

# CHAPTER ONE



The grandmother clock chimed midnight in the hallway below my bedroom, and I whispered my first birthday wish, “No shoveling, no shoveling, no shoveling.” The odd shadows cast by the yard light made it seem as though the snowflakes spiraled backward into the sky. Leaning closer to the frosty pane, I was relieved to see only a thin layer of snow on the ground – not enough to shovel, but, thankfully, enough to hide the ashes that had once been our Yule tree.

The tree had been part of our winter solstice celebration on December 21. Twelve days later Mom always burned the tree on top of the herb garden. I was grateful she chose to perform this little ritual in the backyard instead of the front yard where everyone could see, and now at least the ash pile was covered with new snow. Our neighbors knew we didn’t celebrate the same holidays as they did, but I didn’t think there was any point in drawing attention to that fact.

With the exception of torching our tree – and yeah, I knew it was a big exception – I liked to imagine our Yule celebration was like everyone else’s Christmas. It was one of the few times during the year when I felt like I fit in.

As my breath slowly fogged my view of the backyard, Mom popped her head into my room. “Happy Birthday, Brigit Blaise Quinn. It’s getting late, but I’m glad you’re still awake. I have a present I want to give you.”

“What? Now?” My birthday was only a minute old.

Mom carried a wooden box into my room. Her cheeks were pink and her eyes sparkled with excitement. "I've waited years to give this to you. My mother gave it to me on my fifteenth birthday, and now it's my turn to pass it on to you." She sat on the edge of my bed, and I maneuvered out of my comforter to perch next to her.

"Obviously, you know we follow a different path than most people," Mom continued.

I nearly snorted at her understatement that the Pagan religion she followed (and I tolerated) was a simple life-style choice.

She paused and seemed to search for the right words. "You remember the story I told you about the Tuatha de Danann, the ancient Irish tribe?"

"Sure, I like that story." The magical tales about the mythological founding tribes of Ireland who built all the stone circles were my favorites.

"Right, but the thing is – the Tuatha aren't a myth. They really existed."

"It's not just a legend?"

"No, it's not. They ruled Ireland four thousand years ago, until they were defeated and banished to the mountains."

"Okay." I shrugged my shoulders, confused why this was important.

"There are some people who can still trace their lineage back to the Tuatha and that includes us. We're their descendants."

I didn't understand why she was making a big deal about this. "Everyone's descended from someone, right?" And then I had a neat thought. "Wait! Does this make me royalty? Are you going to tell me I'm a princess?" Now that would be a really great birthday present.

She smiled at my suggestion. "No, this doesn't make you a princess, but being a descendant of the Tuatha is exciting in a different way."

She shifted the box onto my lap and said, "We can learn a lot from our ancestors."

Curious, I ran my hand over the intricate carvings on the lid and grasped the heavy metal clasp. It was obviously very old. When I flipped it open, the hinges actually creaked. Inside was a thick book with a sturdy brown leather cover, worn around the edges. I took it out, but, before I could open it to see what was inside, Mom covered my hands with hers and said,

“You’re old enough to know. This is your history, where you are from, and who you could be if you choose it.”

Puzzled by her strange message and sudden seriousness, I waited for her to pull her hands away, and when she did, I turned to the first page. Although the script was hard to read, I made out the name Onora Quinn and the date September 19, 1324.

“Someone really wrote in this book nearly seven hundred years ago? There’s no way it could have lasted this long.” I squinted hard at the old page.

“It has survived against all odds, so treat it gently. Onora was your twenty-fifth great-grandmother and the first of the Tuatha to record her story in written form. This book has been passed down to each generation, and now it’s yours.” She looked a little sad for a moment and then warned. “Don’t stay up too late reading.”

But, of course, I did.