

Liam O'Leamy

and the



Treasure Hunter



Garrett Crowley

Table of Contents

A New Start [6](#)

Treasure Hunter [14](#)

Discovery [19](#)

A New Friend [23](#)

Investigation [28](#)

Lies [33](#)

The Clue [40](#)

Villians [43](#)

The Chase [46](#)

Fortress [50](#)

Answers [57](#)

Liam O'Leamy and the Treasure Hunter

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Table of Contents

A New Start [6](#)

Treasure Hunter [14](#)

Discovery [19](#)

A New Friend [23](#)

Investigation [28](#)

Lies [33](#)

The Clue [40](#)

Villians [43](#)

The Chase [46](#)

Fortress [50](#)

Answers [57](#)

A New Start

His father decided to send him away. His mother agreed. She said a change of school would be good for him. Liam surprised his parents when he agreed to the move, telling them that he didn't fit in at home. Leprechauns were good at magic, all except him. No matter how hard he tried, he had yet to master the basics.

The older he got, the more frustrated he became. He had enough skill to use magical objects but had dreamed of becoming a true master. That dream had died. At twelve years of age, his parents sent him to live amongst humans where his magical ability would not matter. He hoped they were wise, it would be awful if he felt awkward there too.

Humans had stopped believing in magic and leprechauns a long time ago. However, old stories told of dark days when treasure hunters knew that leprechauns existed. Those days could never be allowed to return and Liam promised to keep his magical abilities a secret. With his promise fresh in his mind, he left for his new human school.

His mother had arranged a room at a guest house and the landlady, Ms. Murphy, thought he was just another

schoolboy. A kind, elderly woman, she had only asked him to obey some house rules. These included an eight o'clock curfew every night. It was easy for him to keep, for he had nowhere to go. Since his arrival, he kept to himself and spent his time alone.

Sometimes, when alone, his imagination brought him to times past. There, humans hunted for his peoples' gold and leprechauns disappeared without a trace. His parents never explained what happened to those who went missing and this fear of the unknown never left him.

One evening, he sat at the desk in his room where a half-filled page of homework reminded him of how different things were in his new life. His English teacher had asked him to write an essay describing his experience of leaving home. The problem was not what to write but what to leave out.

It might look suspicious if he described how he nearly died the first time he tried to cross the road because he misjudged the speed of a car. Before he moved to town, he had only seen cars on a television that his uncle owned. Then there was the evening spent opening and closing the fridge. Nobody used fridges in his village. He'd wanted to see if the light stayed on when the door was shut and even thought about climbing inside but figured he'd make himself a sandwich instead.

He decided not to draw attention to the differences between himself and his classmates. Instead, he described

how he missed hanging out with his old friends.

With his homework complete, he sat on his bed and wondered if leaving home had been such a good idea.

Boredom drove him to practice the little magic he knew. He stood in the center of the room and, from under his hoodie sleeve, removed an armband. He knew he could get the first piece of magic to work as he shrank to two and a half feet tall. However, he grew nervous and doubted his ability to grow again.

His father had made the green metal armband for him and it was the only magical object he owned. Replacing the armband, he closed his eyes and imagined himself growing to the size of a twelve year old. This was where he had trouble in the past. Magical objects were difficult to use. Nothing happened. He clenched his fists until his nails dug into his palms. Still, nothing happened. He was in trouble. Even Ms. Murphy would notice something was wrong when she saw that he'd shrunk.

Then, without him doing anything differently, the armband became warmer and he grew back to his human height. Although relieved at growing again, he did not understand why the magic worked sometimes but other times failed him completely.

His mobile phone chimed. Someone had sent him a message. He suspected it came from his uncle, Patrick, as his parents didn't use phones and he had no human friends.

Come to the waterfall at Ballyboreen forest, tonight.P.

His delight at having somewhere to go cooled as he remembered he needed permission to leave the guest house. It was too late to ask Ms. Murphy, who went to bed early, so he decided to sneak out later in the night. He set his phone alarm for midnight and caught a few hours of sleep.

The alarm rang, but it didn't wake him completely. He struggled with getting out of his bed. Concentrating on the furry carpet as it warmed his feet, he slowly came to his senses. The thought of meeting his old friends gave him a burst of energy and he pulled on his black combat trousers. He grabbed his favorite hoodie, opened his bedroom door and listened for signs of life from Ms. Murphy's room. He heard only silence.

Carpeted stairs allowed him to softly creep to the front door. Outside, he unlocked his bike, switched on its lights and cycled to the forest.

His eyes had adjusted to the night by the time he looked around the muddy car park at the edge of the forest. Trees formed a dark wall in front of him and a lone Jeep was parked nearby. It was unoccupied, so he ignored it.



A full moon helped him to spot a trail leading into the woods. It followed the bank of a river which he hoped led to the waterfall. He did not fear the night until a voice called out.

“Watch where you’re walking, big man.”

He looked down to the side of the trail and smiled. His friend Michael Dunphy stood under a bush carrying a crystal jug. He wore a red jacket, a black hat with a gold buckle and stood two feet tall.

“Be careful. You might step on us little people,” he said.

Liam immediately felt awkward about his height and how he towered over his friend. He removed his armband and shrank.

“Hey. What are you doing here?” he asked.

“It’s the winter solstice - the shortest day of the year, the day with the longest night,” said Michael. “We always come here for a feast. How could you forget?”

Liam was surprised that he had forgotten. The excitement of moving to a new school had distracted him.

“There is more. Tonight’s feast will be huge, because the elders are choosing a new king.”

“Oh wow. I had no idea. My uncle sent me a text, but he never mentioned a new king,” said Liam.

“He’s a strange one, your uncle.”

“Where are you going with that jug?”

“To the waterfall. Today, a water boy and tomorrow king of the world. Your parents are at the feast. Go on over and get me some food. Leave the trail and follow the music. See ya in a few minutes. Take it handy,” said Michael.

The dancing tune of a fiddle guided him to a clearing in the forest. He resisted the urge to go straight for the food spread out on three long tables in the center of the clearing. Instead, he looked for his parents amongst the dancers and singers, but he decided his father would never

be so carefree.

Sure enough, he spotted his father, a shoemaker and craftsman, sitting on a tree stump. As usual, he was working, skillfully adding a red stone to a golden crown. Liam recognized the crown and felt proud. It belonged to the ancient High Kings of Ireland and was a powerful magical object. Only a few people were trusted with guarding it and soon it would be placed on the head of the new king.

“Hey, Dad.”

His father kept tapping the red ruby with his hammer.

“Hello. I’m back,” Liam said, waving his hands.

“Yes, yes. I see you, boy,” said his father without looking up. “Please, stop fooling around. This is delicate work.”

Eventually, he stopped working and raised his eyebrows. Adjusting his glasses, he looked Liam up and down.

“My goodness, where are your normal clothes?”

“What? These are my normal clothes. I’m dressing to fit in at school,” Liam replied, folding his arms. ” Look, I’ve kept my hat and my waistcoat. To be honest, I’m not even sure if I should keep them. Not everybody dresses like you do. If I walk around with pointy shoes and green trousers, I’ll stick out like a sore thumb. Seriously, that is not a good look anymore.”

“That will do. It’s good to see you again. You can tell

me all about humans and your new school after the crowning of the king. Until then, let me get on with my work.”

Liam understood the importance of the ceremony and why his father needed to do his best work. A new king was allowed to have one gem stone added to the crown. This only happened once every fifty years, when the king took responsibility for using the crown to protect the village. The crown had immense power and its wearer gained knowledge of all magical amulets and buried gold in Ireland.

“Before you go, have you said hello to your mother?”

“Not yet,” he said, sensing the conversation had ended.

A burst of laughter broke through the fiddle playing. He scanned the crowd and found his mother amongst the merrymakers.

“You made it,” said his mother, hugging him.

“Hiya mum.”

“Look at you, only gone a week and already you’ve changed. You must tell me everything. What is the world like beyond our village? Your uncle has such great stories of the strange things humans get up to. Are they just like on the television?”

“I suppose they are. Everything is a bit different, but I am getting on fine. Although, it is good to be back here again. I had totally forgotten about the feast.”

“But, enough of my talking. You must be hungry, there is

plenty of food. Help yourself before all the good stuff is gone.”

He didn't need to be asked twice and stuffed his face with cakes before picking up a chicken leg. With his belly full, it was time to relax and have some fun. He nibbled on the chicken until his friend emerged from the bushes. His joy at seeing Michael did not last long. Something was wrong. His friend wobbled from side to side, letting water spill from the jug. Liam ran and caught him by the arm.

“Are you okay?” he said, taking the jug and helping Michael to a seat.

“Feeling sleeeepy.” Liam heard his mother's voice beside him.

“Hand me that jug,” she said, sniffing the water.

Worry lines appeared on her forehead and she poured the water onto the ground.

“The water smelt bad. Michael, did you drink it?” “Just a small drop,” he mumbled.

“I'm bringing you home with me,” she said taking hold of his arm.

“Liam, make sure nobody drinks from the waterfall.”

Liam watched as they disappeared in a cloud of green smoke before standing up on the nearest table.

“Attention, everyone. Do not drink from the waterfall. One person has already gotten sick.”

People in front of him turned in his direction and he struggled to understand the expressions on their joyless

faces.

“Run!” a voice screamed.

Treasure Hunter

“Move !” yelled the fiddle player before vanishing in a cloud of blue smoke.

Liam looked over his shoulder and froze. A tall man with a red hat bashed his way through the bushes. In one hand he held a black stick, in the other a book. The man flung the book straight towards Liam, who jumped from the table and landed in undergrowth at the side of the clearing.

Crawling on his hands and knees, Liam hid in the bushes and lay flat on his stomach. The man entered the clearing, swinging his black stick through the colored smoke left by the disappearing party goers. But one person remained.

His father sat on the tree stump. Deep in concentration, he continued to work on the High King’s crown.

“Look out, Dad.”

The man swung his stick through the smoke and strode across the clearing, straight for Liam’s father.

“Dad!”

This time his father heard the warning, looked up and disappeared in a cloud of green smoke. The man cried out

in anger, but then he stopped, stooped over and picked something up.

Liam crawled forward to see what the tall man had found, his stomach aching when he caught sight of the crown. He pictured himself running out from his hiding place and grabbing it. His arms trembled as he hesitated.

He told himself there was no point in challenging the man, the risk being too great. Pushing himself up on his hands, he moved backwards through nettles and branches but was too afraid to stand up. When he reached the trail, he slipped on his armband, closed his eyes and hoped the magic would work. Thankfully it did and he grew to his human height.

The black Jeep was still in the car park and he walked slowly towards it. Painted on its side were the words "Rent-A-Killer. Rat Catcher Services". Through a window, he saw iron traps with jagged metal teeth lying on the passenger seat. But he had no time to investigate further. Someone was coming along the trail, singing with a gruff voice.

"A hunting we will go.
A hunting we will go.
Heigh ho, the dairy-o.
A hunting we will go."

Liam hid in the woods. From behind a bush, he watched the tall man with the red hat climb into the Jeep. Its

headlights came on, dazzling Liam. He dropped to the ground, fearing he had been discovered. Time passed slowly. One second, two seconds and then the Jeep's engine roared into life and drove away.

He stood up and brushed the dirt off his clothes, wondering if he could have done more than hide. As he unlocked his bicycle, he noticed his hands shaking. They continued to tremble as he gently opened the back door of the guest house and crept upstairs to his bedroom.

Now that the excitement had passed, he admitted to himself how scared he had been during the attack. He lay in bed and closed his eyes, but the image of the man with the red hat and black stick appeared in the darkness. He was too agitated to sleep and instead phoned his uncle, Patrick, who was with the rest of his family.

Thankfully, Michael was okay. However, Liam's father was upset at having lost the crown. Without it the new king's magical powers were weak and the village was in danger of being discovered by humans. Nobody knew who the stranger was and people feared there would be more trouble. They wondered how the stranger knew about the feast and believed that the river was poisoned in an attempt to capture one of them.

His uncle wanted to track down the thief and suggested that Liam might be able to help him. Liam doubted if he would be of use. After all, his uncle was the master magician.

In the morning, Ms. Murphy prepared breakfast and Liam sat at the kitchen table staring into his bowl of cornflakes. She asked if he was feeling okay, he assured her he was fine. In truth, he was distracted. He regretted having been too scared to grab the crown when he had the chance. He imagined his father growing more concerned, and he wanted to help him, but instead he had to finish his first week at school.

It was a short cycle to the school, where he spent the day sitting at his desk trying to avoid the gaze of his teachers. Who could be bothered with school work when there was a thief on the loose?

Eventually, the bell rang and his first week of classes was over. Slouched at his desk, he watched his classmates put their books away and chat about their plans for the weekend. The classroom emptied leaving him to pack his bag in silence and he wondered what he would do for the weekend.

He slouched out of the classroom and pulled his hoodie over his eyes, to shield them from the bright sunlight in the school yard. He thought he was alone, but he was wrong. A hand tapped his shoulder. He jumped and spun around, only to find a girl smiling at him.

“Oh my goodness. Are you okay? Did I scare you? Sorry,” said the girl. “I’m Dana. You might have noticed me in class? Anyway, that’s not important.”

He had recognized her alright. She was one of the

cleverest students in his year and got on with everybody, including the teachers. He had already decided she was a bit of a nerd and wondered why she was talking to him.

“Hey, nice to meet you,” he said, trying to think of something interesting to say. He wasn’t quick enough so Dana continued speaking.

“I hope this is not too abrupt, but would you like to join our school newspaper? Seeing as you’re new, I kinda wondered if you wanted something to do?” she said. “We’re meeting tomorrow in the janitor’s shed. I know tomorrow’s a Saturday and you probably have had enough of school.”

Her enthusiasm surprised him

“Ehh ya, janitor’s office. Tomorrow. Okay, why not?” he said.

“Wow, great! I’m glad you decided to join. See you at 10 o’clock.”

“Okay, got it and thanks for asking. See you tomorrow,” he said.

“Sure,” she replied. “Love the hat by the way. Very unique. You got a style all of your own. Like it.” With that, Dana left the school yard leaving Liam to get his bike.

He was not was not sure what had just happened but decided it was a good thing.

Having no desire to return to the quiet guest house, he decided to explore the neighborhood. Rows of houses, where all the buildings looked the same, lined the streets.

In front of one house stood the black Jeep from the night before with the words “Rent-A-Killer. Rat Catcher Service” marked on its side.

He skidded to a halt and jumped off his bike, leaving it unlocked on the pavement in case he had to make a fast getaway. A low wall ran along the front garden and he poked his head around a pillar at the end of the driveway. The curtains of the downstairs windows were open and the house looked empty.

Discovery

Liam's phone was not in his pocket and he cursed his stupidity at having left it at the guest house. Should he go back and contact his uncle? Would it be better to investigate further? Looking into the garden he noticed a path running to the back of the house.

His tummy felt like it did before a race, a mixture of fear and excitement. The sensible thing to do would be to get his phone. He stopped thinking and sprinted into the driveway and along the path.

The small back garden did not offer many hiding places. He crouched behind a brown wheelie bin which stood up against the wall of the house. No one could see him and yet he had to resist the urge to run to the safety of the street. His heart pounded and he breathed heavily as he remained still and listened. Above his head, the sound of a man singing came through an open window.

“Gold, gold, wonderful gold.”

The voice belonged to the tall man from the night before. Liam had found the thief. He considered what do next. The stranger was too strong for him to challenge, but he needed to do something. Reaching up, he gripped the

window sill above his head. Pulling himself onto his tippy toes, he tried to peep in through the window, but he could not see over the sill. He had to be more daring.

He placed both his hands on top of the wheelie bin and jumped up, bringing his knees under him. Climbing made him nervous, so he took a moment to get his balance. Slowly raising one hand, he stretched out his arm until he touched the sill. He got up on his hunkers and peeped in the window.

The stranger sat at a kitchen table pouring a blue liquid onto an old pair of underpants. These he used to polish a small golden crown. Liam's face grew warm as anger rose in him. He wanted to shout out and demand that the thief returns what he had stolen.

The stranger finished polishing the crown and stroked his long black mustache, twirling the ends between his fingers. He picked up his red hat and with great care placed it on his head. He stood up.

Liam ducked down, listening for any clue that he had been discovered. Every muscle in his body tingled. Nothing happened. He took a chance and glanced in the window. The man walked to a mirror on the kitchen wall and stood with his back to him.

"I look fantastic," said the man, admiring himself. A cruel face looked back from the mirror. The eyes were the most frightening of all. Cold circles of blue swirled around in spirals. They were the eyes of an intelligent,

devious man who knew what he wanted.

“More gold,” declared the man to the empty room.

“More respect,” he continued, as though advising the reflection in the mirror. “Those fools at the university will beg me to return. They all laughed when I failed to capture the Loch Ness monster. Soon, I will have proof that leprechauns exist. They will have to make me the professor of Zoology. Nobody will laugh at me again.”

Liam trembled. He had never seen a crazy person before and feared what the stranger might do if he caught one of his friends. He watched as the madman reached into a pocket of his red coat, pulled out a mobile phone and spoke.

“It is me, Professor Hunter.” He put his phone down on a sideboard and continued to look at himself in the mirror. The professor had activated the phone’s loud speaker and another voice could be heard.

“Ahh, yes,” said the person on the phone, nervously. “How can I help you?”

“I need more poison. A lot more. You will get it for me,” said Professor Hunter.

“That sounds like a bad idea. The radio said someone polluted a river. Did you do it? I don’t want any bad publicity. Why do you want the poison? On second thoughts don’t tell me, I don’t want to be involved in your plans.”

“Calm down,” snarled the professor. “I’ll pay you

double.”

The professor hung up before his accomplice could respond. He turned and flung the phone onto the kitchen table. Liam ducked again. Stepping backwards, he lost his balance and fell off the bin, which toppled over with a crash. The fall knocked the wind from him, and he struggled to breathe. An angry face appeared at the kitchen window and glared down.

“Who are you?” shouted the professor.



Liam scrambled to his feet, ran around to the front of the house and jumped on his bicycle. Behind him, the front door of the house opened and the professor ran out.

“Come back here!” Liam pedaled away furiously. In the future, he would have to be more careful. Worse still, he now had a store arm to go with his nettle stings.

The guest house felt familiar and safe, and in the privacy of his room he phoned his uncle. Speaking quickly, he told him about his discoveries. As usual, his uncle had a plan.

“Well, sonny, it looks like you are a step ahead of us all. Here is what you will do next ... nothing. Leave it up to me. I will go to the house you described and find the crown. Good work,” Patrick said before hanging up.

Liam sat on his bed and sighed. It didn't seem right that his uncle would recover the crown without him. He wished he could do powerful magic like his uncle, who could easily get into the man's house unnoticed. He didn't understand how the magic worked. His uncle only needed to picture a place in his mind, and the next instant he would appear there. Liam doubted that he, himself, would ever master that skill.

There was no point in dwelling on it. He decided to have an early night, but he slept lightly. The professor appeared in his dreams, holding the crown and laughing insanely.

The following morning, Liam made his own breakfast

and left a note for Ms. Murphy, explaining that he would be away for the day. Before leaving the guest house, he stuffed his mobile phone in his pocket, just in case his uncle might need his help.

A New Friend

Liam walked around the empty school grounds where a calmness had come out of hiding and covered everything. He found the shed where the janitor kept his supplies and knocked on its open door.

“Hey, can I come in?”

“Hi,” said Dana. “Welcome to our office. It’s a bit rough, but we can do what we want here.

“Great,” he looked around the sore room. Two chairs and a desk sat amongst a pile of old boxes and mops. Yellow paint crumbled from windowless walls. Dana handed Liam an old cardboard box full of paint brushes.

“You can put this in the corner, out of the way. I gotta go out for a minute. Mr. McGruder...you know who I mean, right? The English teacher? Well, he’s going to join us. He lent us an old computer. Isn’t that great?”

“Yeah, super.”

“I’m going to meet him,” said Dana. “Could you tidy away the boxes and stuff? Sorry for dumping you in the middle of cleaning up.”

“Sure, no bother. What else would I be doing with my Saturday? Watching TV, sleeping...”

“I know it’s a pain. If you get bored, think of something for us to write about,” she said, leaving the shed.

He stacked the boxes and swept the floor. Discovering that one of the chairs could spin, he placed it behind the desk and sat down.

Turning in circles, he noticed a peculiar smell. It smelled like something people made after eating beans. He felt sick and brought the chair to a standstill.

“Hello there,” said a high-pitched voice.

Liam looked around.

“Down here, sonny.”

A tiny man sat under the desk. He wore a dark green waistcoat, green trousers and black, pointy-toed boots. A green hat, decorated with a golden buckle, perched on his head.

“Uncle Patrick! What are you doing here? Somebody will see you,” whispered Liam.

“I’m fine under this table. Besides, I can always vanish. Anyway, I went to the house of Professor Hunter and searched everywhere but failed to find the crown. It looks like he has moved out.”

“Aww no. How will you find him now? Uncle Patrick, what on Earth are you doing?”

“Yoga. It is a wonderful form of exercise. I’m becoming one with nature and have switched to an all bean diet.”

His uncle placed both hands on the floor and performed a hand stand while keeping his legs crossed in the air.

“We need a new plan,” continued Patrick, with trembling arms. “Have you any ideas?”

“You want me to help? Sure, I suppose I could go back to the forest and look for clues.”

Patrick’s face turned purple. He stuck his tongue out, removed one hand from the ground and balanced on the other. He farted. The powerful blast of gas caused him to fall over in a tangled heap of green arms and legs. The air smelled worse than before.

“Don't worry, I am alright,” he said, picking himself off the ground.

Liam held his nose and coughed. Through the open door, he could see Dana returning.

Dana strode into the shed and over to the desk. “Look at this,” she said holding up a camera. “I’m now the photographer for the School News. Sit still, I’ll take your photo,” she stopped talking, her nose twitched and her eyes watered.

“Phew,” she said. “Have you been eating beans?” Liam’s face grew warm and he feared it would turn red. Patrick, who had a talent for trouble, farted again. Dana stared at Liam.

“I’m going outside to get some air. I don't want to die of gas poisoning.”

Liam’s head dropped to avoid her gaze. He shuffled in his chair and kicked his Uncle.



“Ouch, stop that,” said Patrick.

“Stop what?” asked Dana from outside the open door. “Liam O’Leamy, you are the strangest person I have ever met.”

She walked away, leaving Liam red-faced.

“You can come out now,” he said.

“Right. So, if you have nothing better to do than kick a fella, I’ll leave you to get on with your investigation,” replied Patrick. “I’ll also investigate with my dog, Burley.

Oh, there's something else. Your father is unwell. He stays in bed half the day and is off his food. Your mother believes he feels guilty about losing the High King's crown. Some people are angry with him and think he should never have been trusted with it. The sooner we get it back, the better. Goodbye."

Patrick disappeared in a cloud of purple smoke.

Liam imagined his father moping about the house, but the return of Dana with McGruder interrupted his thoughts.

"Good Morning," said McGruder, who carried a laptop. "Glad you decided to join us. Now all you need is an event to report on. Do you have any suggestions?"

The thoughts of his parents' difficulties had distracted Liam and it took a second for him to realize that McGruder had asked him a question. He shrugged his shoulders and smiled when Dana stepped forward and filled the silence.

"I think there's going to be a fair in the village this afternoon."

"Yes, that's right. Someone mentioned it on the radio this morning," said McGruder, "That's the spirit, Dana. I'll leave ye to it."

Just after McGruder left, an idea came to Liam.

"Hey, I've got a suggestion."

"You're a bit late there, Mr. Reporter. Well, what is it?" said Dana.

"Could we cycle to the waterfall at Ballyboreen forest? I heard there is a problem with the water there." There

was no way he could tell her how he came to know about the poison, so he lied. “My landlady mentioned it at breakfast.”

“I don’t know. We agreed with McGruder to report on the fair,” she said.

“Oh, come on. It won’t take long and we can visit the fair later this afternoon.”

“Okay, but only because you’re begging and I don’t want to listen to you whining all day,” she said.

“Ha ha, very funny. Thanks. Hey, do you have a bike? We could cycle out to the forest and be back in time for the fair?”

“Sure. I got my bike with me. Let’s go.”

When the reporters reached the forest car park, Liam got off his bike and stared.

A police car and a truck were parked in front of a picnic table covered in glass bottles containing multicolored liquids. People in white lab coats stood around the table. He guessed they were scientists. Forestry wardens in green uniforms worked on the river bank alongside the car park. They dragged poles, with nets on the end, through the water.

“What is going on?” Dana asked. “What’s happened here? I’m going to the river to take some photos.”

Investigation

Liam watched the wardens take small objects from the water and pile them on the river bank. They were too far away for him to identify, so he walked closer and made a terrible discovery. They were fish, dead fish. The sight of so many dead things halted his movement, it was then he got the foul smell. As the pile grew, it became obvious that whoever poisoned the river did not care about other living creatures.

The smell grew worse as he walked past the picnic table with the makeshift laboratory and joined Dana. She dropped to one knee and took photos of an orange barrel with a crossbones painted on its side. Beside the barrel, a warden talked with a scientist.

“Here is the source of the pollution. We found it floating in the river. The skull symbol indicates it contains poison.”

“We also know who manufactured the poison. The police contacted this person. Apparently, some barrels were stolen from his factory last week.”

Liam desperately wanted someone to reveal the name of the factory owner. Without a new clue he might never track

down the professor, but the warden stopped talking and picked up a clear plastic bag.

“We also found this,” he said, holding the bag which contained a book.

Liam gasped and pretended to cough to hide his surprise. Professor Hunter had thrown that book at him the previous night.

“This book describes hunting small creatures, including a technique using poisons,” said the warden.

“We suspect a poacher, hunting foxes, or badgers, whatever drinks from the river.”

The shock of learning how close his friend had been to dying gripped Liam’s chest. He took a breath and resolved to stop the professor. Bringing his thoughts back to his surroundings, he listened to the warden.

“We will have a hard job catching whoever did this. We have no other clues.”

Liam knew that was untrue, he knew who poisoned the water. What would happen if he told them? Would they demand to know how he knew so much?

“There was a rat catcher’s Jeep in the car park last night,” he said.

Dana looked at him and raised an eyebrow as if to ask him how he knew this.

“Someone told me ... and another thing, a tall man with a red hat and a long curly mustache drove the Jeep. He calls himself Professor Hunter.”

“Thanks for the information,” said the warden, without paying further attention. Liam wondered if the warden had listened. He hated when people were polite but did not take him seriously.

The scientists stopped talking and continued their work, taking samples of river water. Liam looked at Dana who frowned at him.

“You never told me about a man with a red hat. Why didn’t you say this before? We’re supposed to be working together.”

“Sorry.”

He felt guilty for keeping secrets from her.

“If I hear anything else I’ll share it with you.”

“Hmm,” she folded her arms. “Okay. I hope you mean it.”

She checked her watch. “I don’t have time to argue, I have judo practice in a few minutes.”

“Ok, have fun. If I discover anything I’ll let you know,” he said.

“We can meet up after, if you like. Besides, I still want to report on the fair. See you there in two hours?” said Dana.

“Great. See you then. I’m going to stick around and find out who made the poison.”

“No need, I can answer that. The mayor. He owns the chemical factory. I heard the warden talking before you arrived. You’re not the only one who knows things.”

By the time Liam cycled back to Ballyboreen, the fair had begun, but he had no interest in it. The shock at seeing the pile of dead fish hadn't worn off.

He walked along the mains street, convinced that he would never forget the sight of the lifeless fish. So lost in his thoughts was he, that he did notice when he walked into a small crowd of people. The crowd cheered and clapped, bringing him out of his daydream.

“Thank you,” said a commanding voice. “Remember to re-elect me in the next election. Quilty for mayor.”

Liam stopped walking. Had he heard correctly? Was this the man whose factory had made the poison? He moved to get a better look.

A well-fed man moved amongst the people, shaking hands with his supporters. He spotted a woman holding a small baby and moved in on the defenseless child.

Leaning forward he kissed her on both cheeks. The baby's chubby, smiling face stared back. Her bottom lip quivered, her eyes widened, she took a deep breath, wrinkled her forehead and roared.

“Oh, dear me,” said the mayor, stepping backwards and dabbing his face with his polka dot tie. “What a lovely child.”

Liam's eyes narrowed, did this man sell the poison to the professor? He studied the mayor, as though he might learn the truth by just looking at him.

As the crowd drifted away, the mayor's smile

evaporated, but upon seeing Liam, he presented two rows of perfectly white teeth.

"You must be the young reporter," he said, extending his hand.

"How'd you know?" said Liam, accepting the handshake.

"As mayor, I make it my business to know what is going on around here."

The mayor kept smiling and moved towards a white van covered in election posters.

"Well now...," he said. "Let me introduce myself. Mayor Quilty, your friend in politics. How can I help you?"

Liam hesitated. What would a real reporter do? He didn't know, so he acted like one he saw on television and straightened his back, cleared his throat and spoke confidently.

"While investigating the pollution at the waterfall," he said, "I learned that the poison was stolen from your factory. Is that correct?"

The mayor's eyes darkened. He tilted his head backwards and looked along his nose. A bead of sweat slid down his forehead as he locked eyes with Liam.

"Of course it is. That is what the factory manager told me. I have informed the police. I don't know anything else," he said, stepping past Liam. The abrupt end to the conversation caught Liam by surprise. He tried to ask another question, but he stopped when a black and white

dog ran past his feet.

“Yow!” yelled Quilty, hopping up and down on one foot.

The dog dangled from the mayors raised leg. It let go, sat on the ground and winked at Liam.

“That mutt bit me,” said Quilty, swinging a kick at the dog who yelped and ran off.

“I could get a disease from that mongrel. It should be put down,” he said. “Goodbye, young man. I’m going to the cafe for a nice cup of tea.”

Liam noticed a small cloud of purple smoke drifting up from under the van. A foul smell caused him to wrinkle his nose and although his uncle remained hidden, the smell betrayed his presence. The mayor turned and looked at Liam accusingly. Liam shrugged his shoulders.

“Well it certainly wasn't me,” said the mayor. “I couldn’t possibly make such a terrible smell. Are you sure you weren’t eating beans, young man?”

He stopped talking. His jaw dropped and he crouched down, pulling his shirt towards his knees.

The mayor’s trousers had vanished and he stood in his underpants.

“What is this? How can it be? My trousers...” blurted the mayor. “I don't understand.” He rolled his eyes upwards and fainted.

Liam reached out in time to catch the mayor and laid him gently on the ground.

“Uncle Patrick, where are you? Give him back his trousers. Now!” he said, searching under the van for his uncle.

“Hurry, before he wakes.”

Lies

Patrick lent against the van and with a snap of his fingers returned the trousers.

“It was just a bit of fun. Did you see the way that fella kicked Burley?”

“I don't like him either, but you know the rules. No magic in public places,” said Liam, shaking his head.

The mayor groaned. Liam went to help him.

“Where am I? What happened?” said the mayor.

“You fainted,” said Liam. “Perhaps you got a fright when the dog attacked?”

“Yes, that must have been it. Do I have my trousers? Yes, thank goodness I am wearing them. I must have been dreaming. Yes, that's it. I fainted and had a nightmare. Thank you, young man. I will have that tea now.” The mayor stood up and limped over to the cafe.

Liam returned to his uncle.

“Did you get the crown back?”

“No. It's still missing, but we do have one clue. I brought Burley to the house and he got the scent of the professor. That's why we came to town, to see if Burley could sniff out anything and he led me to this van.

Liam straightened up and examined the van.

“I would like to search inside.”

With another snap of his fingers, Patrick popped the back door open, allowing Liam to step inside. His uncle followed and picked up one of the many election posters which lay scattered on the floor.

“The mayor looks terrible. Perhaps, I should help him,” he said, snapping his fingers once again. A ridiculous beard appeared on the picture of the mayor’s face and all the posters looked as if they had been drawn on with a crayon.

“Say nothing,” warned Patrick. “I will have my fun today.”

“I am beginning to understand why humans disliked leprechauns,” said Liam.

“You are far too serious for a young fella,” said Patrick, “Anyway, what was it you wanted to do?”

Liam desperately wanted to find a clue linking the mayor to the professor.

He climbed into the van and closed the door behind him. A search of the back of the van turned up a pair of workman’s gloves and a pile of brown envelopes, but nothing to link the mayor to the poison.

“There’s nothing here,” said Liam.

“Shh, someone’s coming,” said Patrick, before disappearing.

Liam heard keys rattling, it would only be moments

before the driver side door would open, he had no time to escape. Slipping off his armband, he shrank and hid under the pile of posters, where he lay absolutely still, afraid to breathe in case the driver would hear him.

He peeped out from under the posters. The mayor sat in the driver's seat, slurping from a paper cup. A buzzing sound prompted him to put his tea down. He pulled a phone from his jacket.

Liam could not understand the muffled voice on the end on the other end of the call. He waited for the mayor to speak.

“You'd better be careful, or you'll get us both into trouble. I'll get you your poison, but this is the last delivery. Same place as last time. Two more barrels, later tonight. Bring the money.”

The mayor put the phone down, started the engine and the van began to move.

Liam held onto the floor to stop himself bouncing around. After a short distance, the van stopped and he heard the mayor get out.

Pushing away the posters, Liam looked out through the windscreen. The mayor had parked on the fair green and a farmer stood nearby, arranging fruit on a stall. Liam ruled out leaving through either of the front doors and decided to chance the back. He replaced the armband and waited to grow. Nothing happened. Memories of times his magic had failed passed through his mind.

Then he remembered the advice his mother gave him when he first tried on the armband. She told him to stop worrying, to stop trying. Magic was in his blood.

He listened to his breathing and let his fears pass without reacting to them. The armband grew warmer and he grew to his human size, bumping his head on the van roof.

His relief at regaining his human height gave him a new sense of confidence. He straightened his hat, crouched, gripped the door handle and listened. There was no sound. He opened the door, slowly. But he'd made a mistake.

The mayor and a policeman stood in front of him.

“You! What are you doing in my van?”

“I...” Liam stopped talking, at a complete loss for words.

The mayor looked past him into the van.

“You vandalized my posters.”

Liam fought the temptation to yell out that the posters were not important, for he feared the policeman might think otherwise. What if he got arrested? Would the police contact his parents? He cursed his uncle and his silly drawings.

The policeman folded his arms and stepped forward.

“Well young man, it looks like you have some explaining to do.”

The mayor pointed at Liam.

“He ruined my posters, we caught him red handed.”

“I’ll handle this, Mr. Mayor,” said the policeman.

“Young man, kindly empty your pockets.”

Liam obeyed the order and the policeman examined his belongings before searching the back of the van.

“This is interesting. I can’t find the crayon. I will give you the benefit of the doubt. Maybe you vandalized the posters and maybe you did not. One thing is certain, you were in the van. What were you doing?”

“I was looking for clues about the poisoning at the waterfall,” he said as his voice grew louder.

“The mayor is responsible. He sold the poison. I heard him say so.”

The mayor’s narrow eyes glared at him.

“I deny it all. This boy is lying.”

Liam looked to the policeman for support, but he got none. Without proof, it was his word against the mayor’s.

The policeman took out his notebook and pencil.

“Okay. I suspect this youngster has let his imagination get the better of him.”

The mayor closed the van doors, but his beady eyes never left Liam.

“Fine, I’m willing to forget this ever happened. People should know that I am forgiving.”

The policeman took Liam aside.

“I understand you want to find out who polluted the river, but it’s wrong for you to break into vehicles. We have investigated the mayor’s factory and found nothing

suspicious. You are to leave him alone. Is that understood?”

“Yeah.”

“One more thing, whoever drew the beards on the posters has to stop this childish behavior, or else I will have a serious conversation with their parents.”

Liam kept his mouth shut and his hands in his trousers pockets. He stared at the ground and endured the lecture. The mayor could not get away with it. He had to do something, but now was not the time. He walked away to let his anger cool down. It was then he spotted Dana walking towards him.

“Hey, mister. Fancy meeting you here.”

“Hi, it is so good to see you,” he said.

“Really? Thanks. Did you discover any clues? Why the sad face?”

He explained about the mayor and the vandalized posters, leaving out any mention of his uncle.

“You’ve got to believe me. The mayor is involved. We have to go back to the waterfall tonight,” he pleaded.

“Okay. I believe you,” said Dana. “Gosh, you are taking this reporting job seriously. Perhaps, a bit too seriously. Breaking into the mayor’s van, that is pretty serious. Maybe even a little stupid.”

“Oh come on. We had no clues and now I know the mayor is involved.”

“Alright already, we can go back to the waterfall. But,

first I am going to get some photo's of the fair and you can go get me a hamburger. Deal?"

"Deal. Hey, would you do me one more favor? Could you bring your camera? We can catch the mayor red-handed. You can get evidence and prove I'm telling the truth."

"Hmm. Okay. See you in a few minutes," she said, before leaving to take some photos.

He made his way to a hamburger stall, but before he reached it his uncle's voice called out.

"Hey sonny, over here, behind the box of apples."

"Well, what do you think?" Patrick said. "I'm going dog racing tonight. After that, there is a meeting of the elders. They are getting more worried about the loss of the crown and wondering how the professor found us. I must go there myself. Don't worry, you can phone me if you discover anything."

Liam sighed. Patrick wore green riding boots decorated with orange jewels. Elaborate embroidery covered a small saddle perched on top of Burley.

"You know Burley is a dog, not a horse?"

"Of course. Burley doesn't mind. Isn't that right, my old friend?"

Burley's tail wagged.



“Down to business. How is the investigation going?” asked Patrick.

Liam explained why he wanted to return to the waterfall.

“Be careful,” warned Patrick. “Don’t take any unnecessary risks. Look out, here comes your friend with your food. Take this.” Patrick flipped a gold coin in the air. “I know you don’t play tricks on people, but this coin is special. When a human holds it for five minutes, it

transforms into a pile of leaves!”

Liam looked at the coin and frowned.

“Relax. You have enough skill to perform the trick,” said Patrick, before going back into hiding.

“I got the photos,” said Dana, taking a burger from Liam.

Liam’s energy returned as he ate. With a bit of luck, the mayor would lead him to the professor. He would take back the crown and restore his family's good name.

The Clue

Liam and Dana's bikes screeched to a halt. "We're here," he said.

"I thought you said the bad guys were meeting at a waterfall."

"They are. It's in the forest. We need to follow the trail that runs along the river."

"Do you think we can find them in the dark? They might be hiding. Maybe they will make our job easier and they'll find us," joked Dana.

Liam stayed silent.

"Okay, Mr. Serious, I'll be quiet."

Liam scanned the car park and spotted the mayor's van, which sat unoccupied at the start of the trail. He stood still and listened for signs of movement, but he only heard the murmur of the river.

"I can't see them anywhere. Let's go into the woods."

"Hmm. Are we sure this a good idea?" Dana asked him, rubbing her arms. "I forgot how cold it gets at night. Besides, what makes you think we'll find them?"

"I'm not sure. Let's do it anyway. We might catch the mayor with the poison," he said, secretly hoping he would

also find the professor.

They stopped debating, hid their bikes and started along the trail.

Stopping frequently, they looked and listened for the men. At times, Liam felt he was being watched. In the darkness, the trees played tricks with his eyes. Branches looked like arms, trees towered over him and he felt small.

He stopped moving and pointed.

“Someone is watching us.”

Two yellow eyes stared out from the forest. They belonged to a shadow which moved towards the trail.

“Stay still,” said Liam.

“Oh my goodness,” Dana exclaimed. “A deer. That is so cool. I wonder where it’s going?”

“Perhaps, it’s going over to get a drink from the river.”

The reporters waited until the white spotted deer continued its journey.

“Okay,” said Liam. “Let’s keep moving. The waterfall is nearby.”

He admitted to himself that he was glad it was only a deer. For he had no idea what he would have done if it had been the professor. He hoped he would figure out what to do when the time came to get the crown back.

The trail ended at a moonlit rocky pool into which water crashed from the top of a cliff. The powerful waterfall had smashed the circular pool into the rock floor

of the forest. A mist carried the smell of wild garlic to where the reporters stood.



“Where are they?” said Liam. “I don’t understand. We saw the mayor’s van.”

He picked up a stone and flung it into the water.

“Perhaps, we missed them? Maybe they’re behind us?” said Dana, looking back along the trail.

“I know what I heard. The mayor said to meet him at the waterfall.”

“Oh well. We tried. Let’s make the best of it. I’ll get some photos. The waterfall looks magical in the moonlight.”

Liam folded his arms and watched as she moved around the rock pool, taking photos as she went.

“Hey, that’s weird. The waterfall is playing tricks with the light. You’d almost think it glowed,” she said.

“Don’t be daft.”

“Seriously, the water is glowing.”

“Hey, you’re right. It’s like there’s a light in the water, or behind it.”

He jumped up and ran to the water's edge.

“There is something here,” he said, pointing to where muddy footprints ran along the edge of the rock pool. The mist thrown up by the powerful waterfall soaked his clothes as he followed the footprints to the cliff face. He waved to Dana to follow him.

“Come here, there’s a path between the waterfall and the cliff and I found what’s causing the glow. It’s from a

lantern. You gotta see this, there's a cave behind the waterfall."

Villians

Liam's back felt cold and he wondered if the chill came from the falling water, or from the growing fear inside of him? He allowed that thought to float through his mind without reacting to it and remained calm. In front of him, the electric lantern's orange light cast shadows onto the cave walls.

Dana walked up beside him and spoke, loudly, so as to be heard over the thundering water.

“This must be the place. Let's explore.”

He looked at his friend and, with a nod of his head, acknowledged her courage. They moved forward into the cave where giant carrot-shaped rocks grew up from the ground and down from the darkness above. The farther they crept down into the cave and away from the lantern, the less he could see. Liam stopped moving and tapped Dana's shoulder, a silent signal asking her to stand still.

Up ahead, the cave walls appeared much brighter. Someone had another lantern.

A low rumble echoed throughout the cave. Liam grabbed Dana's arm and ducked behind a boulder. The rumbling stopped and he held his breath, waiting to see if

the silence would last. The rumbling started again. His curiosity grew and he peeped over the top of the boulder.

“Wow, I was right,” he gasped as he watched the mayor roll a large orange barrel along the ground.

The rumbling sound continued until the barrel came to a standstill against the cave wall.

“We found him,” said Dana, switching her camera to video mode.

“I can’t see Professor Hunter. Is he here?”

Dana stood up and looked around.

“No, I don’t see him.”

She pointed the camera at the mayor and began to record.



Liam crouched behind the boulder and waited for her to stop recording. They had just caught the mayor red handed and yet he did not feel satisfied. Instead, he wondered if he would ever see the professor again.

Something else bothered him. The darkness of the cave had lifted and he could see the brown color of the rocks beside him. He wondered how he could now see the rocks and where the light was coming from.

The shadow of a tall man with a long narrow hat moved

along the cave wall. Liam tugged at Dana's jeans and whispered.

"Get down and hide. Someone is coming from the cave entrance."

Professor Hunter strode into sight, carrying the lantern from the mouth of the cave. He stopped, put the lantern down and planted his black cane into the ground in front of him. A silver skull formed a handle on the top most end of the cane, around this he clasped his hands and lent forwards.

"Good to see you again Mr. Mayor. I see you've brought my poison."

Liam watched from his hiding place. The boulder hid him from the mayor, but only the shadows along the cave wall prevented the professor from seeing him. He stood still, for fear of revealing his hiding place and studied his enemy. The professor's clothes did not have a bulging pocket which might contain the crown.

"You're late. Give me my money and never contact me again," said the mayor from the back of the cave.

Dana's camera beeped loudly, a signal that its battery was failing.

"Who's there?" said the professor, bending down to pick up the lantern. He marched towards the boulder where Liam and Dana hid.

"I see you hiding there."

Liam stood up, but Dana kept recording.

“You again, the boy from my house. What do you want? Why are you following me?” he said.

“That boy, he wants to ruin me,” said the mayor. “Get the camera from the girl. Nobody can know I’m here.”

“Get it yourself,” the professor replied. “I have no interest in these stupid children. They must have followed you here. They’re your problem, Mr. Mayor.”

The cave grew darker as the professor walked away carrying the lantern. Liam tugged on Dana’s t-shirt.

“Let’s get after him,” he told her.

“We’d better run. The mayor looks angry and is coming towards us,” said Dana.

Liam looked around. The mayor glared at Dana, his arms reached forward as he stumbled towards her.

“Give me that camera.”

The Chase

Liam sprang out from behind the bolder, he served between the carrot shaped rocks and sprinted towards the cave entrance. Faster and faster he ran, ignoring the burning in his lungs. The wet ground at the cave entrance caused him to slip and he landed on his backside. He stared down into the churning water before pushing himself away from the edge. Making his way to safety, outside of the cave, he watched as the professor's lantern moved through the forest.

Like a lion watching a slow moving animal that would make a good dinner, he took a deep breath and got ready to resume the chase.

“Come on, Dana. He's getting away.”

“Wait. What was that?” she asked. “Listen.”

“Help...help. I can't swim...” pleaded a man's voice.

“The mayor must have fallen into the water, we have to help him,” said Dana.

The lantern disappeared into the woods, Liam took a step towards the forest path, but he knew it would be wrong to continue.

“Okay, you're right. Let's go back.”

The mayor swirled around the rock pool, his arms

waving before he disappeared under the water. He popped up again, gasping for air. Liam looked around, found a long branch and then lay down at the edge of the pool. Dana held his legs as he reached out with the branch. It took all his strength to pull the mayor to the water's edge and up onto the river bank.

“Aghh, be careful. I think I've broken my leg.”

“Lie still,” said Dana, taking out her phone, “I'll call the mountain rescue services.”

Ten minutes later, the whop-whop-whop of a helicopter hovering over the forest brought the young reporters to their feet.

“That must be the rescue team,” said Dana. “I'll go to the car park. It sounds like they are going to land there. Wait here until I can bring help.”

Liam stood over the man who'd sold the poison. He wondered what kind of a person would do such a thing. A greedy, selfish good-for-nothing. An idea came to him. Perhaps such a man could be useful after all.

“Mr. Mayor, you look like a respectable citizen,” he said. “I am sure you didn't know that the poison would be used to pollute a river.”

“Of course, I had no idea. The professor, he tricked me into selling it to him.”

Liam distrusted him, but he kept the mayor talking.

“It is important that the professor never does it again. Do you know where he is staying? ”

“I have no idea. Why would I? I don’t hang out with criminals.”

“Really, that is a pity.”

Reaching into his pocket, he took out the gold coin his uncle had given him. He flipped it in the air and caught it, making sure the mayor could see it.

“I would be happy to give this gold coin to anybody who could help me find the professor.”

The mayor’s eyes widened and he licked his lips.

“He is camping at the old stone ring fort, a few miles from here. You know the one, they call it Castle Gold. He has some crazy idea that there is treasure buried there. Now give me the coin.”

Liam flipped the coin to him and the mayor examined it carefully. He clenched his fist when he heard Dana walking along the path with the rescue team.

The team medic knelt down and attached a splint to the mayor’s leg. Two other team members prepared a stretcher. When the medic had finished, the team carried the mayor along the forest trail to the car park.

The biggest machine Liam had ever seen sat with its massive rotor blades atop a red and white metal cabin.

The medic noticed his amazement at the sight of the rescue helicopter.

“Would you like a lift? We normally don’t carry civilians, but seeing as you did such good work helping this injured man, I think you deserve a reward.”

“Yes, please. That would be amazing. I don’t suppose the pilot can drop us off at the old ring fort? It’s nearby.”

“I’ll check,” said the medic, who went to a door at the front of the helicopter.

Liam decided to share what he had learned with Dana.

“The mayor told me that the professor is camping up at Castle Gold. Let’s see if we can track him down.”

“I think we should call the police and tell them everything,” said Dana.

“Okay, but can we at least try to find the professor first?”

“Alright. Besides, I’ve never flown in a helicopter before.”

Liam sat with his back pressed into his seat as the helicopter rose into the air. As the helicopter moved through the night sky, he looked out a window. He remembered the professor polishing the stolen crown and a wave of anger washed away his fear of heights.

A green glow from the control panel in the cockpit spilled into the cabin. It allowed him to see the mayor, who remained lying down and strapped to the stretcher. He caught Liam’s eye and smiled before looking at his hand and opening his fist. A pile of leaves fell to the floor and his face became wide-eyed with rage. He tried to sit up, but the straps kept him down.

Liam watched as the mayor’s mouth open and close and wondered what curses were being drowned out by the

growl of the engine as the helicopter descended toward Castle Gold.



Fortress

The helicopter hovered above a field, and Liam completed a knee high jump to the ground. With his back bent, he held his hat and ran from beneath the swirling rotor blades. Dana stood beside him and watched the blinking red lights of the helicopter rise into the night sky, leaving them alone.

“Look, there’s the professor’s jeep,” she said, pointing towards a nearby laneway. “I am going to sabotage it. I’ll let the air out of its tires, but first I’m phoning the police.”

“Brilliant idea. I’ll have a look inside the fort.” Liam grasped at the chance to look for the crown on his own and crept cautiously towards the circular stone fort, whose walls were three times his height.

The fort had only one entrance and he rested his hands on the cold stone archway before peering inside. Someone had pitched a tent at the center of the circle. He took out his phone and messaged his uncle, telling him the location of the camp.

The professor was nowhere in sight and Liam stared at the tent. It looked empty. He sprinted into the fortress, but he twisted his ankle on rough ground and fell heavily. He lay still, waiting for the pain. None came. He was not hurt.

Beside him lay a pick axe and all around him holes had been dug into the earth.

He stood up, tested his ankle, stepped towards the tent and pulled open the flap.

Dark colorless bundles lay on the floor. He crouched and knelt inside the small space. The sides of the tent moved gently with the night's breeze and tricked his mind into thinking that the walls were coming closer. He fought the urge to escape and touched a dark bundle which he recognised as a rucksack. It contained clothes and he rummaged until his hand found the cold metal cylinder of a torch. Dare he risk using it? Someone might see the light. He pushed the on button.

The rucksack sat at the end of a sleeping bag at whose far end lay a pillow and an old book. The torch provided enough light to read the books title - "Ancient Myths and Legends: The gold fort of Ballyboreen." It opened to a bookmarked page and a paragraph had been highlighted.

"... the ancient Irish peasants were a simple people who believed Leprechauns could be found at a waterfall near Ballyboreen on the shortest day of the year. They told stories of hearing music late at night and would always avoid traveling to the waterfall after dark, for fear of being cursed by the fairies..."

He turned the page, what other secrets had this book revealed to the professor?

"... If you see a leprechaun, never take your eyes off him

for if you do the little fellow will vanish. Keep looking at him, grab hold off him and demand three wishes !”

He put the book down and felt the warmth of his heart as it raced. The professor was clearly a dangerous and determined man who knew too much. Liam wondered if he was out of his depth. It was one thing to track the professor, but confronting him would be reckless.

A red velvet bag had caught his attention. It rested against a pillow, he pulled it open and heard himself say, “Yes!”

He had found the crown and it looked magnificent, its gold reflected the torchlight as he pulled it out of the bag. He could not believe he had considered giving up the search just a second earlier. He thought of his father and the relief the find would bring him. In the end, it was easy, the professor had left the tent unguarded.

“You, in the tent come out. No tricks. I have your friend,” said a gruff voice.

The energy drained from Liam’s body, his lungs ached, demanding more air than he could breathe. He lent forward, onto his hands, looked out through the flap and became dizzy. Dana stood in the middle of the ring fort with the professor pointing a rifle at her.

Liam breathed slowly and deeply, he crawled out of the tent and stood up, holding the crown by his side. His fear for his friend turned to anger, but he knew that anger would not help him and he waited for it to pass. Standing

still, he noticed every detail about Dana, the Professor and the rifle. Dana stood alone and frightened. He wanted to go to her.

His hand that gripped the crown, began to burn. The metal became hotter and he closed his eyes in pain. The ground no longer supported his feet. He stumbled forward. On opening his eyes, he found himself standing between Dana and the professor. Green smoke drifted through the air. The crown, which he still held by his side, felt cooler.

He reached back and grabbed Dana's arm. Closing his eyes, he pictured the two of them standing in the school yard. The metal crown remained cold. He gripped the crown tightly and tried again. Nothing happened. The magic had deserted him. He looked at Dana and let go of her arm, which he had been squeezing. Dana stared back at him.

"How, did you do that?" she said.

"I know how he did it," said the professor, keeping his rifle pointed at Dana. "Your friend is an overgrown vermin, a leprechaun, a trickster and he is about to make me very rich. Oh, and if he tries to disappear, I will shoot you, young lady."

"Let her go," said Liam.

"Why would I do that?"

"I'll give you back the crown."

"Well, that will do for a start," said the professor, "I'm keeping my eyes on you, vermin. I want my three wishes."

Liam knew he did not have the skill to do what the professor wanted, but he had to get his friend to safety.

“Take it,” he said, throwing the crown towards the professor, “Dana, run away.”

She started to say something, but Liam shook his head before she could speak and she fled from the fortress leaving the professor pointing his rifle at Liam.

“Give me my three wishes.”

“I can’t. I don’t know how to.”

“What? Don’t try to fool me, I know the legend - you must grant me three wishes. Maybe I will shoot you instead? ”

Liam moved his hand towards his armband. If he could shrink he might be able to escape.

“Don’t move. Give me what I want.”

Liam noticed a cloud of purple smoke drift past.

“He can’t, but, I can,” said Patrick who had appeared behind the professor.

“Who said that? Let me see you,” said the professor without taking his eyes of Liam.

Patrick walked in front of the professor and extended his hand upwards.

“Let us make a deal, three wishes in exchange for the boy.”

The professor tucked the rifle under his chin and held it with one hand, all the time his finger rested on the trigger. With his free hand, he reached down and grabbed Patrick's

arm.

He lifted Patrick off the ground and dropped the rifle. Then he took hold of Patrick's other arm and raised him upwards, until he could stare into his eyes.

"It's a deal," he said.

Liam watched Patrick dangling from the professor's grip and hated how powerless he felt. But, all was not lost.

From where he stood he heard a loud farting sound. The professor gasped.

"Stop that. At once. You disgusting creature."

"Your wish is my command," said Patrick, as a gentle breeze blew the smelly fart away.

"What? That was not one of my wishes."

"Yes, it was."

"You trickster. I was just telling you to have good manners."

Patrick laughed.

"You sneaky little twerp," sneered the professor.

"Listen to me. Money, I wish for lots and lots of money. More than I can carry."

"Money is it? Okay. Just so I understand clearly this time, you want lots and lots of money? Now? Here?"

"No more of your tricks," said the professor, shaking Patrick. "Money, lots of it right here right now, and another thing I want to be famous."

A wad of notes fell out of the sky. The money kept coming. It bounced off the professor as it fell, growing

into a huge pile. Liam saw his chance. The crown lay on the ground, unguarded. He leapt forward and grabbed it.

The professor shouted, but in doing so took his eyes off Patrick. Free from the professor's gaze, Patrick vanished.

Wads of notes kept coming until they buried the professor, leaving just his head poking out of the pile.

Liam stuffed the crown under his hoodie and dashed to the stone archway, which was lit in blue flashing light from police cars.

"Are you okay?" shouted Dana, running towards Liam.

Policemen swarmed into the ring fort and surrounded the giant pile of money.

"Where are you? You fooled me? You sneaky vermin," said the professor.

Everybody stared at the pile which had stopped growing.

"My goodness, would you believe it. Such a huge pile of Monopoly money!"

"The leprechaun...he tricked me...agh," cried the professor.

"Oh, a leprechaun. I have never heard that excuse before," said the police man, "Sir, you have some explaining to do. We would like to talk to you about a polluted river. Hang on a minute. I recognize your face. Are you the famous professor? The one that once tried to capture the Loch Ness monster?"



Answers

Liam and Dana watched the police pull the professor free.

“How did you appear out of thin air? Where did all that Monopoly money come from?” said Dana.

“Psst, come over here,” said the high-pitched voice of Patrick.

“Come with me and I’ll explain everything,” said Liam, walking behind the tent.

“Oh my goodness, who is this little man. He is so cute,” said Dana, bending down to take a closer look at Patrick.

Dana leaned forward and tickled Patrick under the chin. “Look at you. Can you speak? Are you Liam’s little pet?”

“No, I am not! It is time to put a stop to this,” said Patrick.

He reached into his pocket and took out a small cloth bag. From the bag he took a pinch of dust and placed it onto the palm of his hand, blowing it into Dana’s face.

“You will forget about me. You will forget about Liam’s magical powers. You will not remember how you escaped from the professor,” said Patrick.

Dana stood still, smiling and nodding her head.

“Will she be alright?” asked Liam, realizing he would have to carry his secret on his own again. He felt he could trust Dana with his true identity, but he knew it was an unnecessary risk.

“Don’t worry, she will be fine. Now then, I believe you have something to give to me,” said Patrick.

Liam reached under his hoodie and pulled out the crown. He held it for a moment, wondering what it would be like if he kept it. It felt good to have command of magic, but he had only borrowed it.

He looked at Dana, who was coming out of her trance, and he handed Patrick the crown. He felt proud to have helped retrieve it and restore his father’s good name.

The police drove Dana home and dropped Liam off at the guest house. He had no trouble sleeping and spent the following day writing about his adventures in a letter to Michael.

By the time Monday came along and a new school day had arrived, all his classmates had heard about the strange goings on at the fort. They insisted he retell the story many times.

At lunch time, McGruder called Dana and Liam into to the staff room. He invited them to make themselves comfortable and handed Dana a newspaper.

Liam sat back in an armchair and enjoyed a lemonade while Dana looked through the paper. But, it wasn’t the school newspaper. The Daily News, a national

newspaper, had printed their story. Dana's video of the mayor had even made it onto television.

"Well done you two", said McGruder. "Excellent work. I would like you to do a follow up piece in a weeks' time. Let the readers know how the river has been cleaned up and whether or not those villains went to jail."

"I believe the mayor is recovering and claims he was hypnotized. The other fella keeps talking about leprechauns," said Dana.

"He is clearly mad. In the meantime, I want you two to look at this," said McGruder, handing Liam a print out of an e-mail.

Dear Dana and Liam,

Congratulations on your great adventure, news of how you captured the professor has reached our school.

We take a special interest in remarkable children and I wish to invite you to our country to join us in a young reporter's workshop.

This is a chance for you to share ideas with other young reporters from around the world. In return, we are asking that you help us solve a four hundred year old riddle.

There will also be time for you to meet youngsters

from other countries and make new friends.

On the last evening of your stay, we will host a Monster Ball. Please remember to bring fancy dress costumes of your favorite ghouls and monsters.

Liam, say hello to your Uncle Patrick. He is an old acquaintance of mine and has told me all about you. I guarantee that you will not be bored, our school is very different and used to teaching extraordinary creatures.

*Yours sincerely,
Countess Black,
Head Mistress,
The School For The Gifted,
Transylvania,
Romania .*

“Hmm.” said McGruder, looking over Liam’s shoulder and pointing at the last line in the letter.

“This ladies English is very good but not perfect. She obviously meant to say extraordinary people, not creatures.”

Liam was not so sure that Countess Black had made a mistake...