



## CHAPTER ONE

KERRY, *Ireland*, 1722

"HE PUT WORMS IN MY HAIR! YOU EXPECT ME TO MARRY HIM, AND he put worms in my hair, Mother!" Faith's voice filled the hall as she sat on the stool at her dressing table and looked at her reflection in the small looking glass that sat atop it. Her deep blue eyes were heavily rimmed with dark circles from lack of sleep over the past week.

"You're going to have to move past that, Faith. It was when you two were mere children. I doubt he will put worms in your hair come your wedding day," Faith's mother, Truly, reassured her as she fixed her daughter's hair, securing it with pins and making sure it was perfect for the dinner they had to attend at the O'Gannigan Keep.

Tonight, was the feast for Brody and Faith, to announce to the clans that the two would be officially bound in matrimony come the next new moon.

"Mother..." Faith hissed as Truly tugged on her red curls, still securing them.

"Oh, I'm sorry, dear. Just let me finish this."

"I refuse to do it. I refuse to marry him." Faith stomped her foot under the table and squirmed on the small stool.

"We have settled it. You have no choice. Your father made the deal with Declan O'Gannigan, and Brody will have you for his bride." At that Faith spun in her seat, turning to face her mother, and glare at her.

"He is distasteful. I hate him!" she shouted at her as she rose and stormed toward the door.

"Faith Elizabeth Kelly! Get back here this instant!" Truly chastised her daughter, stopping her in her tracks as she made her way to the door.

Her skirts swirled around her as she turned back, fire filling her eyes. Faith stared her mother down. Not for the first time this afternoon. "You can't make me go, Mother," her words coming out through gritted teeth.

"I can." The deep booming voice from behind her sent a chill through her gut and Faith rolled her eyes as she turned to face her father in the doorway.

"But Da' I hate him. I don't want to marry him," she cooed at her father as she took a step toward him, softening her features, attempting to look every bit his little girl.

"You're eighteen, Faith. I have settled it. The clan needs this. When the O'Gannigans came to me and asked for your hand, what they offered, I couldn't turn them down. Without it, the Keep will be ruined. Brody is a good boy. He is only two years your senior and you two will be well matched." Ronan Kelly told his daughter, taking a step toward her, his massive form filling the small room.

"Da'," Faith whined out to him. "He put worms in my hair!" It was still her only protest. At least the only one she had the nerve to voice. She couldn't explain it. She had hated him her entire life, been repelled by him. He was utterly detestable, had always teased her when they played in the courtyard together.

Told the other children to tease her as well, put bugs in her

hair on the regular, and one time, when she was nearly twelve, he insisted that she kiss him behind the stables. She knew she couldn't go on with those examples. Her father was right, he had settled it. Agreed to give her hand in marriage to Brody O'Gannigan, mere days after her eighteenth birthday, and a short fortnight later they were to announce it to the clans. By the next new moon they would be married and they would cart her off to live in the O'Gannigan Keep, with dare she say it, her arch nemesis.

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"SHE IS A NINNY!" THE WORDS ECHOED OFF THE STONE WALLS OF the great hall as Brody paced the length of it between his brothers. "I can't believe Da' did this."

"She is your mate. He had no choice," Seamus, his oldest brother, tried to reassure him again.

"We donn'a know that! Maybe the magic is wrong. You're older than me. Why have you not yet found yours? Is there not some order of things? How can we be certain of this?"

His boots echoed as he stormed in the opposite direction again, a petulant child throwing a tantrum. The flurry of activity in the Keep carried on around them as the staff and family prepared for the feast that was to be held in celebration of the announcement. Brody did not see it as a celebration, he saw it as a life sentence of unhappiness. A detestable end to what has been a horrid relationship with a woman whom he has despised nearly his entire life.

"A stuck-up ninny," Brody muttered to himself as he continued to pace.

"Da' is not wrong, the magic is not wrong," Seamus called to him across the hall.

"Well, I don't feel it, I donn'a believe it!" he shot back at his brother, the rest of them stayed quiet, observing the two, not a

word was spoken from Cormac, or Torin as they watched their brothers carry on the discussion. It was the same as it had been the day before, and the day before that. Brody had been having this argument with Seamus and Declan, their father, for nearly a fortnight. They were over it, over the constant protests from Brody about the marriage that their parents had arranged for him.

“What if I don’t want a mate?” The thought only just coming to Brody for the first time. He turned to his brothers, waiting for one of them, any of them, to agree.

“You have no choice.” Declan’s voice filled the space as he entered the hall. “The magic chooses for you. She is your mate. Regardless of what you want, whether you want it. I have made her father an outrageous offer he could not refuse, and Faith Kelly is to be your wife. End of discussion, Brody.”

As Brody turned to face his father, he could feel his heart drop, could tell that he had no other options. His father would hear no argument. There was no changing his mind.

“I will not marry her.” His last attempt at defiance fell on deaf ears.

“Go get ready. They will be here within the hour. You will put on a smile and treat the lass how she deserves to be treated as your future wife.” His father had spoken, his command clear. Brody had no choice in the matter.

“I will not like it!” Brody called after his father as he watched him leave the great hall.

“No one said they expect you to, lad.” The words floated toward him, and he turned, giving his brothers another sullen look.

“Maybe she will be good in the sack.” Torin wiggled his eyebrows at his brother and received an elbow in the ribs from Cormac for it.

“I doubt it. She is cold and heartless. It will most likely be like fucking a dead fish,” Brody muttered under his breath as he

## FINDING FAITH

left the hall, climbing the stairs to the second floor to prepare himself for what he was seeing as his own funeral.

This was it, the end of his life, the end of his fun. It was over. The years he had spent gallivanting were through, and not because he was settling down with a woman he loved, but because his father strapped him to a cold, heartless wench he would hate.