



Chapter 1

First Dream – Banba at the Gate

Just outside of Monaghan town is a wonderful place called Rossmore Park, and on the edge of it there lives a boy called Sonny. I'm sure that there are lots of other boys who live on the edge of Rossmore Park, and girls, and boring adults, several dogs, lots of cats, and at least one horse, but this book isn't about them, although the horse might make an appearance at some point, and now that I think about it, dogs and cats do appear every so often...and there are red squirrels, lots of starlings, a woodpecker, pine martens, bats, an otter called Denise, a wolf, several foxes, two badgers, more rabbits than even I can count, three hares, a bajillion Robins, and thirteen Drumlin Giants...

"Did you just say Giants?"

Yes, Dear Reader, I did. There are thirteen Giants in Rossmore Park and we shall meet each of them in this book. But there will be plenty of time for all of that. Now may I continue?

"Yes."

Thank you.

Now where was I? Oh yes, Sonny.

Sonny is a young boy, about six or so, and he has lived on the edge of Rossmore Park for as long as he can remember. He lives with his sister, Robyn, and his mother and father. Rossmore Park is forest park with hundreds of acres of trees, rivers, lakes, paths and the ruins of a castle, namely Rossmore Castle. It was once the home and private estate of the Westenra family, who rather confusingly were also known as the Rossmores, because the head of the family was known as Baron Rossmore. This was a title bestowed on them by a king long ago when people believed in such things. The family lived in their very large castle from 1725 until 1925-ish, and during that time neither you, Dear

Reader, Sonny, nor I, would have been allowed to enter the Park or wander around. Thankfully those days are gone. Now Rossmore Park has bike trails, walking paths, an adventure playground, a coffee shop, and lots of places for adventures. Oh, and thirteen Drumlin Giants. Did I mention that yet?

“YES!”

Ok, calm down.

No one really knows where the Drumlin Giants came from. One day it was a very nice, quite large Park, and the next day it was a very nice, quite large Park, with thirteen large Drumlin Giants in it. If you are ever fortunate enough to visit Rossmore Park, the very first Drumlin Giant you will see is Banba. She is the queen of all of the Drumlin Giants and she lies at the entrance gate.

Strangely she appeared there the morning after Sonny had a dream about a lost boy and the moon, but who wants to hear about a whiny lost boy and a Monaghan man on the moon...

Oh, you do?

Well, OK then.

On this particular night, before Sonny went to sleep he had watched a video about a spaceship, and then he had looked out of his window and stared at the full moon which was sitting above the trees at the edge of Rossmore Park. And then he went to sleep...

He saw a boy walking on the Threemilehouse road in front of his house. The boy seemed to be upset, so Sonny went to see if he could help.

“Are you OK?” Sonny asked.

“I’m lost. I’m tired.” The sad boy replied.

“My name is Sonny.”

“My name is Benny.”

“Do you want to go home Benny?” Sonny asked, because whenever he felt tired, he wanted to go home.

“I ... I don’t really have a home. My parents are gone.” Benny said, trying not to cry.

“Where?” Sonny asked.

Benny didn't answer he just pointed up.

"To the moon? Wow!" Sonny said smiling.

"No! Heaven!"

"Oh!" Sonny said. He was about to take Benny back to his own house, but he saw that it was no longer there. He knew he was dreaming. He smiled. He loved dreaming. In his dreams everyone understood what he said, and he had great adventures. He also noticed for the first time that Benny was dressed very differently to the way he was. Sonny was wearing a very comfy blue tracksuit with rainbow sleeves, and runners with a swoosh. Benny was wearing tweed short trousers, a buttery white shirt with a waistcoat and a thick knit cardigan, and black work boots. Sonny thought for a moment and asked Benny "What year is this?"

Benny looked surprised at this question. "It's 1926 of course!"

"Of course." Sonny replied, and then after looking up at the moon and back to Benny, he said "Come with me." The two little boys walked along the road in the moonlight until, a short distance away they came to the main entrance gates of Rossmore Park. To the left of the gates there was what appeared to Benny to be an odd shaped mound of Earth with a pile of sticks at the end closest to them. Sonny walked towards it and motioned to Benny to follow him.

"What are we doing?" Benny asked.

"Waiting for Banba to wake."

Benny was just about to ask who or what Banba was, when he heard a dull, but loud yawn and saw the whole mound wriggle a little and then the end closest to them turned around and he realised that the whole mound was the outstretched body of a giant and that the sticks were hair and that the large face wearing a crown was smiling at him.

"Good evening, Sonny, I see you've brought a friend." Banba said.

"Yes, Banba, this is Benny. He's lost and he has no home, will you take care of him?"

"Of course." And with that she stretched out an arm and Benny felt himself enveloped in her warm embrace. He settled at her side and fell asleep. Banba

smiled down at Benny and said “This will be a great adventure, Sonny. Where will he go?”

“The moon!” Sonny replied.

In his sleep Benny told Banba about his life, that he was an orphan, that he lived at different times with different neighbours and relatives whenever they needed extra help on their small farms in Corduff. And that while all of these people were kind, he just wanted to get away. She told him to look up at the moon.

“Can you see it?” she asked.

“See what?”

“Your name, there, on the moon.”

“My name?”

“Yes, Benny Callan. Your name will be written on the moon forever. Anytime you feel afraid, or small, look up and remember this night and that I have seen your name there. You are meant for great things, I promise. Take a piece of my hair and keep it with you. It will remind you of this night and this promise.”

Benny was woken the next morning by the Rossmore gatekeeper. He was lying against a mound of earth at the front gate and held tightly in his hand was a small bunch of twigs, which he refused to let go of. He was returned home.

Two years later, in 1928 Benny left his grandparents farm in Corduff on a horse and trap for Ballybay where he caught the steam train to Derry. As the train was leaving the station, through the giant puffs of steam, he thought he saw a little boy in a bright blue tracksuit, but he shook his head, saying to himself “Couldn’t be.”. In Derry he boarded the Anchor Line steamship for New York. Again, as the ship left the pier, among all of his fellow passengers friends and family waving goodbye from the shore, for a moment he was convinced he saw the same boy waving at him. He called out “Sonny!” and waved back.

In New York he worked as a farmhand and studied engineering at night and eventually graduated and got a job in the revolutionary new industry of aircraft. Every so often, he would catch a glimpse of a small boy in a blue tracksuit across a train platform, or on the other side of a crowded street and he would smile. He excelled at work and was at the cutting edge of new technology eventually ending up at Grumann Aerospace. There Benny became

foreman under lead engineer Tom Kelly working on a top-secret project, the design and manufacture of the Apollo 11 lunar landing module, known as the Eagle. This would be the part of the ship that would actually land on the moon. Benny's core responsibility was the emergency manual landing controls, which, if you think about it, is a thankless task. You're dedicating a large part of your life and career to something that you, and everyone else hopes will never be used.

On the afternoon of July 20th 1969 Benny Callan from Monaghan found himself with the Grumann team in the Kennedy Space Centre in a room adjacent to Apollo 11 mission control. As the time approached 3pm they listened intently to the live feed as their baby, the Eagle, having left the orbiting ship, made its final approach to Tranquility Bay on the moon.

Through the radio cackle, with 10 minutes left until the planned landing, they hear Neil Armstrong say "Our position checks downrange show us to be a little long". There were sharp intakes of breath, this meant that they were going to miss their landing target. And then there was silence, the signal was lost. It came back, there is relief all round, but then they hear the dreaded words "1202 programme Alarm!", guidance failure, they will have to switch to manual control.

All eyes turned to Benny Callan from Monaghan. He is staring at the screen, a small smile on his face, his hands in his pockets. He seemed calm. This gave the others confidence.

"1201 alarm!" more trouble. With 4 minutes to go Neil Armstrong realizes they are going to land on a dangerous crater and takes the Eagle out of autopilot mode and takes control. The control designed by Benny Callan from Monaghan. Armstrong must now manually guide the lunar module down. In the Kennedy Space Centre, Dean Krantz, the mission controller mutes all of the engineers microphones so the astronauts can't hear how worried they are. In the adjacent room everyone is staring at Benny Callan. Benny is now standing, a small smile on his face, staring at the screen, his hands in his pockets. Everyone remains calm.

The Eagle is travelling too fast. Everyone knows it. No one is saying anything. "60 seconds."

Everyone holds their breath. Sixty seconds of fuel is not enough to them to land safely.

“30 seconds”.

Silence. In the adjacent room everyone looks to Benny Callan. As before he simply stands there, a small smile on his face, staring at the screen, his hands in his pockets.

And then the radio link crackles into life:

“Houston...Tranquility Base here. The Eagle has landed.”

There is uproar! Everyone is cheering, and hugging each other. Everyone except Benny Callan. When they turn to look, he has fallen to his knees, tears are streaming down his face. As they rush over to see if he’s OK, he takes his hands from his pockets and opens them to reveal what look like tiny twigs, Banba’s hair. He stares at them, and then out of the corner of his eye, at the very edge of the room, amid all of the celebrations he sees the boy in the bright blue tracksuit with the rainbow sleeves, they smile at each other, and then he’s gone.

The Eagle lunar landing module is still on the moon and on it is a plaque with the names of the Grumann engineers who built and one of those is Benny Callan.

Back in a house on the edge of Rossmore Park, Sonny’s Mum is trying to get him and his sister Robyn into the car. As they drive past the entrance gates to Rossmore, Robyn asks her Mum, “What’s that!” pointing at Banba lying gracefully beside the gates.

“I have no idea. I’m sure it wasn’t there yesterday.” She replies.

Sonny looks out the window as they pass and smiles and says “Banba.”