

**Benjamin
Neary**

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CHAPTER 1

A cemetery is not a place I would typically like to start a story. But for this one, I have no choice because that's where I first saw Mr. Redman. Mr. Redman isn't really his name. I call him that because of the bright red handkerchief that was tucked in his shirt pocket.

My friends, April and Joey, dared me to go in. I've known April for as long as I can remember. She has always lived in the green house next door and our birthdays are only three days apart. Joey's real name is Joseph. He moved to Solas (the town where we live) when

we were in third grade, and we've been best friends ever since.

Joey is really the one who started it. There were these rumors going around school that a group of kids had seen ghosts in the cemetery that was on the edge of town. And it was Joey's idea to go see if the rumors were true.

When I first heard about it, I did what I normally do when I hear a ghost story: I rolled my eyes. I absolutely do not believe in ghosts. But that night, in the darkness and the damp air, I have to admit I was a little scared. At twelve years old, I can't say I'm still afraid of the dark. But the huge oak trees slowly swaying in the breeze and casting moving shadows on tombstones did not give me a comforting feeling.

Joey didn't seem to be bothered at all. He was too busy laughing and throwing rocks near my feet trying to scare me. April, on the other hand, decided to stay near the entrance and opted to wait on us there. She told us we

were acting like six year olds, and maybe she was right. But I wasn't about to let Joey think I was too scared to go in.

We started walking down a gravel path that went through the middle of the cemetery. There were tall rock walls that went around the outside, and large oak trees were scattered within. There were just enough trees, and they were just big enough, so that the branches from one tree touched the other trees making it seem like there was a roof over us. Yet, the moonlight was still able to peak through and cast those eerie shadows.

It seemed like a normal cemetery when we first walked in. The tombstones were all arranged in an orderly line, and some were decorated with flowers. However, as we walked about one hundred feet toward the back of the cemetery, it seemed to get darker. The tombstones were older with different shapes, and some were taller than I was.

I stopped in front of what appeared to

be more like a crumbling building than a tombstone. It had four walls, a slanted roof, and a small arched doorway. As I squinted trying to read the writing carved above the door, I realized I didn't hear Joey giggling anymore. I didn't even hear his footsteps. I called out his name and all I heard was the echo of my own voice. *He must be hiding behind something trying to scare me*, I thought.

I did my best to keep calm, and I quickly turned around to make my way back up the gravel path toward the entrance. But as soon as I did, it was like I ran into a wall. I bounced off and hit the ground. My glasses, that I had gotten only two weeks earlier, fell somewhere beneath me. It was too dark to see where they landed, so I got on my hands and knees and felt around with both hands. I felt nothing but cold, wet grass until my left hand landed on what felt like a shoe. Actually, it was more like a sandal and my fingers slid through the openings and touched the bare skin of a foot.

I quickly jerked my hand back and slowly looked up at the figure that stood before me. The only thing I could see clearly was the red handkerchief. As it was tucked in his shirt pocket, it seemed to somehow glow in the moonlight.

I froze, still on my hands and knees, not knowing what to do. I glanced around looking for my glasses and hoping that this man would leave.

Still no sign of my glasses.

Then, out of the corner of my eye, I saw his hand. It was stretched out before me as if he were trying to help me up. At that moment, I felt like I was in a movie. And whether I decided to grab his hand was one of those really important decisions that determined what would happen next. A million thoughts were running through my head. *Who is this man, and why is he in the cemetery at night?*

“I’m here because you’re here,” the man said with his arm still outstretched. It was like he read my mind. And somehow his voice

made all those other thoughts running through my head go away. I suddenly had no problem grabbing his hand. He carefully helped me up from the ground and firmly placed my glasses in my hand. As I scrambled to put them on, I saw that the handkerchief was now at eye level for me. It still seemed to have that strange red glow.

I wasn't quite sure if I should make eye contact, if I should say thank you, or what I should do. So, I just stood there looking at the ground. I'm not sure how long I stood there, but when I looked up again the man was gone.

"Ben, where have you been?" Joey yelled as he ran toward me down the gravel path.

"I, uh—" I couldn't quite gather my words. Joey and I quickly followed the path out of the cemetery as we pretended not to be scared.

"Did you see any ghosts?" April sarcastically asked as we finally made it back to the entrance. Her eyes got wider as she was able to see the look on our faces. "It looks like you did."

Joey and I didn't respond to her question. I wasn't really sure how to respond. *How could I explain Mr. Redman? How could I explain a glowing, red handkerchief?*

It was getting late, and April had already mentioned that her mom was probably waiting at Joey's house to pick her up. As we hurried down the small, narrow road, I noticed how cold my hands were from the brisk night air and I stuck them in my jacket pockets. *That's strange*, I thought. *I don't remember anything being in my pocket.*

With my left hand, I pulled out a thick paper that was about three inches long and two inches wide. It was almost like a light brown leather. In neat, dark brown writing, the words *Crann ar Eolas* were printed on the paper.

How did this get in my pocket?