

Through Time & Magic

An
Irish Adventure



Story & Artwork
by
Anne Tipper

Four children wake up one morning to find themselves back in time and in another country: Ireland. In order for the magic to transport them home, they must embark on an epic journey. With the help of the Wolfhound and Irish faeries, the four friends discover the magic of Ireland and within themselves.

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Story & Illustrations
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Anne Tipper

Celtic
Life & Heritage Foundation

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This is a work of fiction occurring in a real place. The place actually exists. The characters do not exist, although some of the people they learn about did exist while others have been relegated to legend. Any resemblance of the characters in the story to actual persons living or dead are entirely coincidental and hopefully flattering.

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Acknowledgments

The fruition of an idea looks very different then the seed from which it came. *Through Time and Magic* started as an education module to cover the geology/geography and flora/fauna of Ireland. I could not get into it. I was bored and I knew I would never capture my audience if I couldn't get interested enough to create it. What would make it fun?

Ireland has a history of storytelling that dates back thousands of years. The seanchaí (storyteller in Gaelic) of old taught through stories, advised, was very learned in history, politics and human interest. What started out as a boring list of "stuff" that needed to be taught, transformed into a magical story that had help along the way.

Much thanks to my fellow board member, Sue Malone, for reading, brainstorming, creatively engaging and suffering through my first attempts at making this learning fun. For her advice on the artwork and "editing" the art when I reached the limit of my abilities.

Thank you to our readers, both young and young at heart, that helped shape the final story: Nevaeh Tidwell, Lily Christensen, Ryan Tipper, Kelly Pelayo, and Lou Albrecht.

Thank you to Lindsay Christensen who ensured the i's were dotted, the T's crossed, and the commas were in the right place.

And last, thank you to all those who will read *Through Time and Magic* and keep the magic of Ireland alive.

Table of Contents

Day Zero - Winter Vacation Blues	1
Day One – Beltany Stone Circle.....	4
Day Two – The Burren.....	13
Day Three – The Southwest	19
Day Four – The River Shannon	25
Day Five – Back in Time.....	37
Day Six - Wicklow	44
Day Seven – Lough Neagh.....	53
Day Eight – Skellig Michael	66
Day Nine – Beach Day	74
Day Ten – Dunlewy Lough.....	79
Day Eleven – Earth Origins	85
Day Twelve – Giants Causeway.....	87
Day Thirteen – Beltany Stone Circle.....	92
Day Fourteen – Home Again	98
Epilogue.....	100

Day Zero - Winter Vacation Blues

Jane and Susan were at the park in their neighborhood. This was their last day to hang out before school started again.

“What a boring winter vacation!”

The two girls looked up to see who had spoken. Their friend Robert walked up to them and sat down. Jane and Susan agreed. Nothing fun had happened over winter break.

“Where is James?” Susan asked Robert.

“He should be here any moment.”

The four fifth graders had been friends since kindergarten. Their families had moved into the neighborhood around the same time. They were all so different, but somehow had become fast friends. Robert was all about sports and adventure. He was always the first to try something and didn't seem afraid of getting hurt. James was quiet and liked to read. He noticed much more than people realized and filed it away for later use. Susan was interested in flowers and pretty things. She kept herself very clean and liked everything to be neat and orderly. Jane seemed to be everything. She liked bugs and frogs like Robert. She also liked to read like James. She played dress up with Susan when they were little. But most of all, Jane cared about her friends which included animals. Maybe she was the glue that kept them all together.

Shortly, James arrived. “I can't believe school is starting tomorrow.”

“I thought you liked school,” said Susan.

“I do,” replied James, “I just wish we had something to remember this vacation by.”

“Look! I found a four-leaf clover!” exclaimed Jane. “It’s magical! Let’s wish! What would it be? What if we had one last chance of an adventure? What would we want it to be?”



Robert jumped in, “I would want to go on an epic adventure! One that movies are made out of.”

“But safe,” added Susan, “I don’t want to be scared.”

“Two weeks,” said James, “I would want our whole winter vacation back, to do over.”

“How about you, Jane?” asked Robert.

“Magic,” she responded, “I would want some sort of magic to transport us.”

“How about a scavenger hunt?” thought James.

“Ooh, for flowers and pretty things!” Susan added, her eyes bright.

“Nah,” Robert shook his head, “wild big animals!!”

“Maybe, we will get our wish,” said Jane with a mischievous smile.

The friends looked at Jane.

“Yeah right, in our dreams,” said Robert.

“Let’s make a pact, right now!” said Jane, holding up the four-leaf clover. “Someday, we will have this adventure, just the four of us!” She put her arm out, palm down. All the children put their hands on top of hers.

“To adventure!”

“To friendship!”

“To, it’s getting late and I have to go home,” Susan chuckled.

The kids walked back to their street, talking about how cool it would be to go on an adventure! They waived at each other as they walked into their own homes. No adventure there, just time to get ready for school and bed.

Day One – Beltany Stone Circle

The next morning the friends woke up inside a large stone circle with sheep everywhere.

“No way!” whispered Robert.

“This must be a dream!” said James.

“Well, we should pinch each other,” said Jane.

“I don’t want to be pinched,” replied Susan, frowning.

“Yes! If it’s a dream, it won’t hurt.” Robert pinched James.

“Ouch!” James pinched Robert back.



“Ouch!”

Susan and Jane looked at each other. After pinching each other lightly, all agreed it must be real. But how?

“Maidin mhaith, leanaí,” the children heard in a man’s voice. They looked where the sound was coming from. An old gray-haired man dressed in robes was roasting a salmon over a fire in the middle of the stone circle.

“Tá tú anseo le draíocht,” he continued. “Tar agus ithe. Déanfaidh sé ciall níos móⁱⁱ.”

All four kids shook their heads. They could not understand anything he was saying. The man smiled and motioned them over for breakfast. They each had some salmon while a Wolfhound watched nearby. Once they had eaten, they looked around them wondering where they were.



“We will help you get home,” said the Wolfhound, startling the kids and making their eyes wide! “You are in Ireland by magic and with magic we will help you return.”

Somehow, the children could now understand not only the Wolfhound but also the man. The druid, for that is what the old man was, gave them each a pack full of supplies, a sleeping bag, and travel clothes. He explained that magic was needed to bring them home. They must go on a quest to find specific items the magic required to work. The druid pulled out a scrap of old paper with the list:



1. The location of hexagon basalt rock where giants once roamed
2. Three ragged robins

3. Wood for a blackthorn shillelagh
4. An acorn from an oak tree in each province
5. The friendship of red deer

The children had no idea where to start, or even what the list meant. The Wolfhound said he would help them along their quest. He told them they were in Beltany Stone Circle in the province of Ulster. With that, he trotted off.



“You had better follow him,” said the druid kindly. “He will guide you, guard you, and be your friend. He will help you on your journey and bring you back here when you are ready.”

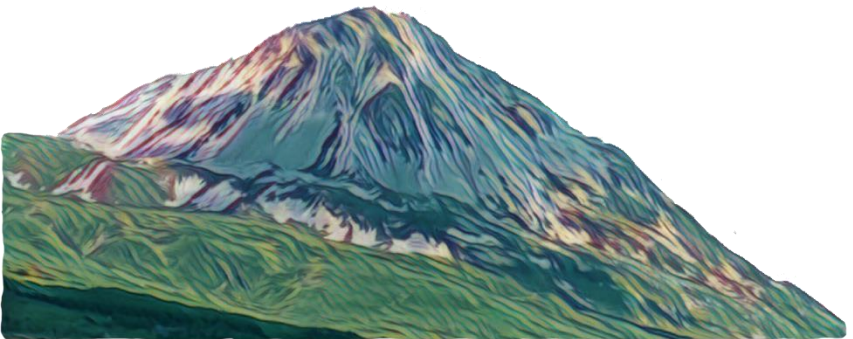
After a quick discussion among themselves, the kids ran after the dog. They wondered how they would know what they were looking for.

“Start doing something,” the Wolfhound told them,
“Movement creates action. Action creates direction.”

As they travelled throughout the day, they collected leaves of different trees. Most of trees were so big, they had to get on each other's shoulders to reach the leaves.



James rummaged through his pack and found what looked to be an old journal. In the very center was an outline of Ireland. As they travelled, the Wolfhound helped him fill in the details.



They climbed up a mountain looking for hexagon basalt rocks.

“You will not find them here.” said the Wolfhound. “This is Mt Errigalⁱⁱⁱ, the most ancient of rocks on the Island. It was formed millions of years ago when sandstone and igneous rock merged. It is called [metamorphic](#). This rock is ancient.”

That night they camped under the stars and showed the Wolfhound what they found.

“Are any of these leaves from the oak?” asked James.

The Wolfhound sniffed each leaf they had collected. James was ready with his journal.

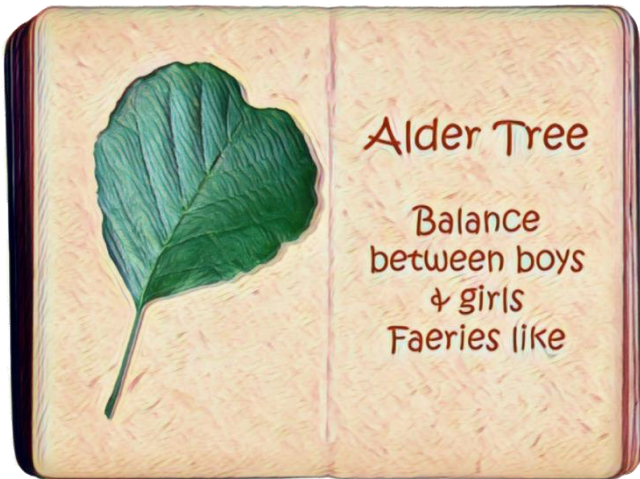
“Not this one,” replied the Wolfhound. “It is a Hazel tree. The hazel is the tree of knowledge and wisdom. It is good to sit under and think.



“That leaf is from the [Ash tree](#). It is a sacred tree and prized for its strength and healing. Sit under the ash and take it in if you feel weak or sick.



“Ah, the [alder](#). It shows the balance between the male and female aspects of life. It is also a favorite of faeries. Ooooh,” the Wolfhound paused.



“Is this one from the oak tree?” asked Susan in the silence.

“No,” responded the Wolfhound. He grew very still and quiet.

“We passed through a sacred grove. This leaf is from the [yew tree](#), the most ancient of trees. They seem to live forever, at least to us mortals. Yews are constantly renewing themselves, something humans could learn,” the Wolfhound added.



“Well, only one left,” sighed Jane.

“Ahh yes! This one is from the [oak tree](#)!” exclaimed the Wolfhound. “See how the leaves go in and out? Now, you know what you are looking for. Acorns are the seeds of the mighty sessile oak tree.”

“Why does the druid want these acorns anyway?” asked James. The children waited for a response. Finally, the Wolfhound cocked his head then shook it until his ears flopped.



“The oak tree,” the Wolfhound said at last, “is a symbol of strength, honor, endurance, and liberty. You will need these traits in the days ahead.”

Day Two – The Burren

When they woke up the next day, it was in a new spot. The Wolfhound appeared to shrug.

“The faeries must be helping you,” he said. “Ireland is too big to walk across in just a few days. 171 miles across and 302 miles long it is about the size of the state of Indiana.”

The kids exchanged glances. How did he know that?

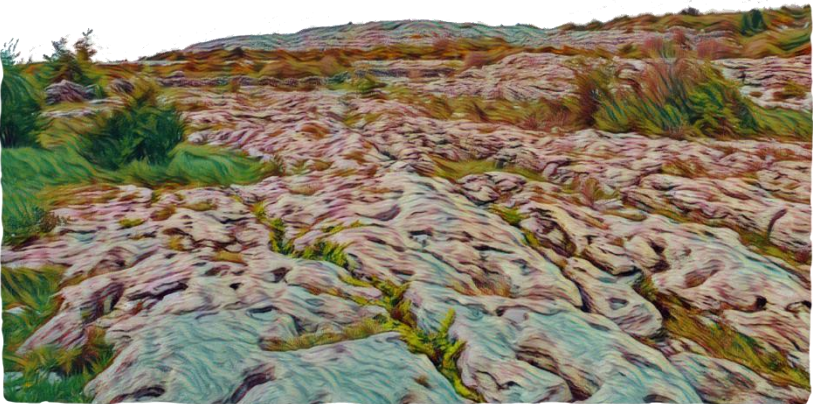
“Where are we?” asked Robert.

“We are in the Province of Munster,” replied the Wolfhound.

“Great,” said Susan, “we can get our next acorn! Let’s look around.”

After breakfast the children headed off. Before long they came across lots of rock and few trees.

“Where are we?” asked Jane.



“Ahh, we are in [the Burren](#),” said the Wolfhound.



“Is this the basalt rock we are looking for?” asked James.

“No,” said the Wolfhound. “This is limestone. There is very little on top of the limestone.”

“It doesn’t look like anything can grow here,” said James.

“Actually,” replied the Wolfhound, “although it looks barren, seventy percent of all the native plants of Ireland are found here.”

“Look at this plant,” Robert motioned. “Its pretty cool.”

“That is an [Autumn Ladies-tresses](#),”

said the Wolfhound. “It is a type of orchid.”

“How about these?” asked Jane.

“Those little flowers are [Irish Eyebright](#),” replied the Wolfhound. “They treat inflammation from colds to coughs and sinus infections.”



“This little flower can do all that?” asked Susan.

“Yes,” replied the Wolfhound, “before your modern medicine, plants supplied healing. They still do so today. In many parts of the world nature is the medicine.”

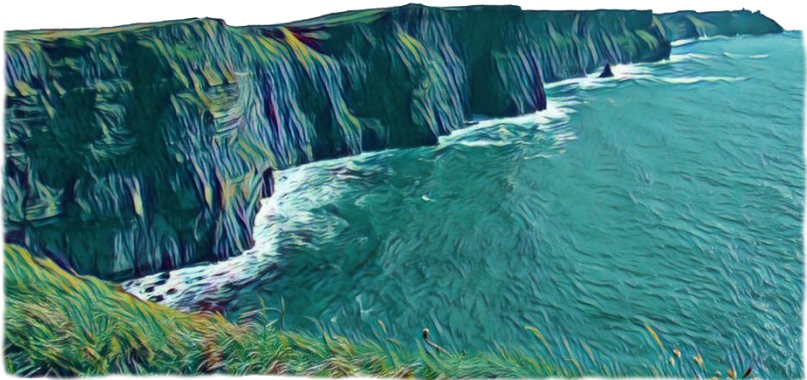
Susan was intrigued and began to write in her journal.

“Those are little plants though”, said Robert shaking his head. “We need wood, not flowers.”

“Yeah,” agreed Jane, “let’s keep going.”

After travelling and exploring much of the day, Robert was in the front.

“Wow...look at these cliffs!” he exclaimed. “It looks like layers of rock.”



“You are right,” said the Wolfhound as he put himself between the kids and the 700 foot cliff.

“The [Cliffs of Moher](#) are made up of layer upon layer of hardened sand, silt and mud. This is sedimentary rock. And underneath is limestone.”

“I don’t know about all those names, but the view is amazing!” said James.

“We are very lucky,” said the Wolfhound. “Many days the clouds and mist cover this view.”

“Can we stay here a bit and look?” asked Jane.

“Sure.”

After some time gazing at the cliffs and watching the surf crash against the rocks, James asked a question that had been bothering him.

“Are there any big animals here?”

The Wolfhound cocked his head at him. “You mean besides me?”

“Yes, like bears, or lions, or wolves. I can’t help but think we are all alone out here. What if something comes and attacks us?”



All the kids looked at the Wolfhound with scared eyes.

“There are no predators in Ireland bigger than me,” said the Wolfhound soothingly. “Thousands of years ago ice still covered Ireland. Large meat-eating animals roamed other parts of the world. The ice bridge connecting Ireland to the mainland melted before the large animals could get to the island. You are quite safe.”

The kids were relieved.

“Well, except for wolves,” added the Wolfhound startling the kids. “But no worries there. I am a wolfhound.”

It was time to go and they continued exploring until the sun began to set. It was quiet at the campfire that night. They spent an entire day looking and didn’t find anything on their list.



“Yes,” the Wolfhound said, “the west of Ireland has less resources than the east. It is much harder to survive here.”

“What was the that bird we saw earlier today with the yellowhead and black tipped wings?” asked Susan. “They kept diving in the water after fish.”

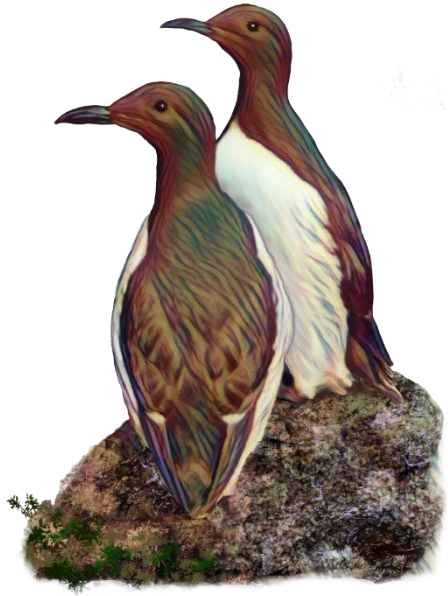
“That is a [Gannet](#),” answered the Wolfhound.

“What about the black and white bird?” asked James.

“That is a [Common Guillemot](#). Both are sea birds. They spend the winters on the ocean.”

“You mean, they live on the water? How do they sleep?” asked Jane.

“How do they stay warm?” wondered Robert.



The Wolfhound cocked his head. “They sleep on the water and they have down on their skins to keep them warm.”

Susan frowned but remained silent. The kids pulled out their sleeping bags and settled in for the night.

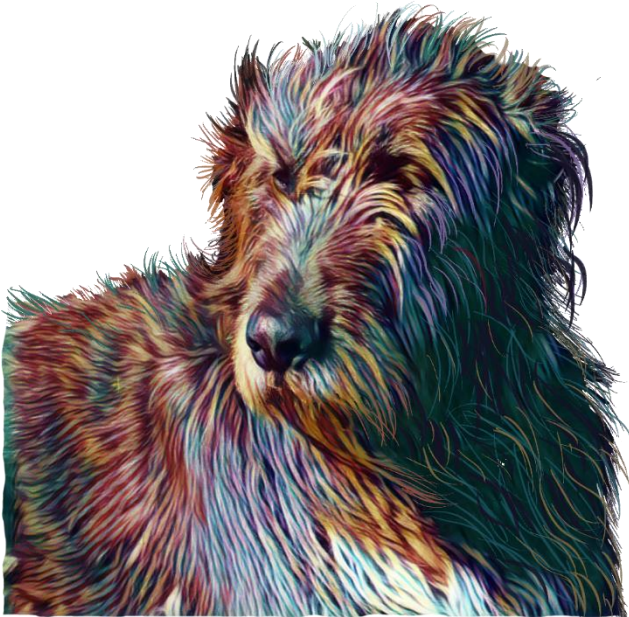
Day Three – The Southwest

The morning found the children in a valley between large rocky ridges. During breakfast Jane asked why they had not seen any animals yet.

“Well, you are all are noisy and scare them away,” said the Wolfhound.

“How come you talk?” asked James.

“The correct question,” replied the Wolfhound in a superior tone, “is why can you understand me. Of course, I can talk, silly human. The salmon you ate on your first morning gave



you the knowledge of animal speech not me. I already have it. Speaking of that, look over there, red fur.

“Maybe it’s the red deer!” said Jane. “Let’s be really quiet.”

The Wolfhound laid down and was very still. A few moments later, a curious [red fox](#) poked his nose out of the grasses.



“Hello,” said Susan. “We are friendly.”

“You might be,” said the fox, “but I am not so sure about your big friend there. You’ll understand if I don’t stick around.” And the fox slipped away.

“We’re scaring the other animals away, huh?” said Susan looking pointedly at the Wolfhound who was suddenly very busy looking at a bug. After they finished breakfast, it was time to look around.

“Where are we?” asked James.

“County Munster,” replied the Wolfhound.

“Weren’t we in County Munster yesterday?” asked Robert?

“Yes, but much further north. Bring out your map. Now we

are in the southwest section.”



James shook his head and filled in the map. He so hoped he could get the mud off his map from where the Wolfhound had “pointed.”

As the children explored the top of the

ridge, they could see valleys and ridges in the distance.

“What kind of rock is this?” asked James. “I know it isn’t hexagon shaped, but is it basalt?”

“No, this is [red sandstone](#). When the earth was under a lot of pressure, it folded creating the valleys and ridges.”

“What kind of bird is that?” asked Susan pointing.

The children looked and saw a bird about a foot tall running through the high grass.

“chut!chut!chut!” he said as he ran.



“Ahh, that is a [red grouse](#), see the bit of red on his head?

There are few places the red grouse can still be found. You are all very lucky. They used to be everywhere in Ireland.” The Wolfhound looked sad. “They are tasty.”

They continued to explore, crossing little streams and valleys.

“Look at that flower!” said Jane, ‘looks like little bells.”

iv“Aww, that’s nothing,” said James, “we have those at home. They are [foxgloves](#).”



“Yes, those are. They can reach about five feet tall and have up to 75 thimbles on one stalk. But,” continued the Wolfhound, “the flowers Jane is looking at are [faery thimbles](#).”

“You mean flowers, they are not actually thimbles,” said James with a snort.

“And you think foxes wear those as gloves?” The Wolfhound cocked his head and walked away.

Susan hurried to catch up with him. “Do either of these flowers have any medicinal value?” she asked.

“Not so much the faery thimble, but the foxglove is the basis for a very powerful heart drug.”

Susan’s eyes lit up.



“But don’t use it!! Every part of the plant is poisonous!” cautioned the Wolfhound. “As with everything of the faeries, it is best to leave it alone.”

During dinner the children asked the Wolfhound his name. He cocked his head.

“My scent is my name, of course,” said the Wolfhound.



“But how do you say it?” asked Robert.

“You don’t,” replied the Wolfhound. “You know it.”

After a few minutes of quiet Jane sniffed Robert. “If your name was your scent it would be ‘I need a bath.’”

Susan giggled and James laughed outright.

“Actually,” the Wolfhound sniffed, “you all need a bath. Let’s look for water in the morning.”

Day Four – The River Shannon

The next day they woke up next to a river. After a big stretch and a good sniff in the air, the Wolfhound answered what they all were wondering.

“Ahh, the faeries were again kind to us. This is the [River Shannon](#) and the sun is shining.”



“That’s a river?” asked Robert. “It seems pretty flat, more like a lake, or pond.”

The Wolfhound seemed affronted. “The Shannon is the longest river in Ireland, stretching 161 miles before it flows into the Atlantic Ocean. It divides the east and west of Ireland, Connaught Province to the East and Leinster to the West.”

The Wolfhound turned to James, “Here, lets draw it on your map.”

James pulled out the map and drew the Shannon with the Wolfhound’s guidance.



“Look, there is a little cove you four can get clean in,” the Wolfhound pointed with his nose.

After playing in the water until they were clean, the Wolfhound brought them over to a raft.

“We should be able to cover a lot of ground travelling by river,” said James. They passed the time looking for rocks along the shore and different types of flowers. Sometimes they pretended to push each other in.

Stopping for lunch by an oak tree, Susan collected their third acorn while James journaled. Jane looked for flowers and Robert decided to explore. He came back with something in his hands. He set it gently on a log. A frog!



Susan screamed and jumped away as soon as the frog moved. James watched with interest. Jane and Robert spent the next ten minutes releasing and capturing the frog, until the Wolfhound put a stop to it.

“The common frog is protected in Ireland, enough playing with him,” the Wolfhound paused. It seemed he wanted to play with it too. Instead he continued, “You know, that is the only type of frog in all Ireland.”

“Really?” replied Susan, hope in her eyes.

“Yes. In fact,” the Wolfhound continued, “there are [only six reptiles](#) on the entire island.” You have over a thousand in Central & North America. Here we only have the common frog, which you just found. We also have the Natterjack toad, Smooth Newt, Viviparous lizard and the Leatherback Turtle.

There is a new species called the Slow-worm, but it is not native.”

“Verses a fast worm?” asked James, chuckling. Robert laughed while the girls giggled. The Wolfhound just cocked his head.



At the next rest stop the children grabbed their packs and Robert again went exploring. He found a strange cropping of rock and trees which seemed to be in a circle formation. He wondered if the rock under the grass might be the basalt hexagon rock they were

looking for. He began digging into the mound when a little [red squirrel](#)^v chittered at him and then ran behind a tree to peer back at him.



Robert kept digging. A [badger](#) came at him, attacked his hand with the rock in it and scampered away as quickly as he came.

“Ouch,” cried Robert. “Not an animal in sight and suddenly you all come at me while I am trying to work. Aren’t badgers supposed to be nocturnal?” He shook his head.



Robert was getting a bit grumpy but continued to dig. Next a [crested grebe](#) swooped down and attacked his head before returning to the reeds of the river. Robert had had enough and started yelling at them all to leave him alone. The noise brought the Wolfhound and the other children running.

“What are you doing?!?!” exclaimed the Wolfhound.

“I am digging out these rocks to see if they are what we need!” cried Robert in frustration.

“Put the rocks back exactly as you found them, then step away,” commanded the Wolfhound. Robert just looked at



him. The Wolfhound began to growl, then he snarled.

The kids were frozen where they stood, too scared to move. The Wolfhound opened his mouth all the way.

“Okay, okay!” said Robert, “I’m putting them back!”

“We are all leaving as fast as we can,” stated the Wolfhound, “after you apologize to the faeries.”

“I truly am sorry,” whispered Robert, although he wasn’t quite sure what he was sorry for.



They scampered back to the raft and hopped on. Robert was very quiet. Everyone was quiet. The Wolfhound had been very scary.

As they meandered along the river, they stopped in several places. James and Jane picked leaves from plants and Susan kept an eye out for a ragged robin, whatever that was. Jane pointed to a bird in the water.

“Look, its babies are on its back!”

“Yes,” replied the Wolfhound, breaking his silence, “a crested grebe. It is like the one warning Robert earlier.”



Robert nodded, “I will pay better attention.”

“They carry them and teach them how to swim, dive, and catch fish. Both parents share in the raising and teaching of crested grebe chicks.”

As they continued down the river, Jane arranged a pretty bouquet of bright yellow-orange flowers she had picked at the last stop. It seemed to help lighten the spirits of everyone.

“What are those?” asked Susan.

“I don’t know,” answered Jane, “but they seem happy.”

“Those are calendula flowers,” supplied the Wolfhound after sniffing them. “They lift the spirits with their color, or so I am told,” sighed the Wolfhound. “Lifting the spirits can do wonders for healing of all kinds. The flowers are also good for skin injuries.”



Susan wasted no time writing in her journal.

As they continued to float down the river, the sky turned gray and a soft rain began to fall. The rain followed them as they set up camp.

Dinner at the campfire was awkward. Not only was it cold and wet, the children tip-toed around the Wolfhound. All they could think about was him snarling earlier that day. It was a very sobering thought and they were glad he was on their side.



Finally, the Wolfhound broke the silence.

“Never disturb a faery fort, or a tree, or mound. It is destroying their home and they do not take kindly to those responsible.

“I know I scared you earlier today. It was necessary. Faeries are neither good nor evil. Just like people, they are capable of both. Destroying their home is an attack and they may have done something back. I was protecting you.”

“I don’t understand,” said Susan. “I thought faeries were good.”

“And why did all those animals attack me earlier today?” asked Robert.

“Settle in for bed and I will explain,” answered the Wolfhound. The children cleaned up and snuggled in their sleeping bags.

The Wolfhound closed his eyes and began to speak. It sounded like something he had memorized and was making sure to get it just right.

“Long ago, when gods and goddesses roamed the earth, the Goddess Danu was Ireland’s earth Goddess. It is said that the Tuatha de Danan were human descendants of the Goddess. They ruled in Ireland for hundreds of years before the Milesians came from Spain and defeated them.



The Milesians gave the Tuatha de Danan a choice: leave Ireland forever or stay, but live underground. They decided to stay. Using their magic, they became invisible and are the faery people we know today.”

After several minutes of silence, Robert spoke up. “So I was destroying their home.”

“Yes,” replied the Wolfhound gently. “The animals around tried to warn you, to stop you. Faeries are protective of their homes just like you are. They will put curses on or deal harm to humans that disturb them.”

The children didn't sleep well that night and the next day they woke to the sounds of howls.

Day Five – Back in Time

“What is that?” asked a sleepy Robert.

“Hmmm,” replied a not-quite-awake Wolfhound, “that sounds like wolves. It couldn’t be...” He suddenly became very alert and jumped up from his slumber.

“It appears the faeries have their revenge after all. They have moved us back in time! Wolves have been extinct in Ireland for over 200 years. My ancestors were bred to hunt and kill wolves to protect the humans and cattle. Looks like we arrived in a time when wolves still roamed the land. “

“Oh my goodness!” gasped Susan turning. “What is that?”



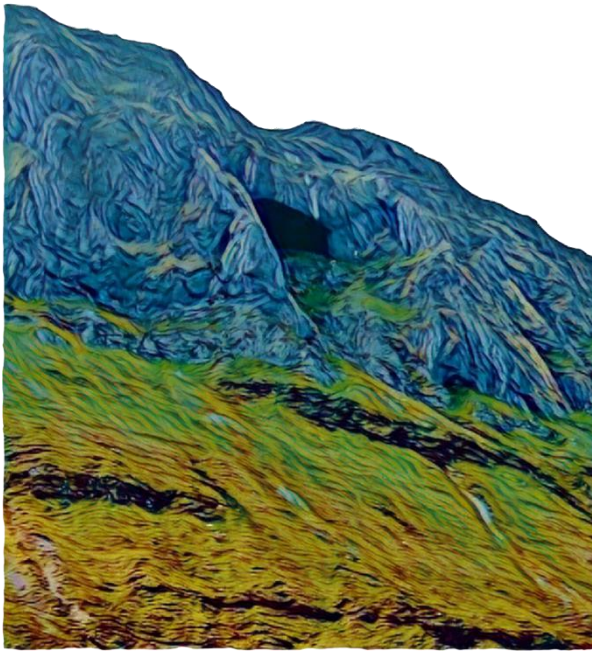
An extremely large animal was looking at them from the edge of the forest. His head stood at twice the height of the children. His antlers were huge!

“Woah!” breathed Robert. All the children’s eyes were big!!

“Don’t move too quickly,” said the Wolfhound quietly, “I don’t want to spook him.”

As they moved away from the giant, they could hear the wolf howls and bark coming closer.

“Quickly!” barked the Wolfhound, “Follow me! We must get away!”



The kids scrambled after the Wolfhound up the side of a steep hill^{vi}. Looking back, they watched a wolf pack chase the gigantic animal.

“What was that?” asked Robert.

“That was an [Irish elk](#),” replied the Wolfhound, “which is actually the largest deer ever! They have been extinct for over 6,000 years! Its antlers reach up to 12 feet wide and could weigh as much as 1500 pounds!” Even the Wolfhound sounded impressed and a little unsettled.

He led them higher up the hill face into a large cave. By the time they arrived, the wolves and huge deer were gone.

“This is so high up!!!” squealed Susan, “and cold!”

“But it is safe,” replied a very relieved Jane.



“And look at the view!” exclaimed James.

“It is beautiful,” replied the Wolfhound, once he made sure the children were in the back of the cave. The Wolfhound watched the front of the cave while the children made a fire and readied breakfast. Once he was sure they were safe, he joined the children.

“We are in [Gleniff Cave](#). Glaciers formed this valley and cave millions of years ago. Legends states the Irish hero Fionn mac Cumhaill¹ hunted red deer in the valley. He used this very cave as a resting and lookout spot.” The Wolfhound cocked his head, “Actually, he hasn’t done that yet. I guess he will in about 4000 years.”

James frowned, “How can frozen water form a valley?”

“Glaciers move and as they do, soil and rocks move with it. That is one way whole valleys are carved out.” After Jane and James had a nice warm fire going, the Wolfhound sighed, “We have a long wait for today. It is not safe for us to venture out of this cave.”

“I thought you said you were the biggest animal here!” Robert stated accusingly. He was still scared. All of them were.

“I am, back in my time. Or, forward in my time. But we are thousands of years in the past. There are no bigger predators than the wolves and we are safe up here. I will guard the entrance but we need to stay in the cave today. I smell rain and it looks like it will last all day. It is a good thing we have shelter.”

The children agreed and pulled out the plants they had collected the previous day.

“Do any of these belong to the blackthorn bush?” asked James.

¹ Finn McCool in English



“Lets see,” the Wolfhound cocked his head then sniffed the flowers. “That pretty yellow one is a [Loosestrife](#). I know it looks bit like a bush, but it is not the blackthorn.”

“Yeah,” said Robert, “it probably needs to be black.”

“Ha ha,” Jane mouthed at him.

Looking at Susan, the Wolfhound added, “The Loosestrife flower is used to treat digestive issues and to stop bleeding.”

“What about this one?” asked Jane.

The wolfhound paused to sniff it. “This one is a [Meadowsweet](#). One day it will be processed and used as aspirin.”

“What do you mean by ‘one day’?” asked Susan.



“Well,” replied the Wolfhound, “it has not yet been discovered. We are too far back in time.”

That was a hard concept to understand.

“Last flower,” said Jane. “It didn’t come from a bush, so probably not the blackthorn.”



The Wolfhound seemed to smile, “this is a [Cuckooflower](#).”

Robert twirled his finger on the side of his head like someone was crazy.

“Faeries deem these sacred, so best keep outside the cave,” continued the Wolfhound.

Robert quickly put his hand down and volunteered to set the flowers to the front of the cave. He had learned to respect the faeries.

“Not much used in medicine,” said the Wolfhound, answering Susan’s unspoken question. When they had finished looking at the plants, Jane asked where they were.



“The Province of Connaught”, answered the Wolfhound. “Get out your map and I will show you exactly.”

Before James could ask the Wolfhound not to touch, his grass stained paw was already on the map. James shook his head. He was still trying to get the last muddy pawprint clean.

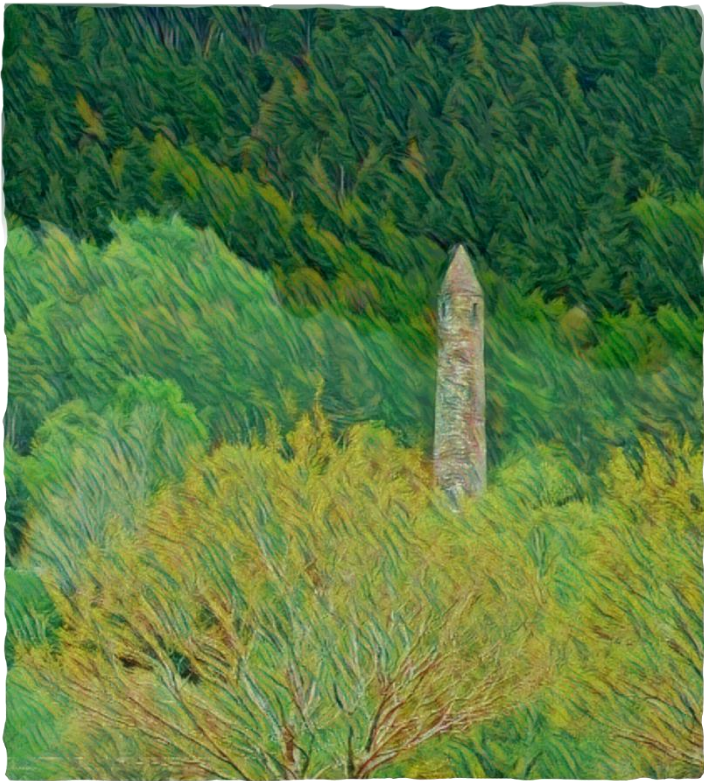
Time went slowly, sitting in the cave all day. Everyone was ready for bed that night, crossing their fingers they would awake in a new place. Hopefully on a clear day.

Day Six - Wicklow

To everyone's relief, the next morning they woke to the sounds of.... Chanting?

"What is that?" asked Jane.

"That sounds like monks at their morning devotions."
answered the Wolfhound. "Looks like we are forward in time."



I am thinking around the eight century. The four of you would be very hard to explain so let's steer clear."

"Clear of what?" asked Robert.

"[Glendalough](#)," replied the Wolfhound. "In the sixth century, Saint Kevin found this idyllic peaceful valley with two pristine lakes. He came for the retreat away from everyone else. But soon others followed, and Glendalough became a monastic city. People from all over Europe come for the education. It is like a college. Although," the Wolfhound added, "in your time it is an ancient site."

They made their way around the stone buildings and through a forest. Soon they came upon one of the lakes the Wolfhound mentioned.



"Wow," sighed Susan. "Such beauty and peace."

"Makes sense why St. Kevin chose this area," agreed Robert.

As they moved on, the Wolfhound continued, “We are in the beautiful [Wicklow Mountains](#). People still visit here to get away. Well, they will in our future.”

“Maybe our Hexagon rocks are here!” said James.

“Maybe our red deer is here!” Jane and Susan chorused.

“I just realized,” Jane added, “even though the skies are cloudy, there is no rain! How wonderful!”

They trekked up the hills looking for rocks and animals.

“Look at this!” said Robert, “it’s not a hexagon shape, but it sure is different!”

“It kind of looks like a rock waterfall or stream,” observed Jane.



“Yes, that is granite beneath that water,” said the Wolfhound, “and right over there is schists. Millions of years ago mud and sandstone became extremely hot. They baked into new rocks

like slate, quartz and schists. As you can see it is shiny. Underneath, the lava was cooling much slower and formed granite.”

“So this is not what we are looking for then,” sulked James.

“No, but slowly, look over there.”

As the children turned, they saw what looked like a deer.

Jane gasped, “is that a red tail [deer](#)?”

“Yes, it is.”



“We are supposed to befriend one,” said James. “Are they usually that small?”

“Um, she’s not *that* small,” supplied Jane.

None of the children moved. The Wolfhound nudged Robert. “Go talk to her.”

“Why me?” asked Robert.

“You are learning to respect our ways.”

Before Robert started to make his way over, Susan pulled some yummy looking plants (she hoped) and gave them to Robert to offer the deer. Robert began a slow walk towards her. The doe’s ears perked up as she calmly watched him move closer. The other children stayed very still and watched. Soon Robert was walking back with the deer. The deer eyed the wolfhound with suspicion. They were almost the same height. The girls kept reassuring her and giving her food. Robert and James stroked her back.

“She has lost her herd,” said Robert.

“Maybe we can help her find it again,” said Jane.

“I thought a deer would be bigger,” mumbled James.

The deer looked right at James and blinked soulful eyes.

“You are the perfect size and beautiful!” rushed James.

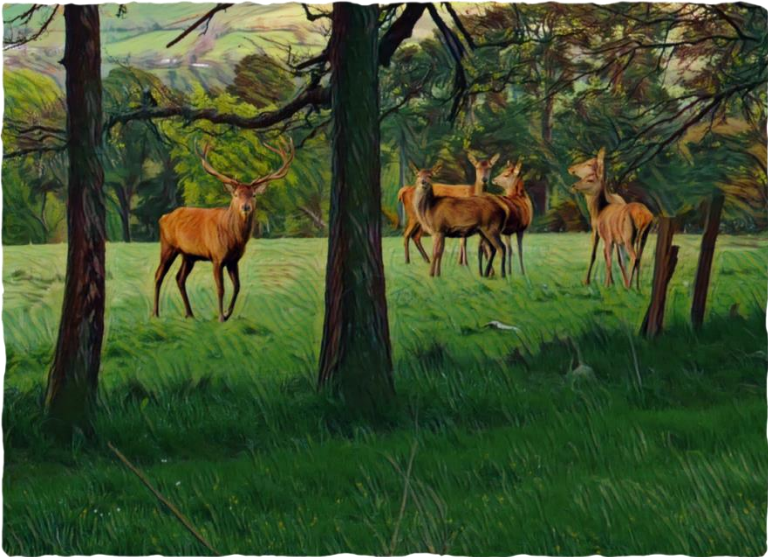
“Nothing living today will be the size of the Irish Elk,” said the Wolfhound, shaking his head. “Male red deer are still big. They can reach five feet high at their shoulder and weigh up to 550 lbs.”

After a few more minutes of consoling the deer, the Wolfhound once again spoke.

“Let’s look for her herd.”

It took them all morning and part of the afternoon to find her herd. The Wolfhound kept sniffing the ground and taking them in all sorts of directions. The boys thought they could do a better job. Each time they started to mention it they felt the Wolfhound's breath on them and decided to keep quiet. It was easy to forget just how big he was until he breathed, or panted, on your neck.

Finally, they caught up with the herd in the afternoon, just as they were about to give up. The red the deer said "thank you friends" before she bounded off to join them.



The children were tired and hungry. The sun decided to come out while they made an early camp. After eating, they looked through what they collected.

Susan had found another oak tree and picked an acorn. Jane and James had collected flowers and leaves from bushes.

Spreading the plants out, they asked the Wolfhound if any were from the blackthorn bush.

“That is a [blackthorn flower!](#)” exclaimed the Wolfhound, poking his nose at it. “Anyone remember where we found this?”



All the children were suddenly busy with new tasks. No one wanted to repeat the meandering of the day.

“Well, now at least we know what we are looking for. We will recognize it when we come across it again,” said Jane.

“And get the wood the druid needs,” stated James.

“Let’s see what all we have from our list and what we still need to find,” said Robert.



“We have all four acorns,” stated Susan triumphantly, bringing four acorns from her pack.

“We befriended a red deer today,” said Robert.

“We know what the blackthorn looks like now, so we should be able to find that soon!” stated James

“We know what rock the basalt hexagons are... not,” laughed Jane.

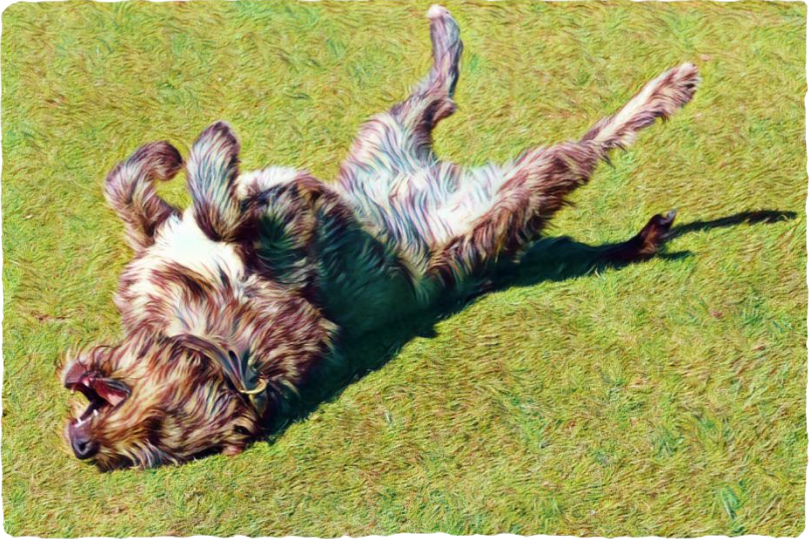
“But we still have to find those birds,” sighed Susan.

“What birds?” asked the Wolfhound.

“The ragged robins,” answered Susan.

“Yeah,” snickered Robert, “the birds that need their feathers combed.”

The Wolfhound rolled on the grass sneezing... or was he laughing? He stood up and shook. Yes, he had definitely been laughing.



“What is so funny?” asked James.

“Ragged robins are flowers, not birds,” he replied right before he rolled on his back again with his feet up in the air.

“It’s not that funny,” Susan grumped.

Since it was still early, the kids played games until it was time for dinner and sleep.

Day Seven – Lough Neagh

The next morning was overcast and damp. The kids found themselves beside a lake so big they could barely see to the other side.



“Ahh, looks like [Lough Neagh](#). It is the largest lake on the island,” stated the Wolfhound in response to their unasked question. “It has enough water to fill seven million swimming pools! Legend states that the hero Fionn mac Cumhaill² scooped it out when he was chasing the Scottish giant. Then he threw it into the sea and created an island called the Isle of Man.”

² Finn McCool in English

“Is that the same Fionn that used the cave we were in?” asked Robert.

“The very one. But the lake it was actually formed when the crust of the earth split. An area sunk creating a lake. Here, I will show you on the map.”

“That looks like a [mallard duck](#), like we have back home!” interrupted James.



“You are right,” said the Wolfhound approvingly.

“Are there any ragged robins around here?” asked Susan.

“Not here by the shore. Ragged robins grow in marshes or boglands,” replied the Wolfhound.

“Then why are we here?” sulked Robert.

“And what’s a bogland?” asked James.

“A [bogland](#) is a very special place that took thousands of years to create,” answered the Wolfhound. “Here we have peat bogs and lots of different plants make them their home. Humans dig peat for fuel.”

The Wolfhound cocked his head, sniffed in the air, then licked his lips. With a wolfish grin he said, “fish,” and trotted off towards a boat.

The kids looked in their travel bags and sure enough, all had fishing poles. They followed the Wolfhound on to the boat and into the lake. After some frustrating moments figuring out their gear, they all settled in to fish. Robert caught the first fish.

“Mmmmm,” said the Wolfhound licking his lips, “that is a salmon... good eats.”



“Why is a salmon in a lake?” asked Susan. “I thought they were in streams.”

It was hard for the Wolfhound to stop looking at the salmon, but finally he replied.

“Salmon swim from the sea and up the rivers to lay eggs. Some make it all the way to the lakes. And we have cold water here so that salmon is going to be tasty!”

About five minutes later Jane caught a fish. “What is this?” she asked.



“That is a pollan fish. It is a yummy white fish and this is the only lake in Ireland where it is abundant.” His large mouth started to open as if he couldn’t help himself but to take a bite.

Just then James caught one, but struggled to pull in it. The mist had made the fishing pole very slippery. Susan stopped her fishing to help him. When they finally got the fish on the boat it was about 20 pounds!



“Wow,” said the Wolfhound, “you two are very lucky. Usually you can only catch dollagan in the dark!”

“And we are all lucky because we have lots to eat besides travel bars,” said Susan happily.

After eating, they looked at map and the Wolfhound showed them where they were. This time a sappy wet paw print was left. James closed his eyes and shook his head. It was no use.



As amazing as the Wolfhound was, he just couldn't seem to figure out that James wanted a clean map.

"We are in County Ulster, at the top of Ireland."

Lunch completed, the children packed their bags and started exploring. They followed natural paths the Wolfhound said were made by animals to get to the lake.

While they were walking, Jane asked the Wolfhound what a ragged robin looked like.

"It has very narrow petals, and it looks raggedy."

"What color is it?" asked Jane.

"Um, sort of blue-ish greyish," answered the Wolfhound.

"Blue grey?" asked Susan.

Instead of answering, the Wolfhound continued, "It used to be very common, but humans have drained many of the marshes and wetlands to make way for pastures. We don't see as many anymore."

"What do marshes have to do with ragged robins?" asked James.

"Ragged robins need boggy ground to grow," replied the Wolfhound.

"Then let's hope the faeries will send us there," said Susan brightly.

"They already have," said the Wolfhound as he sat on his haunches.

The kids had not been paying attention where they were going. Looking around, then at their feet, they noticed it was a bit muddy in places.

“Ewww,” whined Susan, “my shoes are all dirty.”

“It sure is squishy here,” said Robert with delight.

“Yes, there are wetlands around the lake. Be on the lookout for your [ragged robin](#)^{vii}. They have five spikey greyish petals. I will wait here.”

It did not take them long, but instead of being blue-grey the ones they found were a bright pink. They brought some samples back for the Wolfhound to see. After sniffing, the Wolfhound confirmed they were ragged robins.



“But these are pink, not blue-grey!” said Jane, “are you sure these are the right ones?”

“Of course! My nose never lies.”

Jane considered the Wolfhound. “I don’t think you see [color](#) the way we do.”

James carefully picked three ragged robins and pressed them in the pages of his journal.

“Cool!” exclaimed Robert, “we only have two more things to collect!”

Susan looked at the fragile flower, “Is this used for anything?” she asked the Wolfhound.

“Yes, the root is used as a soap for washing clothes, the flower as a hair rinse.” The Wolfhound sniffed in their direction then sneezed. “In fact, you all need your clothes washed. And for that matter, another bath. Let’s dig up more of these flowers and get you and your clothes clean.”

“But its cold and wet,” complained Susan.

The Wolfhound sniffed the air. “Not for much longer. The sun will come out long enough to warm you and dry your clothes.”

They spent the rest of the morning digging up ragged robins. By the time they had enough plant root to wash the clothes, the sun had come out. While waiting for the clothes to dry the kids chatted about what was left to find.



“We still need to find the wood for the blackthorn staff,” stated Robert.

“And the location of the hexagon rocks,” added Susan.

“Is that really all we need now?” asked Jane.

“Yes,” answered James, “just two more items.

After lunch the clothes were dry and they headed on their way. Just as the Wolfhound predicted, as soon as their clothes were dry, the skies clouded and a soft rain began to fall. Not the first time the children were grateful for the rain coats found in their packs.

That afternoon, they came across some hedges separating two fields from each other.

“Hmm... this looks familiar,” mused James.

“It should be,” replied the Wolfhound, “that is your blackthorn.”

“But it doesn’t have any flowers,” cried Jane.

“They do not bloom all the time. Flowers turn into dark berries. Look at those black thorns. That is your wood alright.”



All the kids were skeptical and leery of the sharp thorns.

“Well,” said the Wolfhound, “get to cutting.”

“With what?” exclaimed Robert. “And how do we get past those really sharp thorns?”

“I will leave you to it,” replied the Wolfhound. Almost as an afterthought he added, “Make sure to cut a very thick branch, as this is for a shillelagh. Better yet, dig up the whole thing. The best shillelaghs are made with the root.” Then he trotted off, laying down in the only sun patch, and promptly fell asleep.

Later that night at camp, the children were quiet.

“What’s up?” asked the Wolfhound. “Why so glum?”

“We didn’t get the blackthorn wood,” sighed Susan.

“Why not?”

“We didn’t have anything to cut it with,” said Robert, “or to dig it up with.”

“All we got was dirty,” humphed Susan.

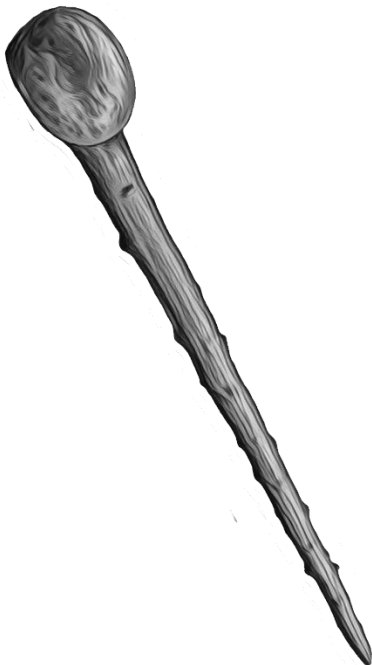
“And even if we did,” added Jane, “a mean dog snarled at us, as if he knew we were going to cut down part of his hedge.

Now we are never going to get home.”

“We don’t even know what a shillelagh is,” said a defeated James.

Just when the children thought the Wolfhound would not answer, he explained. “A shillelagh is a walking stick on sight but so much more. It settled disputes in a gentlemanly manner.”

“How can a stick settle a dispute?” asked Robert.



“It is not just a stick, although it starts out with one. It was also a weapon. A duel with them settled disputes like with pistols or swords.”

The kids settled in their sleeping bags to listen.

“They started with a big sturdy branch. Some people would hollow out the heavy end and fill with lead or metal to make an even better weapon. They were so good, the English banned them when they occupied Ireland. So, the Irish made them into walking sticks. The English could hardly deny them that.

“To make the shillelagh beautiful and hardy, people placed the wood up chimneys for several months or even years. Then



once cured, finished with oils.”

“Wait,” said Robert shaking his head, “wouldn’t it burn?”

“The wood was not near the fire,”

replied the Wolfhound, “but up the chimney. The smoke dried out the wood and it would accumulate layers of soot to give it that deep black appearance.”

"There is more to the creation of a shillelagh than a simple walking stick. There is more to each of you as well. Some things take time and patience. Have some faith in your abilities and in being creative. You will find a way to get the blackthorn wood."

But the next morning found them in a new place with not a blackthorn tree in sight.

Day Eight – Skellig Michael

“Oh, it is cold here!!”

“And windy!”

“The rain is going sideways!”

“It’s really high up!”

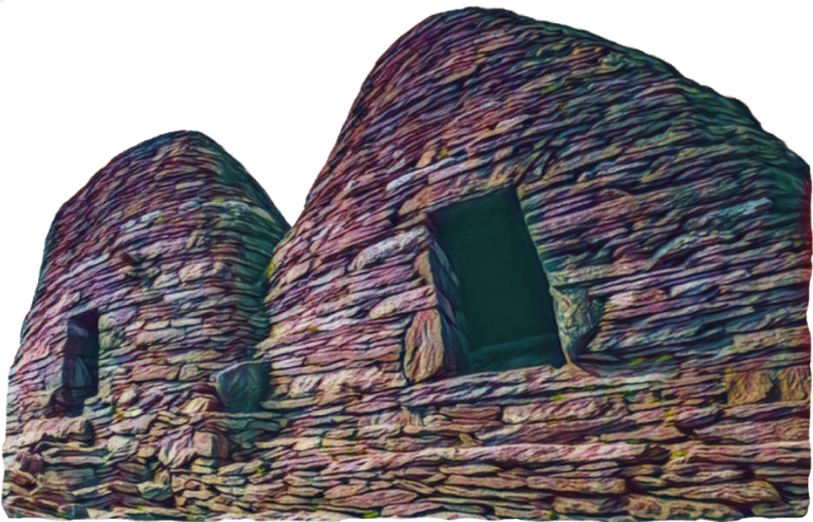
“And isolated!”

“This place is a bit scary!”

It appeared they were on an island, surrounded by a big ocean with crashing waves and angry winds.



The Wolfhound cocked his head. “I wonder...” he said, but before the kids could ask any more questions, he ushered them into some round stone huts^{viii}.



“Let’s start a fire and get warm,” said the Wolfhound, “then we can look around.”

While Susan and Jane started the fire, Robert and James began preparing the food.

“Get your map out,” said the Wolfhound once they were all warm and sated.

“Do you know where we are?” asked James.

The Wolfhound replied with a toothy smile. “We are on [Skellig Michael](#), in the southwestern most part of all Ireland.”

“Are our hexagon basalt rocks here?” asked Jane.



“This island is made of red sandstone and compressed slate,” answered the Wolfhound. “No basalt here.”

Once the rain let up, they all left the warmth of the hut and started exploring.

Suddenly the Wolfhound barked, “Be careful!”

James slipped on the wet ground and fell ten feet to a ledge below.

“Look,” said James, trying to cover up his scare, “another island.”



“Yes, that is little Skellig,” replied the Wolfhound. “Let’s get you back up and stay close to the middle of this island. It is not safe to be at the edges.”

But how? The Wolfhound kept running back and forth. He even began to bark. The girls looked around frantically, trying to find something to help James. Robert was calm. He hooked his feet on some rocks and leaned down toward James.

“Grab my hand!”

“Its too far...”

Robert looked around, “See those rocks? If you can climb on those, I can just reach you.”

Robert was able to pull James to safety. James nodded at Robert in thanks. They explored the interior of the island the rest of the day, being extra careful of their footing.

“This is amazing!” stated Susan.



“This is Christ’s Saddle^{ix},” said the Wolfhound. “The monks named it when they lived here.”

“Is that why there are little houses here?” asked Jane.

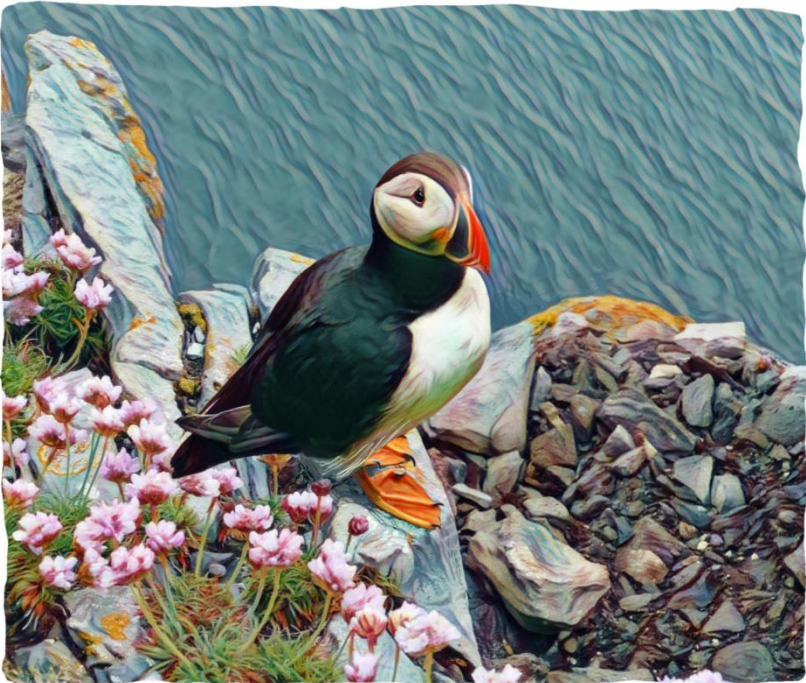
“Yes, the monks lived here in isolation and simplicity so they could pray and meditate in peace. They arrived sometime between the sixth and eighth century and left in the 13th Century, moving to a mainland monastery.”

“It is magical here,” said Robert in hushed tones. All agreed.

As they explored the island, carefully, they saw seals and...

“Look, down there by the water! What are those funny clown birds?” asked Robert.

“Those are [puffins!](#)” said the Wolfhound. “They live here part of the year to raise their young, then much of the year they live out to sea on the Atlantic Ocean. There are many birds that raise their young here on Skellig Michael.”



That night exhaustion set in from exploring the island. Susan and James started making dinner over a campfire. As James sat down, he gave a groan.

“What’s wrong?” asked Jane.

“I hurt all over.”

The Wolfhound sniffed him. “You smell of blood.” Sure enough, James had scrapes and cuts all over from the fall earlier that day.

“We don’t have anything to help him with,” Susan stated with scared eyes. “We are nowhere near a doctor and our parents are not here...” A tear welled up in Susan’s eye.

The Wolfhound looked at Susan and waited.

“What? Why are you looking at me like that?”

The Wolfhound continued to look at Susan, cocking his head to the side. Jane and Robert came over to see what was happening.

“I can’t seem to move,” whispered James. “I hurt and all my muscles are stiff.”

“Why now and not earlier?” asked Jane.

“Muscles get stiff when not used, and excitement can cover up pain,” explained the Wolfhound. James was silent, a grimace on his face and eyes closed.

Jane nudged Susan, “What about those flowers?”

“What?” Susan looked at the Wolfhound who pushed her journal towards her with his nose.

“Oh my goodness! Yes! Those flowers help with cuts and pain! What do we do?”

The Wolfhound looked at the children. “Boil some hot water and put the dried meadowsweet flowers in the water. It will

make a tea to ease his pain. In the meantime, Jane, do you still have that bouquet of calendula flowers?"

"Yes!" Jane ran to get them from her pack. "They are all dried now though."

"They will work just fine," replied the Wolfhound. As he showed Susan what to do, Jane boiled the water for meadowsweet tea. Robert continued to cook dinner.



Once the remedies were ready, James was slathered with calendula on his cuts and drank the tea to relieve the pain.

Dinner was quiet and peaceful. James was starting to move around better. There was nothing to review from the list, but they all received peace and hope. There was something magical about the island.

They knew everything would be alright and they would make it home again.

Day Nine – Beach Day

They woke up the next morning to sunshine, barking and the muted sounds of waves. The ground was soft.

Suddenly, the Wolfhound ran in the midst of them spraying up sand, then took off again. He was clearly happy!

The children got up and looked around them. The Wolfhound was already a little speck in the distance. As they watched, he grew bigger every second. He was running full speed towards them from the far of the beach. Every lope covered over ten feet. Wow, he was big! And happy! He reached them, with a very happy wagging tail, spraying sand all over them.



“This is a beach!” sputtered Susan trying to get the sand out of her mouth. They all looked at the Wolfhound.

“Of course it’s a beach!” answered the Wolfhound.

“Are we still in Ireland?” asked James with thoughtful eyes.

“Why wouldn’t we still be in Ireland?” asked the Wolfhound, joyfully digging a hole.

“I thought Ireland only had rocks and green!” said Robert.

“Don’t forget the rain,” added Jane.

“That’s silly,” answered the Wolfhound. “Yes, you are in Ireland. Yes, we have beaches! Glorious, beautiful, run-worthy, hole-digging, sandy beaches!” With that, the Wolfhound took off running and jumped in the water.

“Lets go!!” said Jane. She ran after the Wolfhound. Soon they were all playing and running in the sand. After frolicking all morning, the children relaxed in the sun to dry off.



“Where are we?” asked James.

“And what is that little rock hut?” added Jane.

“We are in Ballinskelligs Beach,” replied the Wolfhound. “and that is McCarthy Mor Castle.”

“Looks pretty small for a castle,” remarked Robert skeptically.

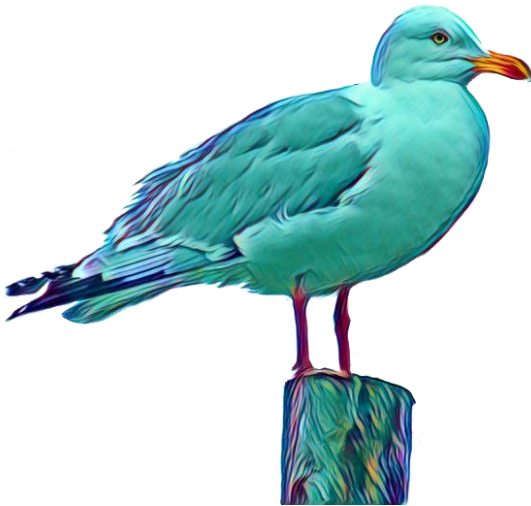
“It guarded against pirates,” said the Wolfhound.

Robert smiled. “Cool.”

The children settled in for lunch and to enjoy the view.

“Look, on that post,” pointed Susan. “It’s a sea gull!”

“That is a [herring gull](#), still a seabird,” said the Wolfhound.



Lulled by the sound of the waves and the warmth of the sun, they all fell asleep.

They woke up to sand and sun. Looking around, something seemed different.

“This is a different beach,” realized Jane.

“And big,” added Susan.

“And sunny!” added a happy Robert.

The Wolfhound woke and shook out his fur. “We have travelled yet again,” he said. “This is one of my favorite beaches. So much sand and it goes out a very long way. Great for running!” And with that, the Wolfhound was off again.

After playing, they settled in to soak in the warmth of the sun. Again. Robert pulled out food from his pack and they all began to eat.



“Wow, this beach is great! Where are we?” asked James.

“Get out your journal and I will show you,” replied the Wolfhound. “This morning we were in Ballinskellig beach, which is the southwest. Right now, we are at Fintragh Beach in County Donegal.”

Once again, the Wolfhound put a wet paw on his nice map. This time with sand. Shaking his head, James added shells and names to the beach locations.



The children were tired from the day. They watched the sunset and had a fire on the beach. Snuggling in their sleeping bags, sleep took them.

Day Ten – Dunlewy Lough

Familiar surrounds greeted them in the early morning.

“Wait a minute,” said James while they were eating breakfast. “Haven’t we been here before?”

The Wolfhound seemed impressed and nodded. “We are back in the foothills of Mt. Errigal,” he said. “That is Dunlewy Lough.” After a pause, the Wolfhound continued. “Lough means lake.”



“Why would the faeries bring us back here?” wondered James.

“Its cold and misty wet again,” stated Robert.

The wolfhound said nothing. After breakfast he trotted off. The children packed their belongings and rushed to catch up with him.

When they found him, he was frolicking with a couple of black and white shepherd dogs. A man seemed to be raking or cutting grass clumps.



“That is odd,” remarked Jane, “why is he cutting grass?”

“Look over here. I don’t think he is cutting grass, more like he is harvesting dirt,” said Robert.

Susan wrinkled her nose.

“That is odd,” she remarked.

One of dogs came running over to sniff the children.

“That’s not odd,” yipped the dog excitedly as she ran back to the man, “it’s peat!”

“What is peat?” asked James.

The children went over to where the man and the dogs were, including the Wolfhound. He explained that he harvested peat to heat his home.

“[Peat](#) is a type of wetland made up of decaying vegetation,” explained the man.

“But it doesn’t stink,” said James a bit confused.

“Nope,” replied the man, “it actually smells quite nice when its burnin’ and one brick can burn fer ‘bout an hour.”



“So...” the man began, “what ye wii ones doin’ here? An without a proper adult keeping track of ya?”

“Oh... well... its kind of hard to explain,” James said hesitantly.

“What he means to say is that... well... we don’t exactly know,” Jane supplied, shoulders slumped. How could they explain

they simply woke up one morning in a different place? With no idea how they got here, not here and not Ireland.

“We woke up here,” stuttered Robert. The man narrowed his eyes.

The Wolfhound barked at the man then trotted up to him looking him straight in the eyes. After a few moments, the man broke the silence.

“Aye, it seems there be faery magic afoot. Whacha looking fer?”

The children released held breaths in relief. Did he understand the Wolfhound too?

“Well, we need blackthorn wood for some sort of a shell-el-lee thing,” said Susan hopefully.

“Ahh, yes, that ‘d be a shillelagh. You’d need a nice strong piece of wood. Come, I have one I was making up. Not sure why I started, but I guess I do now.”

The children looked at him in awe.

“Really?” James spoke for all of them.

“Indeed, I do lad. I have a good feeling.” The four children looked at the Wolfhound at the same time. He looked over and barked, then started following the man.

Robert shrugged. “Well, I guess it’s okay. He would be snarling if the man was unsafe. Let’s go.”

The soft rain continued and, along the way, the kids told the man of their adventures. He quietly listened to everything they had to say. The dogs loped around them as they walked, the smell of wet dog trailing them.



“Let’s see your map,” the man said when they arrived at his house. They could tell he was still trying to decide if he believed them. Robert brought his map out. The man quietly reviewed all their travels.

“Quite an adventure ye have.”

“Yes, we have!” chorused the children.

The kids stayed with the man all day, helping him with whatever he needed in appreciation for his kindness. They all took much needed showers and he even cleaned their clothes.

They laughed when the Wolfhound was subjected to a much-needed bath.

That night, they pulled out their sleeping bags and slept indoors in a real house for the first time since they arrived in Ireland.

“I will never take my room for granted again,” sighed James.

“You know, its kind of strange,” thought Susan aloud, “The Wolfhound hasn’t spoken to us at all today. I wonder if he loses his ability to communicate with us if there are other humans around?”

They settled in for the night, their tummies full of Irish stew and soda bread. Their bodies were warm and comfortable. The Wolfhound curled up between them, the perfect recipe for sleep.



Day Eleven – Earth Origins

Slosh, slosh, slish, slosh. A steady rhythm of slish sloshing, and moving up and down woke the children the next morning. It was barely dawn and they found themselves in.... a boat?

Woah! All four children came awake at the same time. What are we doing here?!?!?! There was an eerie orange light at the front of the boat. Peering through the fog, they saw what seemed to be glowing moving... rocks? Pushing and squeezing. As the glow reached the water, steam arose (so not fog after all). The rocks slowed way down and finally stopped moving.



“What is that!?!?!?” cried Susan.

“Ahh, you have finally found your basalt rock,” replied a completely unshakable Wolfhound.

“What?!” exclaimed Jane.

The lava pushed and flowed together morphing the liquid magma. It seemed to be coming from all sides. The pressure was creating shapes and columns of rock. The children watched in awe. They were witnessing the making of the world. Well, at least this part of it.

“Unbelievable,” whispered Robert.

The scene didn’t get old, but the kids were getting hungry. They looked around but there was nowhere to go, no land where they could dock the boat and get out. It was all lava.

“How exactly are we supposed to find the basalt rocks if they are in the middle of being made?” asked James.

“I guess we hunker down for now,” replied Robert. “Let’s eat and see what happens.”

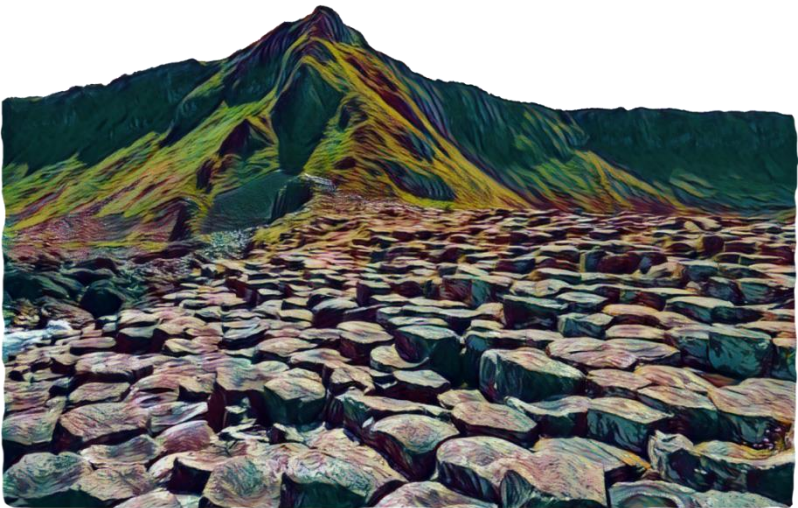
The Wolfhound seemed content. The kids got out their journals to update the adventure and just hoped the faeries would bring them back.

Day Twelve – Giants Causeway

The next day they awoke, still in the boat?

“Oh no,” groaned James, “not another day of this!”

But instead of an orange glow, the clear blue sky of a sunny day greeted them. Peering over the side of the boat they saw a familiar scene, but this time, all the lava was cool. The rocks were actual rocks, not glowing movement.



“Wow! I wouldn’t have believed it if I hadn’t seen it,” said Jane. “These rocks don’t look natural.”

“It looks like people placed these stepping stones here,” commented Susan.

“Well, now that you mention it, the ancient Irish didn’t think it was natural either. They believed the hero Fionn created

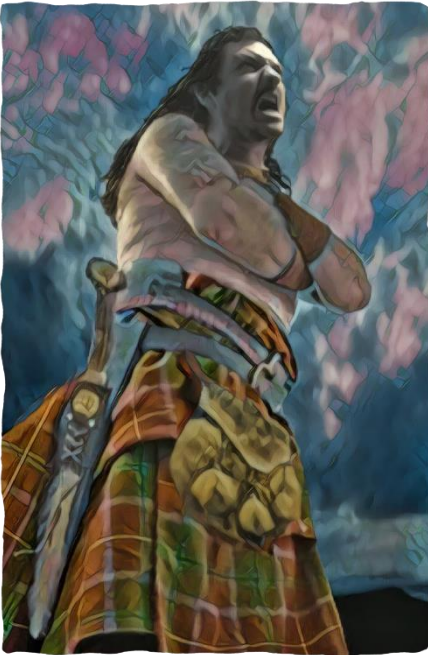
the causeway to fight a Scottish giant. There are stones like this in Scotland as well,” the Wolfhound explained. “They call it [Giants Causeway](#).”

“The same Fionn that created the lake and watched from the cave?” asked Jane, raising her eyebrows in disbelief.

“Yes, the very same.”

Robert was more interested in the story. “Who won the fight?” he asked.

“They didn’t fight,” answered the Wolfhound.



“Oh,” Robert was disappointed.

“It turns out the Scottish giant Brenendonar was much bigger and stronger than Fionn. So Fionn and his wife managed to trick the huge giant. He ran scared back to Scotland ripping up the causeway as he went.”

“Sometimes brains are good too,” James said with a quiet smile on his face.

Robert pulled a face but smiled, “Let’s go explore!”

The kids spent the day clamoring on the rocks. The Wolfhound kept running around barking at them trying to keep them safe. Some of the rock columns were over 30 feet high!



They sat on the rocks and looked out to the water when they stopped to eat lunch. The view was surreal. Susan dabbed calendula on all the little scrapes.



“Lets get your map out,” suggested the Wolfhound. They all looked at the map, then at the Wolfhound.



“Here,” he said, putting a dry paw on the very top of the map. “This is where we are.” James made a notation, including their boat from yesterday. For once the Wolfhound didn’t leave a big pawprint.

“Wow, I can’t believe we finally found these, after all this time looking!” exclaimed Susan.

“It was definitely worth the wait!” said Jane

“These rocks are fun!” said Robert joining in.

“We have everything now!” said James suddenly. “We can go home!”

With the realization that the adventure was soon to be over, all the children became silent. Exploring Ireland had been so much fun, but they missed their families, and they knew they would miss the Wolfhound.

Dinner that night was quiet. Each of them spent a little time sitting next to the Wolfhound with sad eyes but excited hearts.

Day Thirteen – Beltany Stone Circle

The next morning found them once again by rocks. For the first time in thirteen days they knew exactly where they were: Beltany Stone Circle, right back where they started.



The druid was still there, once again cooking salmon over a fire. Just like the first morning, he invited them over to have some salmon to eat. It seemed eerie, as if no time had passed at all.

“We have everything,” Susan pulled out pressed ragged robins from her journal and handed them to the druid. Jane gave him the wood from the blackthorn bush. James had the four acorns and gave them to the druid as well. Robert pulled out his map and showed him the location of Giants Causeway.

“And the friendship of the red deer?” asked the Druid. The children told him the story of helping the young deer find her herd again. He nodded as silence descended on them. After many moments of stillness, the druid broke the silence.

“Why so quiet?”

“It’s our last day,” sighed Susan.

“I thought you wanted to get home?” said the Druid.

“We do, or I do, it’s just...” James had a hard time finishing his sentence.

“We are going to miss the Wolfhound!” cried Jane.

“And exploring Ireland!” added Robert.

Suddenly all four children were talking at once. They loved the adventure, but they missed their families and wanted to go home, but they wanted to stay. The Druid sat quietly and let the children exhaust their words. After several minutes of quiet, the druid spoke.

“Life is like that,” he said. “Many transitions in your life may seem bittersweet. You are ready for the next part of life but don’t want to leave the one you are in.

The children looked sad.

The druid became quiet and watched the children. He then closed his eyes and drew in several deep breaths. Opening his eyes, the druid reached out his hand. A small white creature landed on his finger. The druid put one finger to his lips in the quiet gesture. The children silently looked at the little creature on his finger.



It wore a spotted white cloak, with white fur on the top of its head moving down its back. After several minutes, the spotted cloak spread out. What looked like a cloak was actually wings.

“Is that a faery queen?” asked Susan in awe.

“This is a [white ermine moth](#),” answered the Druid. “You can only see them from May – July. They are quite regal.

“This is a creature that has some transitions. It stays an egg between four and five days, then hatches into a tiny caterpillar. For the next 25 days it eats and grows as fast as it can. Then it races around looking for a good spot to winter. It

winters in a cocoon until May. During that time, it changes completely from a caterpillar into this beautiful moth.”

The little creature began to flutter around the druid, then flew away.

“So you see,” continued the druid, “all creatures have transitions. You are experiencing one right now. But the magic of Ireland will follow you.”

“How?” asked James

The druid reached in his pocket and handed Jane a four-leaf clover.



“The magic of Ireland is not contained on this island,” continued the Druid shaking his head. “It is a small part of the bigger magic in all the world. You are already magical just because you are you. You carry that with you everywhere you

go. What you have learned here, what you have experienced, will be a part of you always. What you do with it is up to you.”

The children were quiet thinking through all the druid had said.

Looking at the Wolfhound, the children noticed he hadn't talked all morning. The Druid smiled.



“I couldn't send you home being able to communicate with animals. People would think you all crazy.”

The Wolfhound gazed at them. They seemed to be able to understand him now, even without the gift of animal speak.

They spent the day chatting with the druid and hanging out with the Wolfhound. They walked around the stone circle marveling at how large the stones were. That night they

changed back into their pajamas and gave their travelling packs to the druid.

“Well,” said the druid as he tucked them in their sleeping bags that night, “this is it. You will be home when you wake in the morning. It was an honor to help you.”

“Thank you,” said James

“Yes, for being here at the beginning and the end,” said Jane.

“For letting us know what to find in order to get home,” said Susan.

“For introducing us to the Wolfhound,” added Robert.

“I wasn’t scared with the Wolfhound around,” Susan added.

“This was such an amazing experience,” said James, “We are so appreciative of your help and the Wolfhound’s.”

The Wolfhound went to each of them and licked their face. Exhausted, the children fell asleep.

Day Fourteen – Home Again

Sure enough, the next morning each child woke up in their own bed, in their own time. In fact, not even a single day had passed. Was it just a dream?

Never had each of the four friends gotten out of bed so quickly. They each raced around their homes in search of family for big hugs. Their parents were surprised but hugged them back. All four were ready for school early, to share with each other the strange but wonderful dream.

The next time the four children saw each other was at recess. Each seemed a little shy, what seemed so real now seemed fanciful.

Finally, Robert dropped the soccer ball the four of them had been playing with. “Okay, I had the weirdest dream, and all of you were in it. I can’t seem to stop thinking about it.”



“I did too!” exclaimed Jane, “we looked all over Ireland for...”

“A ragged robin!” said Susan with wide eyes.

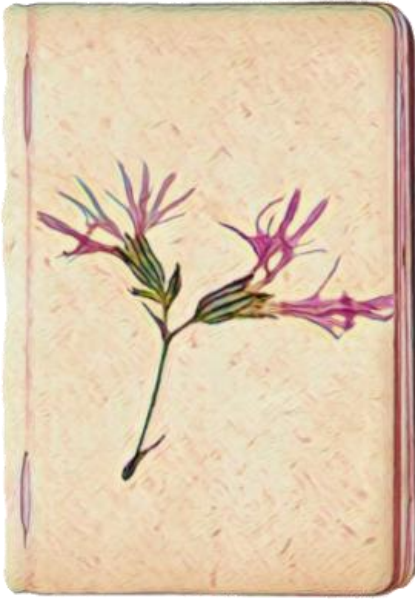
“Hexagon rocks,” whispered James.

The four children stared at each other, play forgotten. How was it possible?

That afternoon their teacher brought in a friend so the kids could see and play with her dog. The kids all went out to the playground. The dog was an Irish wolfhound! He made his rounds to all the children. The teacher’s friend told them about Irish wolfhounds showing how big they were. Of course, the kids already knew.

As they left, the wolfhound turned around, looked at each of the four friends, and... winked?

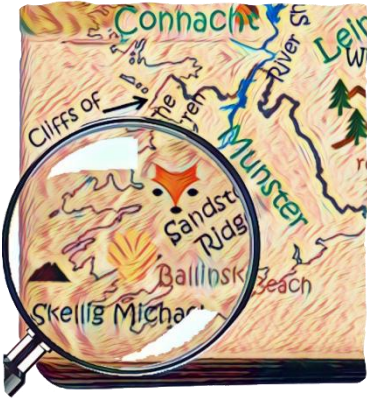
Epilogue



Years later, when Susan most needed encouragement, she found a perfectly pressed ragged robin in an old journal. It was what she needed to complete her studies in herbalism.

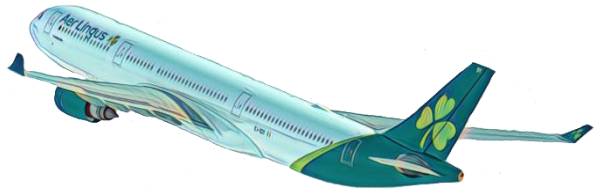
Jane never seemed to lose her ability to understand animals, although she never talked about it. She became a veterinarian. Susan guessed her secret. When asked if she ate the salmon on the last day... Jane simply smiled and shook her head.





James decided the whole thing had been a dream. He became a forensic scientist. One day he found an old journal in the attic with a map of their adventures. For fun, he tested the bit of dirt from the Wolfhound's paw print. The test showed it came from Ireland.

Robert never doubted. He drew on the memories when he needed a little magic. And when he needed a little more... he booked a plane ticket to Ireland.



Resources:

Wildflowers: <http://www.wildflowersofireland.net/>

Geology: <https://www.gsi.ie/en-ie/geoscience-topics/geology/Pages/Geology-of-Ireland.aspx>

Birds: <https://birdwatchireland.ie/>

Botanical Map: <http://bsbi.org/maps?taxonid=2cd4p9h.cfv>

Mammals: <https://www.vincentwildlife.ie/species-overview>

Ask About Ireland: <http://www.askaboutireland.ie/>

ⁱ Good morning, children

ⁱⁱ You are here by magic. Come and eat. It will make more sense.

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^{iv} Art based on photo by Trish Steel [CC BY-SA 2.0
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^v Art based on photo by Sylvia Duckworth / Red Squirrel

^{vi} Art based on photo by Franco Atirador - [1], CC BY-SA 2.5,
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=67803676>

^{vii} Artwork based on photo by Dr Richard Murray / Ragged Robin flower
(*Lychnis flos-cuculi*)

^{viii} Art based on photo by Towel401 [CC BY-SA 4.0
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