in a storm you were afraid of to help me!"

"Really?" Allie huffed loudly.

"Being brave is doing something even when you are afraid." Brigid shouted as she opened the kitchen door. They both stepped over the laundry and Allie closed the kitchen door. It was suddenly quiet. So quiet, it felt as if Allie were wearing her earplugs when she went swimming.

"Phew! Let me get all this laundry downstairs and then we will have some hot chocolate. How about pizza for dinner? Can you take out the pizza pan and the cheese in the refrigerator. In the bottom cabinet next to the sink, I have a jar of prepared sauce we can use."

Brigid pulled out a stepladder, climbed up to a cabinet over the sink and pulled out a box of pizza dough mix.

"But first, you have to dry off. Now run upstairs and dry off. Put on some warm, dry clothes."

"Pizza!" Allie repeated as she ran up the stairs.

Brigid stepped down from the stepladder with the box in her hand and put it on the counter. She brought the laundry basket down to the basement and put the wet clothes into the dryer. Then she went upstairs to dry off and change into dry clothing also. Allie and her godmother met each other in the hallway on their way downstairs to the kitchen. Once in the kitchen, Brigid said, ""Now, we make pizza!"

"Allie, wash your hands and get ready to make fresh pizza dough!"

"Oh, wow!" She lathered her hands then rinsed them off quickly. She turned toward the table and saw the pizza pan, measuring spoons and a measuring cup.

"Do you know how to follow a recipe, Allie? Oops. Of course you do." Brigid answered her own question in response to the slight roll of Allie's eyes and her

sigh. As Allie carefully read the instructions, Brigid signaled to Jupiter to come to the kitchen and then to the door.

"Come on, Jupiter. Make it fast!" She kept the door open a little to watch him walk around the big Maple tree to do his business. She was glad the rain had eased to a drizzle but from the looks of the sky, more heavy rain might come in a while. She also knew there was going to be a bigger storm that night. The chill outside was getting bitter. Jupiter returned to the door within minutes. He seemed grateful to be in from the cold. After all, he did not have as much fur as usual.

"Hey, Allie," Brigid laughed as she wiped Jupiter with an old towel.

"Jupiter is hardly wet! When it rains, he does his stuff under that big Maple outside the door. There are so many leaves, he hardly gets wet! Yes, Jupiter and I are very grateful for that tree." Brigid cooed, "You are a very smart dog!"

By the time Brigid had finished drying Jupiter off, Allie had spread the dough she had prepared on the pizza pan. Brigid opened the can of jarred sauce for her to pour and opened the brick of cheese that would top the pie and shredded it. Allie spread it on the pie and when it was loaded with cheese, Brigid turned the oven on and they both waited.

"How about salad, Allie?" Brigid said, as she opened the refrigerator door.

"I just want pizza. Can we eat in the living room? Later, can we have some popcorn?"

"Well, I guess we will just have to declare tonight eat what you want night and tomorrow is Jupiter-gets-his-stitches-out day!"

"Yeah! What time do we bring him?"

Brigid slid the pizza pan into the oven. "We have a 4 o'clock appointment." Brigid whispered and Allie winked. She knew that they couldn't let Jupiter think he was going to the vet tomorrow. They ate the pizza and talked about her new school, the storms and what movies to watch.

"When your mom comes up next weekend, she can take you to school and register you."

"Does school start in August up here?"

"No. But, I will let you in on a secret. The teachers and staff are at work a week early to get things ready. School starts right after Labor Day. Just like in the city."

"Oh, good! I want to help you with your business some more before school starts."

"Say, I have an idea. Why don't we leave early so you can see the school on the way to you-know-where."

"Is it a big school, like in Brooklyn?"

"I think I'll wait and let you see for yourself. I will tell you it's a red building."

"A red building?" The only schools she ever saw were in the city and they were all the same color, like sand.

"You know, Allie. You have become a good little worker. If you want you can help me on a Saturday or Sunday for a few hours and I'll pay you."

"Really? I'm that good a worker?"

"Yes, you are."

"We'll leave the dishes for now. Allie, I still hear thunder. How about turning off the lights? I'll light candles. Hopefully if everyone is saving on electricity so we don't have a power blackout."

"A blackout?"

"Yes. We can get strong winds up here. Dead trees and pine trees can be blown down. Sometimes they land on the power lines or sometimes the power poles themselves are too old and fall down. Other times, people drain what power we have and then we have to kind of borrow from other power plants and that's what can cause problems."

"Gee, you're smart!" Allie said even if she did not understand the borrowing power part. Aunt Brigid was just like her mom and dad. They always knew the answer to any question she asked.

Chapter Thirty-One

Brigid and Allie left for Jupiter's appointment a couple of hours early. It was clear that Jupiter was not happy. He only went for car rides when he went to Dr. Bob's clinic. He lay on the back seat of the truck as if sulking.

"He definitely knows where he is going!" Brigid laughed.

"Dogs are smart, huh?"

"And cats, skunks and any animal in its own way. They know what they need to do and when. Remember the movie about the Native Americans we saw last week? The medicine man always let animals guide him. Of course, he had spent his whole life studying them."

"I loved that movie. Do people really know what an animal is trying to tell them?"

"More than you would think. I do, for example."

"You do?"

"Of course. When I see an eagle, it is usually because I allowed myself to become wrapped up in everyday things or worries. The eagle reminds me to take time to ask for help so that I do not lose myself in my worries or deadlines."

"Wow! How do you know that?"

"To Native Americans, eagles represent one of the highest and closest spirits to Creator because they can fly so high. They say that if you are worthy, they will bring your prayers up to Creator personally. Oh, here it is!"

Brigid drove into town and made a right turn, drove past the post office and then into the parking area for the market and the post office. She put Jupiter on a leash and lifted him down from the truck. He looked around, confused. This was not Dr. Bob's office. They walked out of the driveway and across Main Street. They stopped at the gray stone bridge that was over a wide stream. On either side, the wall continued for about a block on either side.

"Where's the school?" Allie asked

Brigid pointed to a two story red building .

"This is it."

"It's, it's so...small!" Allie was surprised. This was the smallest school she had ever seen.

"Oh, it seems Jupiter is really feeling good. He's happy it not the vet's office and he is beginning to pull!"

Allie stood taking in the school what really caught her eye was the clock tower on the building. She turned around to look at the school building and saw that it had a clock tower.

"I would have thought this was a church, not a school."

"The classes are small too. You will love this school. I mean I hope you will.

Around back there is another building for the middle and high school."

"You said a school bus will pick me up?"

"Yes, I did. It will be a beautiful ride to school too. You will see valleys and more mountains on your way to school everyday. And, when there is a heavy snow, schools close right away. Sometimes for days."

"Really? School never closes in the city."

"Allie, there is one catch though."

"I knew it. What's the catch?"

"If school is closed too many days in the winter, the days are made up at the end of the school year."

"I guess you can't have it all." Allie said with a sigh.

They went back to the truck to make Jupiter's appointment on time.

"Oh, look Aunt Brigid! Jupiter is sitting up and looking out the window!"

"That's because he thinks there is no vet visit. Wait until we get there. He'll be another dog completely."

After Jupiter had gotten hurt, Allie was too worried about him to notice the scenery. In the distance there were high mountains appearing in different shades of purple, and brown and green. There were many emerald green pine trees. The other trees that grew between them were of varying colors. They were gray, purple and red leafed. As the wind blew, the branches swayed like feather plumes and their colors seemed to deepen as clouds passed overhead. The countryside was filled with trees and valleys. Below, the valley looked like a picture, as if someone painted them. Allie also noticed that the leaves on some of the trees were beginning to change from dark green to dark orange and

yellow. Allie knew she would be happy here. So this was country, she thought and decided she liked it a lot. Allie was drawn away from the view by the stopping of the truck. They were at Dr. bob's.

"Here we are. Turn around and look at Jupiter! He is giving me the dirtiest looks!"

Allie turned to look at him in the back seat. He was, indeed, giving her godmother a very 'dirty' look which made her laugh. Before Jupiter, Allie would never have thought dogs could make expressions with their faces or give dirty looks!

"I'm going to have to drag him, I'm afraid. After his last visit, he may not want to go in at all."

He didn't. Brigid tugged and tugged on his collar commanding "Come, Jupiter" but acted as if he did not hear a word.

"Oh, no you don't, Jupiter. You are going in even if I have to carry you!"

"Isn't he heavy, Aunt Brigid?"

"Yes, a bit but I am more determined than he is!"

Brigid bent down on her knees until she was at Jupiter's eye level. Putting one arm around his chest and the other under his tail she gave a groan and an "Umph!" and lifted him off the backseat. She was bending slightly backwards with the weight and asked Allie to run ahead and open the door. Huffing and grunting, Brigid carried Jupiter into Dr. Bob's where she gently lowered him to the floor.

"Jupiter, you got your lift for the day. It's the only one you get. You will walk back to the truck when we are finished." Brigid scratched his bald head.

"What if he won't walk?"

"He will. He will want to get away from here as soon as possible."

When Dr. Bob came into the waiting room, he looked in his Jupiter's eyes and checked the stitches.

"I told you I do a good stitch. Now, let's bring inside get him up on the table and I'll take them out. Have you ever seen stitches removed before, Allie?" He asked.

"Will it hurt?"

"No. All the hurting is gone now."

"Then," Allie said bravely, "I'll stay for Jupiter's sake."

She watched as he took long thin tweezers to lift up a stitch. Then he slipped a narrow pair of scissors underneath it and cut the stitch. He tugged very gently with the tweezers and the cut stitch just fell out. It took a long time not because it was hard to do, it wasn't. It took a long time because there were so many stitches. As each stitch was cut free and removed, Allie saw the skin unfold and as it did, she saw more stitches.

"Will those stitches have to come out too?" She asked.

"No, Allie. They will dissolve over a period of weeks as the skin heals. Brigid, you know he'll get very itchy where he has those stitches. Put some of that homemade ointment you make on the stitches and that will be fine. By the way,

I want to order another case from you. My people are so happy it, they are asking for more!"

"Sure thing. I can make you a case by next week, is that okay?"

"Whenever you can!"

He lifted Jupiter and put him on the floor. Jupiter began wagging his tail and spun in circles, his great nails clacking on the floor. If the door to the examining room had been opened, he would have galloped through and out the office.

"Just finish the antibiotics. There is no more swelling. He is doing great! Not that I am surprised." And he gave Brigid a knowing wink.

As Brigid waited for the bill, Allie whispered to her godmother, "It sounded like he 'knows'."

"He does. Some people do know." Brigid said as she kept pulling Jupiter in check as he pulled toward the door to leave.

They walked to the truck and when Brigid opened the back door, Jupiter jumped onto the backseat as if nothing had ever happened to him.

"Wow! That's much better, Jupiter. Now, shall we pick up Chinese food on the way home to celebrate Jupiter?"

"You sure are right when you say country is modern! I didn't think you had Chinese places all the way up here."

They went back to Livingston Manor where there was a Chinese take-out place on Main Street. The truck soon smelled of onions, garlic, and Chinese

saucers. Allie could not wait to get back. The smell was making her more hungry.

"Aunt Brigid, do you tell everyone that you're a witch?"

"Remember, I wear my pentacle proudly just like anyone else wears a medal of their faith. People who recognize it, know. Others will react in ignorance, which you already know. Just as no one else has to defend their religion, I choose not to have to defend what I believe. Arguing is not good for the soul. Besides the people that matter do not judge whether they understand or not. Other witches recognize the pentacle. Other people usually respect it. I have no need to make announcements. Does anyone else?"

"Allie, and this is very important, when you go to school don't mention any of this or your interest in it. Many of the children go to Sunday services and might feel afraid because of what they are taught and I do not want you to get involved with discussing religion, okay? I just want you to make friends. It will probably not come up anyway because it's not necessary. Besides there is a wise saying that goes 'Never discuss religion and politics'. Like all things, in time you will know who you can talk to about things and who you cannot."

"But, it's not right, Aunt Brigid! You do so much good!"

"I know but many people of all religions do a lot of good too. We shouldn't forget that. Everyone isn't like that lady in the video store either. Like Dr. Bob. But why risk your peace of mind at your age? Sometimes there is a price for having a regular life outside of the home. Sometimes that price is simple silence

but, I tell you what, when Halloween comes around, I can help you write a history report on the olde ways, so the kids can learn where the customs come from, okay? That can be your part in all of this, okay? You don't need to do anything other than enjoy your new home and school, okay?""

"Okay."

"I am very impressed." Her godmother said. "You used those chopsticks like a pro!"

"I have a friend in Brooklyn, Mei Li. She taught me how to use them."

"That's the wonderful thing about the city. There are so many different cultures. I'm am afraid that's the one thing you will not find much of up. But, when you visit your grandparents you'll get to see your Brooklyn friends too. Maybe they could come up to visit."

"I'll have so much to tell them!"

As they cleared off the table, Brigid glanced at the clock.

"My Goddess! It's nine o'clock already! I think you better get used to going to bed a little early. After all, school is the week after next."

"No movies tonight?"

"No movies. Those movies were to keep us entertained while Jupiter had to sleep downstairs. Remember?"

"Yes! And now he can sleep with me in the bed again!"

"And rumble up and down the stairs!" Her godmother laughed.

"Are you going to bed too, Aunt Brigid?"

"Not right away but I would like to. I have to check on orders tonight. I'm a little behind on my orders. Tomorrow if you want, you can help me get them ready so, for now, up you go. Take a shower, change into your pajamas and your bed will be turned down by the time you get there."

Allie passed Sally on her little table and almost didn't notice her. She had a way of blending in with the dimly lit hallway. She took a few steps back and petted her on the head. The huge cat opened her eyes and yawned. Her teeth and fangs were chalk white against the blackness of her fur. She looked like a panther, which in a way, Allie thought was cute.

"I don't think I ever thanked you for your help last week, Sally. I was worried about Jupiter. I'm sorry. I hope you understand. So I want to say thank you now." And she gave Sally a gentle hug, curling her arms around of her plump body. Sally opened then closed her eyes and thought, "You're welcome, chidling."

The warm water felt good on her skin. As she stood on the long, rubber safety mat in the bathtub, she thought about Jupiter and was happy. He was fine. She couldn't wait to jump in bed. She would have his pillow all ready for him too. After her shower, she put on her pajamas, brushed her teeth and walked past Sally once more, letting her hand slide along her soft, furry back. The bed was turned down and as Brigid plumped the pillows Allie found herself eager to get into that wonderful bed again. It had been over week since Jupiter got hurt. She was sure Jupiter couldn't wait to get in bed either.

Allie felt herself swallowed up by the wonderful mattress. She would have to tell her mother to get feather mattresses and pillows. Once snuggled in, she called, "Jupiter!" once. One call was all it took for the familiar rumble up the stairs to make its way into the bedroom. The bed shook as Jupiter jumped onto the bed and plopped down, next to Allie, head on his pillow, as if nothing had happened. Before heading downstairs to her workspace to check orders, Brigid quietly went to the window and looked out. Allie was really tired and began to doze off as she petted his head. The last thing she thought she heard was, "Allie, it's snowing."

Chapter Thirty-Two

Allie awoke the next morning to the smell of something like burning leaves only richer, darker and hotter. She breathed it in slowly. As usual, Jupiter was already gone and probably downstairs with Brigid. Allie uncurled her blankets and stepped onto the rug by the side of her bed. Putting on her robe, she breathed in once more. She felt heat in the house but she could not remember heat having a smell. She said good morning to Sally and wondered if that cat ever moved other than in times of danger and walked into the bathroom where she quickly washed her face and brushed her teeth. She knew she did not brush as well as she should have but the smell of bacon was too good! As she went down the stairs, the warmth in the house felt stronger. She walked toward the kitchen, and noticed that the fireplace, where she and Jupiter had spent so many nights on his rug, was ablaze with flames. They flicked and licked at the blackened bricks within the hearth. She had never seen a fireplace with logs really burning inside of it. She had only seen them on television, in movies.

"It snowed last night. We had an odd summer but, we sometimes get a dusting even before summer is over. It's almost September and up here, temperatures will drop fast soon. The Manor's weather is different than anywhere else to begin with but then, you've learned that already. Even though it snowed we might be the only place that got snow while other places got nothing at all. But look outside."

Allie went to the door wondering what so special about snow. She had seen snow before. Brooklyn gets snow. She opened the door and gasped. Brooklyn did not get snow like this! There was a light wind tossing the fresh snow around. In the sunlight, the snow flurries shone like rainbow glitter and sparkled like diamond dust on the ground as it fell. The trees looked like glass! No, like the sparkling, expensive crystal statues you see in department stores. She had never seen snow like this before. Country snow.

"Well, what do you think?"

"The snow looks like glitter. It is all so white and shiny-"

"Like a Faery land?"

"Yes. I think if there were faeries, they'd want to live here and that would make you my faery godmother!"

Allie thought a moment about her godmother and about faeries then asked, "Aunt Brigid, are there really faeries?"

"Well, I am surprised you didn't noticed the milk and cookies I leave for them every night."

"No! Do you? Where?"

"On the other side of the pond. We'll walk back there later, if you wish."

After breakfast Brigid, Jupiter and Allie went out for a walk. Allie squirmed against the wind breaker jacker, and gloves Brigid made her put on.

"But, the sun is shining now, Aunt Brigid! It can't be that cold!" Allie protested.

She was feeling a little too warm.

"We're having a cold snap that warm up soon but this is the first snow and I don't want you to catch a cold. Besides, isn't it easier to take off extra clothes and open a jacket than be cold and have to come inside right away?"

Allie didn't say anything more. When she stepped out on the porch the crisp bite of the morning air stung her nose. She knew it wasn't this cold in Brooklyn. When she stepped off the shelter of the porch, the cold wind hit her face like a slap. She pulled her collar up.

As they walked, the sun shone more strongly and the trees that looked like glass earlier in the day were starting to thaw, ice melting in drops to the earth. The dark, moss green color of the pine trees sparkled as the ice ice began to melt off the branches. The melting snow made a crunchy sound beneath their feet.

"You'll love winter up here, Allie. There's sledding, ice skating and building snowmen!"

After a while, it began to feel warmer and Allie unzipped her jacket and stuffed her gloves into her pockets. Even though they walked in silence, Allie daydreamed of sledding. She had never done that before. Suddenly, she couldn't wait for winter. She smiled to herself the whole walk and throughout the day as she thought about a country winter.

Chapter Thirty-Three

The next week school was very busy for Allie. She was able to see her father, Sam, every weekend now. He was getting stronger and grew with determination. Accepting his illness, he was working hard to heal himself of this addiction. Allie felt hope. Knowing her father working hard to get better, she was able to enjoy getting ready for school. She and Brigid went to a beautiful mall with her Aunt Brigid and her mother. It was in a town called Middletown. They shopped, ate and even went to a movie there. Jupiter's fur began to grow back and Darla began to cuddle up to Jupiter in the bed too. Of course, Sally was still Sally. She seemed always asleep but was really always watching. The evening before the start of school, a thunderstorm was suddenly upon them. Allie, her mother and her godmother sat at the kitchen table listening to the thunderous drumming and dancing of rain on the roof. They all gave each a look and ran to the kitchen door. Allie was the first one there and opened it. The three of them ran out onto the lawn. They clasped hands and danced in a circle laughing and giggling in the rain as if they were all children.

Up above and beyond the clouds a blue bird flew. Eyesight sharp it spied the three dancing in the rain on the lawn. Their joy was strong, like a wind, and lifted upward, higher and higher to who was once Baby Blue. And so it was, on this night of pure glee and joy, that Big Blue carried this message of joy up to Creator so that joy would always be with them. This was his gift to them for being there for him when he needed them the most.

****The Beginning****