



CHAPTER TWO:

The Paintings

Drew eased up onto her tip toes, stretched her slender body toward the blue sky and breathed in the delicious morning air; there was a slight breeze carrying the sweet smell of Ireland's wild meadow flowers to her senses. Her eyes drank in the lush green of the hillside overlooking the bend of the Boyne River. She missed the sounds of the whooper swans, but knew they would return in the fall. Until then she would muse at the grunting sounds of the mute swans as they flew overhead toward the river. This was Drew Megan

Campbell's world – the only world she had ever known. Here in this place she was loved, protected, nurtured and fulfilled. She wished everyone in the world could be as safe and loved as she.

Yearnings for any other world had never entered her mind or heart, but her world as she knew it, was about to change.

“How strange, how very strange, yet how beautiful!” she said aloud to herself as she laid out her art supplies on the weathered back garden table. Her father waved from the other side of the garden.

“Top of the morning, my little artist.” Drew waved back absentmindedly, caught up in her wonderment. She had painted the familiar Irish landscape many times, but today there was a very different landscape wafting in her head.

At only fifteen, Drew was already an accomplished artist in her own right. Within the past year, she had had her work exhibited in a solo showing at her local library, and several award pieces now hung in a teen exhibition twenty miles away in the nation's capital of Dublin.

Drew loved watercolors; for her the transparency of the paints washed away the ugliness of the world, and only its true beauty shone through. Painting gave her a sense of peace, wholeness, connection – feelings that she wished truly existed in the hearts of all people all over the world. She rarely watched the news or read the newspaper because world affairs saddened her so. She wished that she could change it all for the better somehow. But what chance would a fifteen-year-old girl have against all the darkness in the world?

This particular morning as Drew's brushes washed across the canvas pad, a very strange and enormous, yet beautiful tree emerged. Its large, shiny green foliage was wrapped with thread-like vines of colorful beads. Sparkling bangles of gold, silver and crystal hung from its limbs, glistening. And glass balls of intricate designs were sprinkled throughout its massive branches, giving the beholder the sense that if touched, the branches would make a most enchanting vibrational sound.

"My goodness, Drew, that's an amazing tree," said her mother as she pushed open the back kitchen screen door a few hours later.

"Your imagination's working overtime this morning."

Caught in the experience, Drew was unaware of Meg's presence. It was as if Drew was actually standing right in front of the large tree, mesmerized by its beauty. Puzzled, Meg shrugged and made her way to the garden to join Tom.

As the days passed, Drew painted in her every spare moment, each of her paintings more intriguing than the last: a wide meadow with a crystal blue river winding through; a forest encampment; stone archways etched with mysterious languages, shapes and symbols; and pathways that seemed to go nowhere. And the faces – oh such beautiful and unusual faces, faces she felt she knew. But how and from where?

Her mind was reeling – her daydreams so vivid. What was happening? she wondered. Where was all this coming from? She felt so alive, so joyous. Sometimes she would paint throughout the night

as the endless, enticing images held her captive.

Drew's parents watched and worried as the weeks passed. Her obsession with this new, inner world was now playing out into her everyday real world. Witnessing her paintings, Meg and Tom feared that the time was drawing near for their precious daughter's walk with destiny – a destiny laid upon Drew by her great-grandfather on the day of her birth. They had hoped and prayed that the task would pass her by. They believed that if Drew were not aware of the myth, it would never come to pass. But these paintings, these faces! Was the Campbell Family Myth closing in on them in spite of their precautions?

Their only comfort was the love and gentleness they could see in the eyes of the many faces Drew painted: an olive-skinned gleeful youth with an elongated head, a kind-faced matronly woman in jeans and an older gentleman with compassionate eyes and a multicolored body. Meg and Tom sensed that whoever these people were, they would protect Drew and teach her how to survive in the mysterious new world she was being drawn to through her paintings.

With her father's help, Drew took down most of the other paintings from her bedroom walls and replaced them with the new wonderland she had created on canvas: the large colorful tree, the forest encampment, the wildflower strewn meadow, the carved stone archways and the amazing faces.

Her bedroom was full of all that she held dear, not an inch of space was wasted. A large floor to ceiling mirror with its many

decorative hooks held her Irish dance awards, tiaras and wigs. Brass wall hooks displayed well-worn ghillies, and jig shoes of all sizes hung by their laces – shoes long-since outgrown, but still cherished. At the base of the large mirror, a scarred wooden platform, built by her dad for her dance practice, covered half the floor. As is typical for a teenage girl, Drew's dresser drawers were stuffed to the brim and overflowing with treasures, bobbles and clothes. White cotton poodle socks crawled out of a woven basket beside her Irish sleigh bed. Her nightstand was strewn with CD's of her favorite pop/rock artist, Irish dance music and a photo of her beloved great-grandfather, Grand. On the other side of the room stood an old wooden easel, splattered with a collage of colors, that once belonged to her great-grandmother, Nana. Paint boxes and glass jars containing brushes of all shapes and sizes were stuffed on the large window seat, along with messy stacks of art paper and canvas pads waiting to be caressed by her paints. Cherished photos hung from the ceiling on varied lengths of brightly-colored satin ribbons – old wonderful black and whites of Grand and Nana, neither of whom had she ever known, but to whom she felt dearness. There were wedding photos of Mum and Dad, an array of childhood, school, dance and art show photos. And there were family holiday snapshots and photos of friends. Her favorite photo was one of her dad nervously holding her on the day she was born. She always teased him that there was more blanket than baby in his arms.

For this vibrant, green eyed, copper-colored curly haired lass, life

was a fast-paced mixture of family, school, dance and painting. Drew was a master of all she pursued and she loved it. Yet she felt a strange new sense of herself emerging – one she knew little about. It was unnerving, yet exciting all at the same time.

One summer evening as she painted, Drew glimpsed herself walking in the forest encampment she had painted; she saw herself under the stone archways talking with other teens as wide-eyed as she. And she saw herself standing in front of the large, decorated tree waiting for permission to venture inside. The amazing faces she had come to know through her art began to speak with her in her head. “Hello, Drew. I am Bezen of Early Earth and this is my son, Mingo,” said the kind-faced lady in jeans as the tall young man nodded his elongated head at her. “We anxiously awaited your arrival,” she finished.

The elderly gentleman with the colorful body introduced himself as Eittod of Tulsun Minor. As his deep echoing voice vibrated into her senses, his crystal blue eyes drew her into his world.

Throughout that night, Drew experienced her two artistic outlets working in tandem as they never had before – painting and dancing in feverous movements – as if she were plugged into the giant tree’s energy source; she glowed and reveled in it.

Oblivious to the old grandfather clock in the downstairs sitting room striking three, Drew was in a reverie. Her hands flew back and forth across the canvas, frenzy-like. Her dancing feet matched the swift tempo of her brush strokes. Sweaty copper curls matted to her

brow and neck, her face apple red. She was in another world far away from her beloved Ireland. Her fanciful musing reached its crescendo and then fell away as quickly as it had come. Drew collapsed across her bed into a deep sleep – finally unplugged.

Breakfast came and went without her, and then lunch time appeared, but still no Drew. Meg and Tom were very aware of her late night painting and dancing sessions, and tried not to interfere with her pleasure. Her art work had certainly moved to a new level; amazing new brush techniques and more vibrant paint mixes were appearing in her work. By mid-afternoon, Meg eased upstairs and quietly opened Drew's bedroom door. She was spread diagonally across the duvet, face down, still in her clothes of the day before. Her mother slipped into the room to take a peek at the new painting on the easel, being careful not to disturb any of the debris strewn about the floor. When Meg reached the easel, the truth of what Drew was experiencing tore deep into her. Tears raced down Meg's face. Panic riveted into every fiber of her being. She fought to hold back the fast-coming screams as she left the room, closing the door quietly behind her.

With a hand clasped tightly to her mouth, Meg ran down the steps, through the house, and out into the back garden beckoning Tom. The back kitchen screen door screeched as it flapped on its hinges behind her.

“Drew knows, Tom! She knows!” Meg screamed through her sobs.

“It's on her easel along with some writing. She knows, Tom!

Somehow she knows. Come quickly, Tom, Drew knows!" Meg waved her hands frantically in the air motioning for Tom to come. Her feet were pounding the earth as she ran in place at the edge of the garden, her apron flapping in the warm afternoon breeze.

Tom hurried from his knees. "Take hold of yourself, Meg!" he called, making his way to her across the garden, brushing dirt from his pants as he went.

"For heaven's sake, what's all this about? Drew knows what?" asked Tom, watching Meg continuing her manic-like movements.

"Meg, calm down!" he begged as he reached out taking hold of her. He hadn't seen Meg this unraveled in fifteen years.

"Her painting!" she gasped, looking for answers in Tom's face.

"Last night Drew painted the carved stone Grand had given her, along with some writing."

"How could that be?" he recoiled. "Drew has never seen it, *never*, Meg! You *know* that!" His eyes darted to the far end of the garden.

"How could she know? It's safe, Meg. Hidden, I tell you, hidden. We both know that!"

Meg shrugged, "I don't know, Tom. I don't know, but it's on her canvas." Meg's arms were again in motion, pounding her fists together in desperation.

"What does the writing say?" he questioned, his heart now pounding hard against his ribs.

"Oh, I don't know, Tom. I was so upset over the painting of the stone that I didn't even take time to read it. Come see for yourself.

She's still asleep. Come! Come quickly!" gasped Meg, her body quivering, her face blood-red, her breathing labored.

"Meg, you need to calm down," pleaded Tom, taking hold of her fists and pulling them to his chest. "We'll do this together," he said calmly. "We'll take care of it. We always have, but you need to catch your breath and calm down," he stressed.

Meg leaned her sweaty wet face into him.

"It will be okay, Meg, you'll see. Please calm down," he begged, now gently stroking her matted red hair. Meg's breathing slowed to soft sobs as Tom gently held her, concern etched on his pallid face.

"Now, let's go take a look at that painting together," he said in a compassionate, reassuring tone.

Still quivering, Meg turned, threw open the screen door and made her way through the back kitchen to the staircase, Tom at her heels.

As they reached Drew's room, they paused, looking into each other's eyes for comfort and support. They were not known to pry into their daughter's affairs or private things. Although Drew was only fifteen, a strong bond of trust existed between them. But this situation was very different. This was something Meg and Tom had feared for fifteen years – something they couldn't understand or ignore. This was something they had to stop. But how?

As they entered Drew's room, Meg blotted her steady stream of tears with a corner of her apron as Tom moved quietly to the easel.

Once there, his eyes confirmed his fears. Stunned by the sight of the quartz stone, Tom slowly read the writing on the canvas pad. Not

believing what he had just read, he read it again. Turning to Meg, he motioned her forward, pointing to the invitation Drew had written in watercolor.

Her heart still pounding, Meg read the message.

Dear One:

Your silent pleas for peace in your world have been heard, and today, your pure and loving heart has answered the call of Eittod. Thank you!

You, Drew Megan Campbell, are invited to travel to Outpost Gypsy Tree for your instructions and assignment, whenever you so choose to depart. There is no need to pack, except for your stone; all needs will be met on this end. You will be moving out of the illusion of time, so you will not lose a moment of your linear time. Your parents, Meg and Tom, know of a task laid upon you by your great-grandfather, Grand, on the day of your birth. Their knowledge of the depth of the task before you is limited, but they can share what they know before your departure. All other questions that you may have will be answered upon your arrival. Whenever you desire to return to your precise split second in time, the departure passwords will be given to you. Remember, you have free will and your choices are always honored. When and if you are ready to travel, simply repeat the following transport passwords out loud.

“A peaceful, loving world is what I seek within my heart,

And I am willing to clear the way for it to happen.

I am part of the solution.

I am the solution!

I am chosen.

Eittod, this is Drew Megan Campbell.

Hear my petition for transport to Outpost Gypsy Tree!

NOW!”

Honorably yours,

Eittod of Tulsun Minor

Ambassador to the Regions Authority

Outpost Gypsy Tree

The nightmare Meg thought she and Tom had buried long ago stared defiantly into their faces. They were dumbstruck.