

Copyright

The Kinnear Chronicles, Books 1 & 2

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Author's Note

Yes, friends, we've been here before. Sort of.

As a self-published author, I've been given an opportunity that many authors only get late in their careers...to go back and fix mistakes, then publish a new, revised edition.

Some of you are aware that I was always a bit ambivalent about publishing *Family Ties* and *Thicker than Blood* as two separate novels. They are, after all, halves of a single story, and I made (intentionally and unintentionally) changes to nomenclature and structure between the two books which have caused some confusion.

I'm sorry!

So, here we are again...but the content has been cleaned up (to my relief in many cases), many little mistakes have been corrected, and the story is being presented as a single volume. I'm keeping it divided into two parts, mainly because it meant less mucking with the story, which I didn't want to change dramatically. But now you can, at last, go straight into part 2...no more cliff-hanger (which I understand frustrated many people).

On the lighter side, this process also gave me the opportunity to go through and gather up the loose threads and start to formulate plots from them. So keep your ear to the ground. Alys's story is far from over.

More information about Alys's world can be found at my website, <http://www.joshsanofsky.com>. Also, if you'd like to ask Alys (or Athena, or Artemis) a question, feel free to email me at askalys@joshsanofsky.com. I'll make sure the message gets to her, and post answers on my blog (<http://www.igrokthis.com>) as I hear back from her.

Josh Sanofsky

10/15/2015

Dedication

Perhaps I should call this a re-dedication, instead. Therefore, I give you the people who made this possible:

My best friend Nate, without whom Alys's world would never have been molded into a usable shape. Neither its rules, physical, metaphysical, magical and legal, nor its concepts of warfare and armament, law enforcement, and the standing of wizards in a modern society.

My parents, Aaron and Barbara, who introduced me to science fiction and fantasy, and whose encouragement kept me going when the story was struggling.

My beta readers, Holly, Stephanie and Mandy, for their help in wearing away the rough edges.

My editor, Rachel, for breaking my overuse of ellipses at great personal risk. This book wouldn't be nearly as readable without her input.

My line-art and promotional artist, Rilla Bailey, who brought Alys, Athena and Artemis to life so wonderfully.

Finally, my feline overlords, Jake and Elwood, without whom Artemis wouldn't be who she is. Whenever I need inspiration for her actions or dialog, I look to them...and they graciously provide. In exchange for an extra brushing or a few extra treats, of course.

Part 1: Family Ties

Chapter 1



I had changed quite a lot since I left home to study magic under the tutelage of Wizard Jonathan Tremane. After all, I was barely thirteen when I left for Dublin in 1975. You change as you grow up, and there's no way to stop it. I had left my nameless little suburb of Killarney a timid, shy little waif and had returned ten years later (except for brief visits for Yule every year) a self-confident young woman with a somewhat cynical opinion of people in general.

I blame that on Master Tremane, at least in part. My mom is an endlessly forgiving woman, after all, and I have little tolerance for idiots and jerks.

The man who'd confronted me upon my return had both traits. In abundance.

"Alys Kinnear," the High Druid proclaimed, his glance taking in the members of the Eiré Druid Council who flanked him, "You no longer have any place amongst us." High Druid Fergus Leamhnach was a tall, thickly-built man in his early seventies, with iron-grey hair and a matching bristly beard that came down to his chest. His eyes were dark and glittering as they fixed on me. He was only the High Druid of Éire, but he behaved as if all the druids in the world were under his watchful eye. Admittedly, he did have a lot of influence amongst druids all over Albion, but probably not nearly as much as he thought.

He was also an idiot. And a jerk. Remember? Little tolerance. But both my mom and Master Tremane raised me to be polite and respectful, so I sucked it up and remained silent and stoic.

When I didn't respond right away, he continued. "We take no pleasure in this proclamation, but as a Hermetic mage you do not belong in this community."

Oh, give me a break. There were reasons other than my being a Hermetic mage that they didn't want me in this community, but actually stating them aloud would prove how much of a bigot he was. I bit the inside of my cheek to keep from saying anything.

"You are a distraction to your mother," Druidess Fianna Somerled added, wisps of her frizzled gray-streaked hair poking out around her cowl. "Deirdre has worked hard to repent of and rise above the youthful

indiscretion that resulted in...*you*." Her lip curled as she spoke the last word. "Your presence among us is only an unwelcome reminder of that mistake."

I stiffened a little, my right hand tightening around my staff. I guess they *were* going to say it aloud.

Druidess Somerled had always borne some weird sort of grudge against my mother and me, as if the question of my parentage was a personal affront. Of course, it might not be that weird...by the time I was twelve, I'd overheard plenty of people in town commenting on my mother's 'indiscretion' and how scandalous it was not knowing who my father was.

One of the benefits of being an isolated kid: you have plenty of time to observe people, and no one notices when you're there.

"You are *visibly* an outsider," the High Druid agreed, looking down his nose at me.

Surrounded as I was by dark-eyed and tanned-skinned Celts with red, brown, and black hair, my pale golden hair, light skin and bright golden eyes - not to mention my subtly-pointed ears - certainly drew attention. I couldn't argue that. Still, that was a pretty horrifically rude thing to say to someone. The wood of my staff creaked a little as my fingers tightened around it, but I kept my face impassive.

Druidess Somerled nodded, her eyes narrowed in vicious triumph. "That dalliance has already made your mother unweddable in our community. Do not compound her errors by insisting on remaining among us."

"But it is more than just your mother's well-being that concerns us," Druidess Siobhan Murley said softly. "Your uncertain lineage produces unsettling questions and we want no part of it. The old geas still stands."

If I was being honest, and I was trying to be, I could see how that might be a problem. The Sidhe could, by all accounts, be extremely touchy about their agreements being bent and broken. But saying I was an outsider was uncalled for. My father might not have been a Druid—or even human, for that matter—but this stupid little town had been my home all my life.

"Finally," Druidess Somerled said, "There is the matter of the prophecy we feel refers to you. For the safety of the community, it must not be allowed to come to pass, so you must depart."

Prophecy? That was a new twist. I'd have to ask Mom. I wasn't going to give the Council the satisfaction of pleading for information, but I also wasn't going to stand there and allow them to insult me. I kept my expression carefully neutral, but I'd had quite enough of this.

"There's no need for name calling and rude implications, High Druid," I replied, putting an ounce of polite condescension in my voice as I repressed the urge to grind my teeth. Rise above, Alys, rise above. Remain calm.

Making a scene wouldn't solve anything and I'd feel stupid about it later if I did. "I merely came to say farewell to my mother and collect my few belongings before departing for Albion."

They both bristled. Literally in the High Druid's case. I swear his beard visibly shifted and stiffened. In my experience, there were few people in the world worse at hiding their emotions than Druids - with the possible exception of Tantric mages. I don't think I'll ever forgive Master Tremane for sending me to *those* lessons without any kind of warning.

"Young lady," the High Druid began, but I cut him off by raising my free hand in a gesture of submission. One did not cut off the High Druid lightly or with impunity, so I was certain it would further infuriate him. How could I not interrupt him? It was too much fun.

Look, I'm not a petty person by nature, but everybody has limits. My patience had been sorely strained, doubly so since they'd waylaid me coming into town. They'd actually been waiting for me so they could deliver this oh-so-polite edict.

Gits.

"High Druid, Druids of the Council," I intoned, mocking them with my gravitas, "I will depart this very day." I let my staff fall against the inside of my elbow as I clasped my left fist in my right palm and bowed over my hands. "Walk in harmony with nature."

The posture of my salute was a Hermetic tradition, representing the forces of Anima - of magic - under human control. The words were a traditional Druid phrase for partings, and it seemed to mollify them a little - or at least shut them up - as I turned and strode away.

They didn't offer me the same politeness in return.

In spite of everything, I loved my hometown. Being a community with an unusually high concentration of Druid residents, it seemed to exist in harmony with nature. There wasn't a park, because the houses and buildings had plenty of room between them for growing things, and there were trees everywhere. The buildings themselves appeared to be mostly rough-cut stone and wood, though there were many these days that were made of brick instead of stone.

Every house had a garden and was generously adorned with flowering plants. There were well cared-for cats and dogs on every street, and sheep, goats and chickens were often kept by individual households for various reasons.

It was, in a word, rustic. Or perhaps quaint. Somewhere in between the two.

But as much as I loved the town's ambiance, its inhabitants had not been kind to me. Even when I'm not being completely honest with myself, I

have to admit that I am an oddity in Éire. Talent as a Hermetic mage isn't unheard of on the Emerald Isle, but it is rare. Combined with my unusual appearance, it had made my childhood awkward at best. I had learned young that the world was not always a kind and generous place, and that people could be insensitive and rude without meaning to be.

They could also be *intentionally* insensitive and rude. I had just walked away from such an incident.

But I try not to dwell on my childhood. Doing so accomplished nothing, and I had long-since learned to ignore what people who don't really know me have to say about me.

My mother, bless her, was offended on my behalf.

"I can't believe they treated you that way!" she exclaimed, after I had settled in her kitchen with a mug of cocoa and she'd persisted in finding out why I was out of sorts.

I smiled at her. "It's all right, Mom. I knew when I left Dublin that I probably wouldn't be staying here long. And I really don't want to make things harder for you."

She shook her head and pulled me into her arms, hugging me tight. "Don't be silly, girl. None of this is your fault, it's mine. It's not right that you should have to pay for my mistakes."

I returned her hug and sighed. "It's not your fault either, mom. If what Master Tremane thinks is true, you probably didn't have any choice in the matter."

She took a step back, her hands resting on my shoulders as she looked me over with a concerned frown, and I wondered again who my father was. I had to take after him, because honestly, she and I couldn't have been any less alike if we had tried.

My mother is an embodiment of the archetypal Irish beauty: fiery red hair, tanned skin, piercing green eyes, and a heart-shaped face. She stands about a half a head taller than me, and is...well, I suppose putting it politely wouldn't suit either of us well. She may be forgiving, but she's as blunt and to the point as I am. So, to be blunt, she's stacked. Rather spectacularly.

I'm a svelte little thing, and all manner of pale shades. My facial features don't even bear much resemblance to hers.

"I suppose Master Tremane could be right," she said at last, smiling sadly as she ran a hand along my temple and brushed back my hair. "Your father might have been of the Sidhe. Wouldn't that be something!" She smiled, and her eyes went distant and unfocused. "He *was* a rather spectacular lover, as I recall."

"Mom!" I did not want to hear about that.

She laughed and patted my cheek. "You're a good girl, and I'm very proud of you. Where will you go?"

"London," I replied. "Master Tremane gave me a letter of introduction to a friend of his, who might be willing to let me work for him while I study to become a full Wizard."

She sighed. "London. Do be careful, dearest." She kissed my forehead gently.

"I will be, Mom. That reminds me," I snapped my fingers. "Druidess Somerled, - " mom rolled her eyes, but didn't say anything, so I continued, " - said something about a prophecy?"

"A prophecy?" she repeated blankly. "About you?"

I nodded. "She said something about how it couldn't be allowed to come to pass, so I had to leave the village."

Mom shook her head. "I'm not aware of one, but it's not unheard of for the rest of the Council to neglect to tell me important things that're going on. I'm the lowest ranking member of the Council, even if I am the most approachable." She smirked.

I sighed. "I didn't want to ask. It's not like they'd've told me anything anyway, and I'm not about to beg them for anything."

"I don't blame you, honey." It was her turn to sigh. Then she smiled. "I'll see if I can get anything out of them. I doubt it, but if I learn anything about a prophecy regarding you, I'll let you know. Keep your eyes open for a Sending."

A Sending was a magical form of communication, whereby the caster created a temporary magical construct in the form of an animal - mom liked to make owls - and sent it to deliver a message. They were popular, because it didn't take a huge amount of energy to do, and the message reached its recipient within just a few minutes, as opposed to the weeks a letter could take.

Not to mention the problems that had occurred with the Merfolk colonies when the idea of laying telegraph (and later telephone) wires underwater was tossed around in the 1890s and again in the 1940s. It wasn't until I studied the history of those incidents that I understood precisely how wide-spread those colonies are and just how many Merfolk there are living in the oceans. Needless to say, they were simply not happy with the idea. Negotiations are ongoing, probably interminably.

"I will, Mom."

"And I expect to see one of your leopards at least once a week." She raised her eyebrows and smiled. "At least until you get settled in somewhere. Okay?"

"Okay." I grinned. When I cast a Sending, I favor large felines, especially leopards. Master Tremane thinks they're ostentatious (this from a man whose Sendings take the form of hunting hawks), but my mother likes them and so do I. "But don't worry about me, Mom. I'm a big girl: I can take care of myself."

She sighed and shook her head. "When did you grow up?"

I laughed. "You tell me."

She hugged me, sighing again. "I missed too much of your youth. And it'll probably be a while before we see each other again, won't it."

I held onto her tightly. "Probably. But maybe not."

She let go of me and smiled sadly. "I know it's for the best, but I hate it. You'll stay for supper at least, won't you?"

"Are you sure the High Druid won't pitch a fit?" I asked with a smirk.

"Oh, he probably will. But he's never had any children and he doesn't get to tell me what to do with mine," she answered, standing back, all business now. "We need to repack your clothes and the gear for your trip, don't we? I have just the bag for the job, too." She turned and hurried across the kitchen, clearly excited, while I looked on in amused curiosity.

The bag in question turned out to be a satchel with two main sections under a flap. The outside of the satchel was covered with pouches and pockets.

"What is it?" I asked. I could sense the magic in it as soon as she took it out of the chest.

"Something my mother made for me a long time ago, when I was doing *my* training. It's a Bottomless Bag."

I whistled softly. "Really? But aren't those usually pretty expensive?"

She laughed. "Usually. But this one was home-made, and it's not quite as bottomless as most. It's more than large enough to carry all of your clothes and other gear, though. You can even put your staff in one of the outside pouches so you can get to it quickly without having to carry it around all the time!"

"Mom, this is..." I didn't know what to say, a little overwhelmed by such an unexpected gift. This bag would make my life infinitely easier, especially if I was going to be traveling a lot.

She smiled. "I don't have much use for it anymore, and you'll probably put it to better use than I ever did." She pushed it into my hands gently. "It's yours now, love. A going-away present." She pressed her lips together and gave me a tight smile. "There isn't a whole lot else I can give you, except healing salves and other first-aid supplies."

"Which I will gladly take," I agreed with a smile, clutching the bag. "Thanks, Mom. It means a *lot* to me."

"Come on, let's go pack it!" she said, and I laughed as she led the way to my old bedroom.

The room had not changed significantly since I was thirteen. After all, I hardly spent any time there other than a few days now and then. As such, it was a reflection of the little girl I'd been. It was a sea of pinks and purples, littered with ponies, unicorns, brightly colored pixies, and stuffed animals of every shape and description. I really, really needed to clear the room out one of these days. But it had a beautiful little fireplace that threw a cozy amount of heat during the winter, and a bed that had been huge for me then and still felt that way even now.

I began to repack my things from my military-style duffle bag, putting them into the bottomless bag while Mom sat beside my stuff on the bed, folding each piece of clothing before handing it to me.

"What're your travel plans?" she asked.

"Beyond getting to London," I answered, "I don't have a clear plan of action. Airship to the city, then find the man Master Tremane gave me the letter of introduction to."

"What're you going to do when you get there?" she asked, handing me a pair of leather trousers.

"Find work," I said simply. "A lot of young mages take jobs guarding private citizens or doing security for businesses. The money is good, and you get to travel. I'd love to see the world. If I'm lucky, Master Tremane's friend will need an assistant and won't mind taking on a student."

She nodded wistfully. "I always wanted to get away and travel myself, but I never could. You'll tell me all about what you're doing in your Sendings, won't you?"

"I'll bore you to tears with the details," I joked.

She laughed. "Good! Are you going to get a familiar?"

"I'd like to," I said, admiring the way the bag never seemed to get any bigger as I put things in it. "But I don't know what yet."

"Probably a large cat of some sort," she teased. "Will you have it Elevated?"

"I really don't know," I said with a shrug. "The wizards who offer that sort of service charge a lot of money, Mom. And I don't know if I could do the Elevation ritual myself yet. I studied it, but obviously I've never tried it before. I haven't even witnessed it being done."

"But wouldn't it be nice to have an assistant who could do nearly everything you could?" Mom asked. "Becoming a full Wizard isn't an easy goal to achieve, dearest. From what I've heard it can be something of a psychological gauntlet, as well an intellectual one, and having a trusted

companion along could make a big difference. Even a normal familiar would be a big help to you, wouldn't it?"

I nodded. "I suppose we'll see what happens. It might be a while before I can find the right one. Each type of familiar has its advantages, after all."

She nodded. "I keep meaning to find a nice owl to keep me company. Maybe now I will."

"You should. I hate the idea of you being here all alone."

"I'm hardly alone," she said dryly. "Not with the other members of the Council watching me and waiting for me to slip up and make another 'mistake.'"

I grimaced. "I'm really tired of being called a mistake."

She sat up a little straighter. "Ignore them. You're the best thing that ever happened to me, and I refuse to think of you as anything but a wonderful gift." She sighed in a dreamy sort of way. "It's an experience I'll never forget, and I really don't want to. You know, the more I think about it, the more I agree with Master Tremane. Your father must've been a Sidhe Lord. That makes you even more special, whether the Council wants to admit it or not. There aren't many changelings in the world."

"I suppose," I said uncertainly.

"Are you going to try to find your father?" She asked the question quietly, but with a tone to her voice that I didn't quite understand. Was she worried that I *would* find my father? Hopeful that I'd find him and bring him home to her? Both?

I was silent for a minute as I finished putting my clothes into the bag.

"I don't know," I finally answered. "Maybe. Part of me wants to, just to know who he was. Another part of me doesn't want to have anything to do with someone who would take a woman for his own amusement and then never see her again." Or inquire after any children that might result.

"It's their nature, love," she said softly. "If you know anything about the Sidhe, you know how flighty they can be."

The Sidhe are a bit difficult to explain, and a lot of the information we have on them is questionable at best. They are similar to humans in many ways, except that where humans use magic, the Sidhe are creatures *of* magic. They live primarily in what we consider to be the spirit world - a dimension that sits along side ours and connects to it at many points. They can access the energy of magic directly and effortlessly. It sustains them, to the point where they don't have to eat or breathe unless they feel like it (which they usually do, because let's face it: eating is fun, and you can't talk without breathing, and they enjoy doing both). Magic keeps them from aging, thus making them effectively immortal. And they look...

An awful lot like me, actually. The High Sidhe do, at least. Their society/culture is complex, multi-tiered, might rely on a caste system, and frankly we don't know a whole lot about it. The High Sidhe, also called Sidhe Lords, are often golden-haired and pale-skinned, with oddly-colored eyes and pointed ears. They tend to be a bit shorter than humans, though some do grow taller - their height seems to depend on their standing and importance in their community.

But as a whole, they don't like humans very much. They call us messy and noisy, and tend not to involve themselves in mortal affairs very often. And when they do, it's rarely out of the goodness of their hearts. They make deals in the same way we breathe; constantly and effortlessly, and nothing seems to bring them more joy than putting one over on some stupid mortal.

They can - and sometimes do - reproduce with humans. Their offspring are known as halfplings or changelings, and usually have the best traits of both parents. Which is to say, the open-mindedness and flexibility of humans with the innate power and long life of the Sidhe.

I try not to think about how long I'm likely to live, assuming my father actually was a Sidhe Lord. Barring death by violence or disease, I could live...a very long time. It gives me the creeps.

I nodded. "I know it's their nature, Mom. That doesn't make it right."

She smiled slightly. "Well, just be careful if you do end up dealing with them."

"I will be, Mom, but I really don't intend to have any contact with them, if I can help it."

She chuckled softly. "Just remember that they don't always give *you* the choice."

I nodded and remained silent for a minute as I packed, trying to think of the right way to phrase my next question. "Have you thought about leaving the Council and moving away?"

My mother paused in folding a heavy fur-lined winter cloak and stood staring out the window. After a moment, she sighed. "I won't lie to you, I've thought about doing both things. But I have nowhere to go and nobody to help me get my feet under me if I leave. Maybe if I had someone to help, but..." She shook her head and smiled. "My place is here, I suppose. Keeping the home fires burning for you."

After that statement, we both tried to keep dinner light and happy, but there was a definite air of melancholy during dinner. Both of us knew that it would likely be some time before we saw one another again. Mom had pulled out all the stops, making some of my favorite dishes - which that night included a savory venison stew in freshly baked bread bowls - and continuing to talk about my plans for the future.

"Where would you like to be in ten years?" she asked.

"In Vinland, maybe," I answered. "Master Tremane had me study both the Norden Vinlanders and the native tribes. I'd love to meet them; they sound fascinating."

"I hear it's a dangerous place," she replied with a slight frown.

I shrugged. "No more dangerous than any colonized country. And the Vinlanders have made extensive inroads trading with the native tribes. There's sure to be plenty of work to be found there."

"And it's exotic and exciting, and you've always been a sucker for those two things," she teased.

I laughed. "True enough."

"How about in twenty years?" she asked with a smile.

"I want to own a tower on the ocean somewhere, and have a bunch of weird animals and things to keep people away so I can play the mysterious crazy wizard they go to when they need advice." I was joking, of course. I hadn't thought that far ahead.

Mom just chuckled and waved her hand at me.

After dinner, she accompanied me to the door and handed me my new bag. I slung it across my torso and picked up my staff from where it leaned beside the door.

She fussed over the lapels of my calf-length leather coat and sighed. "Stay in touch, honey."

"I will, Mom." I hugged her tightly.

She held onto me until I finally eased up and released her. Then, with a slightly mischievous smile, she pressed a pouch into my free hand.

"What's this?" I asked, frowning in surprise.

"My other present to you. I've been saving since you became a Hermetic apprentice. That should be enough money to buy a familiar. Get something really fantastic."

My vision blurred and I wiped the tears from my eyes before they could fall. "Mom, I - "

She smiled and closed my fingers around the pouch. "You're welcome, honey. Maybe you can bring it home to meet me someday."

"I'll try." I slid the pouch into one of the pockets in my new bag.

We embraced again, held on tightly for a few moments and then she kissed my forehead and turned me to face the night.

"Walk proudly into the future, Alys. I'm very proud of you, and I love you."

"I love you too, Mom."

She gave me a gentle push to get me started, and I strode away from her down the flagstone path. I went through the gate in the low stone wall

and turned around to wave good-bye. She returned my farewell, but - never one to linger - she quickly stepped back inside and closed the door.

I turned, and started walking again, my staff striking the ground every two or three steps. I headed for the train station, to catch a train back to Dublin. From there, I could take an airship to London.

The village didn't feel like home to me anymore, particularly with the hope that my mom would one day leave it. I wondered where she'd go, and if I could make the time to help her find a new place. Maybe, maybe not: my training would be intensive. I was worried for her though; she clearly wasn't happy here, and there wasn't anything I could do. It was, after all, her choice to make.

Then I smiled. I was confident that she would find her own way; she always did. And I knew that no matter where she went, we would always find each other...and then, wherever it was, I would be home.