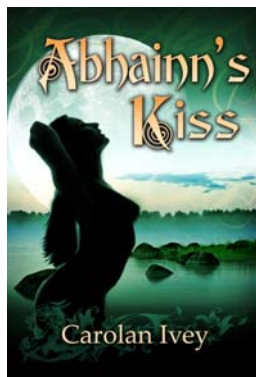


## *In The Gloaming*

In the grey edge between light and dark lives a world unseen. That elusive edge is called The Gloaming.



### ***Abhainn's Kiss***

*Avalon reborn...*

Hidden away on a misty island off the Irish coast all her life, Abhainn has no idea she is the last of her Faery race—until a troll tries to kill her.

Her peaceful world shattered, she has only days to fulfill her destiny. She must defy a curse that dooms her to hide from the sun, and take her rightful place in the Great Circle on the Isle of Avalon. Only Abhainn can restore the balance of Dark and Light, and heal the rift between humans and Fae. That's a tall order for a one fragile Faery.

Michael Craig is on a quest of his own, one grounded in cold, hard reality. Fairy tales? They're for children and dreamers. But when he rescues Abhainn from certain death with an accidental kiss, he finds himself thrown into a very different reality. One he's reluctant to accept, even as it unfolds before his eyes. Only one thing holds him there—Abhainn will die without him.

Abhainn's life depends on Michael's kiss, his sword arm...and his ability to believe.

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*"I hadn't read past the first five pages before Carolan Ivey captured both my heart and my emotions."*

– Kerin Hanson, TwoLipsReviews.com

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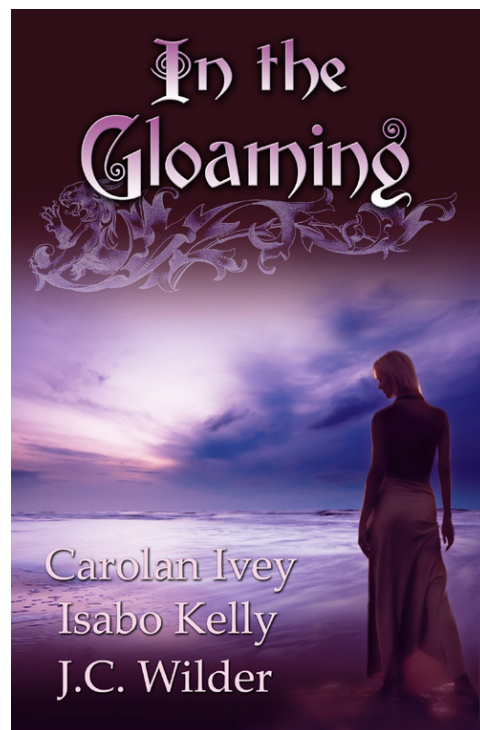
*"An entertaining fantasy with a heavy emphasis on the romance, ABHAINN'S KISS is a welcome addition to the reading pile."*

– Kathy Samuels, Romance Reviews Today

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*"This fantasy was well worth losing sleep over."*

– Leslie Trampusch, PNR Reviews



### **In The Gloaming: Abhainn's Kiss** by Carolan Ivey

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The girl within the circle sat with her back to him, motionless as the stones that sheltered her. Something about that hair, hanging loose but riddled with tiny braids... Maybe he had seen her before on one of his previous buying trips to Ireland.

Perhaps if he saw her face, her name would come to him.

Deep inside, the boy that had long ago fallen asleep under the demands of adulthood now stirred, pushing and shoving at a thick, heavy barrier that seemed to blanket his memory on all sides. His head throbbed with the effort.

"Hello?"

She remained still, as if she had not heard him. Somehow reluctant to enter the circle, he skirted along the outer rim, focusing on the curve of her cheek as it came into view. The upturned nose. His gaze dropped, startled, to the curve of breast that showed clearly under the plain green fabric of the dress she wore. This was no child. He moved his gaze up to her eyes, an impossible color of green that...

...blinked slowly, wide with terror. For the first time, he noticed the panicked sound of her breathing.

Michael blinked hard, but her image wavered, as if surrounded by heat waves off a hot pavement. Suddenly she clamped her hands over her ears and cried out.

"Hey!" He dropped his rucksack and took a few steps toward her.

The hairs stood up on the back of his neck. From between the stones appeared what looked like a garden gnome gone bad. Brown and squatty, with stick-like arms and twiggy fingers that clutched a primitive bow and arrow. Its black marble eyes met his, and it leered a smile that didn't improve its looks. Michael froze in his tracks and stared it.

"What the hell are *you*?"

It didn't answer, but nocked the wicked-looking black arrow, aimed it a Michael's chest...then swung it toward the woman. Michael launched himself toward her, eyes riveted to the tip of the arrow, which dripped some nasty looking green goop.

The woman gave a strange, watery gasp as he closed his hands over her shoulders and shoved her down.

*Thwang!*

Michael rolled, grunting as his body impacted the rocky ground. The arrow whined past him to crack harmlessly against another standing stone, with a sound that oddly resembled a yelp of pain.

The ugly garden ornament took off down the hill on spidery legs, surprisingly fast for something that barely reached Michael's waist. It breathed hard, a noise somewhere between a stuffed-up Pug and a coughing hog.

"Stay down!" Without looking back, Michael took off after the creature, fury pounding in his ears so loud that a splash of water behind him rarely registered.

It was a short chase. A hundred yards down the hill, the creature slipped through a break in a drystone wall. By the time Michael caught up, the thing had vanished down a hole, its snorting breath echoing from somewhere far below.

"Damn," he muttered.

Pain stung the back of his hand, and he glanced down, flexing it. Blood oozed from a long straight scratch. That arrow must have nicked him.

*That's just great. No telling what was on the tip.*

Already, a sickly shiver rippled across his skin. Ignoring it, he launched himself back up the hill, concerned the arrow might have nicked the woman, too. Tiny as she was, a miniscule amount of the stuff could harm her.

The late morning sun beat down on the back of his neck, humidity plastering his shirt to his body. Gaining the top of the rise, he jogged through the stones and halted just inside the circle.

She was gone.

Michael searched, dodging in and out among the stones. He ended up standing near the center, still alone, his heart racing.

A faint voice called from down the slope. "Abhainn!"

*Ah-vawn...*

The word tugged ferociously at the thick barrier covering his memory, but still let no light of recognition through. Far down the slope, an older, greyer woman stood in the whitewashed doorway of a neat, thatched cottage, shading her eyes from the sun.

Another shiver ran under his skin, and his mouth went dry. The ground tilted, just enough to send him backward a step, and his ears began to buzz. He looked down at his hand. Swollen, already twice its normal size.

He turned in a slow, careful circle, trying to find the rucksack he'd dropped earlier, which held his water supply and first aid kit. But his eyes wouldn't quite focus. Sun on water flashed near his feet. Blue, then gold. Dropping to his knees, he crawled toward it.

He plunged his injured hand in first, seeking to cool the fire burning under the skin. Instantly, warmth spread through his body, chasing away the shiver and quieting the buzz in his ears. He took a deep breath and sat back on his heels, examining his hand with interest as the swelling deflated and the seeping cut sealed on its own.

*Whoa.*

He rubbed the water experimentally between his fingers and paused. Had the water just *sighed*?

He shook his head and leaned forward again to scoop some in his hands. It smelled of fresh rain and soothed his parched lips. He closed his eyes in relief and opened his mouth to drink.

He felt pressure against his mouth, entirely too soft for the roughness of his work-hardened hands and too firm for mere water.

And it moved against his palms, just like the jaw line of a woman.

Warm breath, like a woman's sigh, caressed his lips. He opened his eyes and lifted his head.

There, cupped in his hands, was an elfin face framed in wild, white-gold hair. Eyes the color of sun on green water, wide with wonder, glowed above her slightly open mouth, still wet from his kiss.

A similar face leaped up from his memory, though still unnamed. It was pale and child-round; the one before him now was contoured with womanhood, though not much larger. The only feature virtually unchanged was her mouth, a study in curves and naturally upturned at the corners, which made her look like she was always on the verge of blurting some delicious secret.

She sat just as he had seen her before he'd taken off after the ugly lawn gnome—in the center of the stone circle, as if she'd never left it. Before he could think about how she'd gotten there, she reached up to touch his hair, reverently, as if it were he who had suddenly appeared before her, instead of the other way around. Her lips moved.

*"Mícheál."*

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