

Liam the Leprechaun

“It’s a leprechaun!”

Angela glanced at Jackson as she heard the words cried with anguish by her friend, Caitlin Murphy. Caitlin was a nurse working the ER at the hospital where she’d taken her kids a few times for quick care, when as kids they’d managed to hurt themselves, but thankfully in minor ways. She was a wonderful nurse, a pretty brunette in her late twenties who really knew how to relate to both children and adults.

Jackson looked at Angela, gripping the cell phone to her ear, as she repeated the words, arching his brow.

They’d been about to head out. Date night—something they indulged in seldomly due to the twenty-four-hour-seven-days-a-week nature of their work, and the fact they tried very hard to be good parents as well to Corby and Victoria.

But it was St. Patrick’s Day. Mary Tiger was spending the night to watch the kids, and she and Jackson had been heading to McMartin’s pub to join up with friends, enjoy corned beef and cabbage, green beer, and the parade that was scheduled to go by the restaurant and pub.

“No?” Jackson said hopefully.

She shook her head. Caitlin had been so wonderful with the children so many times, she couldn’t say no. Except she wasn’t sure what she was saying yes to yet.

“Caitlin, calm down. Please, explain to me what’s going on, what you need—” Angela began.

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“He came in a few minutes ago. A leprechaun. They come in, a group of Irishmen, each year, dressed as leprechauns, to tell tales and dance for the kids’ wing. He gave his name as Liam O’Conner. He was suffering from a head wound and wasn’t completely clear, came into triage. He caught my hand and told me that I had to help, that they were going to blow it to smithereens. Then he passed out. And he’s still down here now. But, Angela, he didn’t fall. Someone bashed his head with some kind of weapon like a rock, or . . . I don’t know what. I believe he was desperate to get here for help, and he gripped my hand and he . . . Angela, it’s for real! Please, you need to get here and speak with the leprechaun.”

“Caitlin, okay, did you ask anyone at the hospital—”

“Oh, yeah, I tried, I tried saying the leprechaun was worried, and everyone laughed and said that if I kept listening to him, maybe I’d get to his pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. Please, get here quickly, before he’s brought up to a room. I—I think this guy may be the real deal. I mean, I’ve heard the unit Jackson heads deal with matters of cult practices and ghosts and . . . I can’t help but wonder if this guy is telling the truth. No, he’s not a leprechaun, but he may know something, and I had a feeling . . . he is desperately trying to get help!”

“We’re on our way,” Angela promised.

She grimaced to Jackson who was already heading straight to the car. When they were seated he started the ignition and looked at her.

“A leprechaun?” he asked.

Angela quickly repeated what Caitlin had told her. As she did so, the phone rang again. It was Caitlin. Her leprechaun had just been taken to a room.

“I’m off in a few minutes and I can get in; but you need to say you’re a relative, the hospital is being tough on visitors tonight . . . you know, St. Patrick’s Day. Some people like to use it as an excuse for too much green beer.”

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“Got it,” Angela said.

Jackson glanced her way as he headed out, veering for the highway.

“She said to say we’re relatives?”

He arched a brow to her and she smiled. Jackson’s official title was Supervisory Special Field Agent, and he manages their bureau unit for ‘specialized’ circumstances, known as the Krewe of Hunters due to their first case having been in New Orleans.

He had the height, the broad shoulders, and the musculature to be an impressive figure. His dad was Native American, a Cheyenne, and his mother’s background was Scottish. Still, he had the handsome cheekbones and facial structure that definitely defined him as Native American.

“So, I’m related to a leprechaun?” he asked dryly.

“You are half Scottish or something,” she said lightly.

“Leprechauns—Irish. He’ll have to be your uncle, how’s that?”

Angela smiled, nodding. “Jackson, I mean, no matter what, I would want to go if Caitlin was worried. But he said something to her about someone blowing something up. This is worrisome. We may need to get some of the agents we were about to meet working on this—”

“And so we may. But let’s get there. Let’s talk to our leprechaun first.”

“Head injury. What if he can’t talk?”

“Angela, let’s take things as they come. We’ll figure it out. Hey, you do have an Irish family! The luck of the Irish, remember?”

“And if you asked my grandmother, the luck of the Irish means bad luck or no luck at all!” Angela said.

“Whatever, you’re a good old American mix, a lovely blonde, so you’ll get away with saying you’re a relative. So, we’re off to see a leprechaun!”

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An injured leprechaun, she thought. Liam O’Conner. Caitlin said a local group of Irishmen used the holiday to help kids, and she’d thought it was great. Now one of them was injured and saying something bad was about to happen.

“St. Patrick’s Day ‘Blarney?’” she murmured aloud.

“Blarney sounds much better than many a thing that might be said,” Jackson reminded her.

She grinned. “I went to Ireland with my mom. We kissed the Blarney stone. A little creepy. My dad said it was probably a spot at the top of the castle where men on guard might have relieved themselves, and mom was not pleased. One of the prevailing legends is that the goddess, Cliodhna, helped out Cormac MacCarthy, the builder of Blarney Castle. He was about to become involved in a lawsuit, pleaded for help, and she told him to kiss the first stone he saw. He did so and could suddenly argue so eloquently that the lawsuit was easily won in his favor. Not sure about that—the castle was built in the fifteenth century, and I don’t know much about fifteenth-century lawsuits. Others say the story goes back farther when Robert the Bruce, King of the Scots, gave it to a MacCarthy for help at the Battle of Bannockburn, but geologists say it’s local limestone.”

Jackson glanced at her. “You know a lot about Blarney.”

“Hey, I’ve kissed the stone.”

He grinned. “Hm, you do have a talent for Blarney.”

She smiled.

“St. Patrick’s Day,” Jackson continued. “It celebrates the life of St. Patrick, the patron saint of Ireland. Born in fourth century Roman Britain, he was kidnapped at the age of sixteen and taken to Ireland as a slave. He escaped, but embraced Christianity and returned to convert the Irish, creating schools, monasteries, churches, and more. By all accounts, a very good man.” He paused to grin. “Supposedly, he drove the snakes from Ireland. Hm. Snakes? Evil politicians?”

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Angela laughed. "I think there were still kings at the time, along with an Ard Ri, or high king, but I have to admit, I should google—"

"What about leprechauns?" Jackson asked seriously.

"Part of the fairy world," Angela said. "Mischievous little fellows, sometimes known as shoemakers, seen in green most of the time, little men who guard pots of gold at the end of rainbows. And in our case, a wonderful group of Irish Americans who come to entertain little children at hospitals."

"So, what could this guy know--?" Jackson began.

"We're here. Let's find out," Angela said.

The hospital was busy but Jackson deftly found a parking spot. Not speaking again as they hurried in.

They didn't have to lie about being relatives; Caitlin Murphy was downstairs to meet them and had already secured visitor passes for them. "Come, he's in 402," she said anxiously.

"Has he said anything else?" Jackson asked.

Caitlin winced. "He . . . he's not conscious. They're considering putting him into a medically induced coma to reduce brain swelling."

Jackson glanced at Angela. They might have rushed to the hospital for nothing, and yet . . .

"Let's see him," Angela said.

Caitlin led them to the room.

Naturally, they didn't see a little green man lying in a bed with pointed shoes and a jaunty green hat. The costume he'd been wearing for the night was in a plastic bag on a little stand by the bed.

They saw a man of thirty-five or forty with dark red hair, beard, and mustache, eyes closed, hands folded over his chest. Angela sat quickly in the chair at his bedside, taking one of his hands. She doubted the man was a shoemaker, but his hands were rough as if he had worked with them all his life.

"Caitlin, is it possible for me to speak with the doctor?" Jackson asked.

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“Yes, come with me, I’ll find Dr. Martino,” Caitlin said.

Alone with the man, Angela shook her head. “What did happen to you? Just trying to help out with kids . . . and here you are.”

She was startled to feel someone behind her. She didn’t think Jackson and Caitlin could have returned so quickly, but . . .

She felt the cold and turned to see a man behind her, tall and gray, dressed in a suit. A burial suit, she thought. Her visitor was among the dead.

“Sir,” she murmured, “is there any way you could help us—”

The ghost was evidently taken aback.

“You see me?” he asked.

She nodded. “I know. I as . . . odd as a leprechaun. But this man—”

“My son,” he said softly, and she caught the hint of an accent. The man was Irish. “I’m Logan O’Conner, lass, late of Dublin, Ireland, came to these great states when I was thirty-five, and Liam a wee lad of five years. We loved the home of our origin and this wonderful place and now . . .”

“I’m so sorry. But the doctors here are excellent, I know through experience. They’ll see to it he’s okay,” Angela said, hoping she wasn’t lying. “I’m afraid he was hurt because—”

“He was attacked because he heard that maniac talking about the bomb!” the older man said furiously. “Aye, me lad was parking, heard a rat was planning on setting off something at McMartin’s, on the parade route, but they were making sure that Shamus Johnstone was here—”

“Shamus Johnstone is an agent with—”

“Aye, he heads a terrorist watch unit,” her ghost told her. “And he comes here when it’s St. Patrick’s Day, honoring the children. But Liam was seen, all dressed up in his leprechaun attire, and they came after him. I guess they thought they’d killed him, but he managed to make his way into the hospital before . . . before he was out. And now . . .”

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“I have faith; he’ll be all right!” Angela said. She tried an encouraging smile. “It’s St. Patrick’s Day, after all, and . . . it’s not all about green beer, it’s about faith, whatever our faith may be.”

“You’re a fine lass,” he assured her. “And—”

Angela gasped softly. She had been holding Liam O’Conner’s hand. Suddenly, she’d felt a squeeze.

Liam’s eyes were open. They were a dazzling green.

He stared at Angela and he obviously didn’t care who she was, he was just anxious to get his words out. “The Protest Pals . . . one of our fellows keeps watch over them, but he’s here, with the kids tonight, they planned it that way . . . the bomb . . . the bomb was slipped beneath the Irish Dancers’ float, Evan Miller knew I heard what was said, he clocked me and . . . and the bomb . . . it will be on its way . . . teens, girls, boys . . .”

“I’ve got it!” Angela said. “Don’t worry—I’m on it right now. Worry about you, about getting better!”

She jumped up, digging her phone from her pocket, as Jackson and Caitlin walked back into the room.

“The Irish Dancers’ float,” she said. “There’s a bomb. Evan Miller of the Protest Pals attacked Liam. Jackson—”

“I know who Miller is—he’s been on the watch team’s radar for a while. Call our unit folks at McMartin’s; I’m getting the bomb squad, and I’ll let Shamus know what’s going on as well,” Jackson said.

“How—” Caitlin asked.

“Liam told me,” Angela said.

“But he’s still . . . unconscious,” Caitlin said.

“Trust me, he is going to make it,” Angela said, looking at the ghost of their leprechaun’s dad.

“He’s going to make it, and he may have saved I don’t know how many people. We’ve got to move!”

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Jackson was on the phone; she was on the phone. She nodded to Caitlin and hurried from the room, aware her friend shivered and quickly took the chair Angela had vacated, holding their “leprechaun’s” hand as well.

Bruce McFadden answered her call, starting out by cheerfully asking what was taking her and Jackson so long to arrive.

She quickly explained.

And she knew their team was on it.

By the time she and Jackson arrived, the early floats had gone by, but those just ahead of the Irish Dancers’ float had been stopped.

The floats had been cleared.

Racing down the street, she waved to Krewe agents who had left the pub and were out in force, clearing people away from possible danger.

The Irish Dancers’ float was in the center of the road.

Empty except for the bomb squad dressed in gear and searching the float.

“No one is going to die!” Angela whispered.

Special Agent Bruce McFadden approached her as she stood staring at the street, and Jackson spoke with the bomb squad supervisor.

“We’re clear, but getting everyone out of all the venues on a St. Patrick’s Day night is no easy task. We’re still going door to door to each pub ad restaurant,” Bruce told her. “Are we sure this was a real threat?”

“Protest Pals,” she told him. “They knew one of the Irish entertainers parking to head in for the kids’ thing at the hospital they do every year, and he heard them, and they attacked him and left him for dead. He knew what they were up to—”

“They found it!”

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Jackson was striding back to them. “Bomb squad found the device. Simple one—probably learned how to make it via the Internet. But if they hadn’t found it—”

“Those kids on the float!” Angela said.

“And death or injury to those within a hundred feet of the blast,” Jackson said.

“Well, so much for a St. Pat’s celebration,” Bruce said. “Jackson—”

“Spoke with the bomb squad head. We’ll be working with a few agencies including the local police, but we need to find some forensic evidence so we’ll be getting our people out here. The bomb never had a chance to explode which means those responsible might have been careless with prints, hairs—DNA—whatever.”

“Oh, great leader, we follow your commands,” Bruce said lightly.

“Jackson,” Angela said. “I’d like to get back to the hospital. I want to—”

“You want to see Liam,” Jackson said, nodding. “And his dad, I take it?”

Of course, even as they were running out, Jackson would have seen the spirit in the room.

“Right.”

“Go, take the car. Keep me posted.”

She smiled, thanking him.

It was a bit of a walk back to the car and then it took some time. The police hadn’t had to close off too many roads—they’d already been blocked for the parade.

Finally, she was back in the hospital parking lot. Thankfully, she’d never removed her “visitor’s” tag so she didn’t have to stop anywhere.

She rode the elevator to the fourth floor, anxious to tell Liam O’Conner—whether he was awake or not—they had stopped the bomb.

Her words just might sink into his subconscious.

“No, stop!”

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Angela heard the words too late; she'd already entered the hospital room where Liam O'Conner lay still sleeping.

She had been in such a hurry she had opened the door and sped right past the ghost of Logan O'Conner.

Then she came to a dead standstill.

Caitlin was in the room just as she had been when Angela had left. Seated at Liam's side.

But there was a man behind her. One alive and well—and holding a scalpel to Caitlin's throat.

Angela had never met him but she'd seen his photo in several briefs. The man was Evan Miller, suspected of laundering money to finance terrorist groups and of kidnapping an investigator who remained missing.

They'd never had the hard evidence they needed to hold the man.

And so here he was. A man of medium height, light brown, close-cropped hair, a wiry strength, and such hatred in his eyes she knew he wouldn't hesitate to kill.

And a bomb on St. Patrick's Day was right up his alley. Except they'd found and disarmed the bomb.

Now at the hospital. . . perhaps to destroy the lives of those who had ruined his plans for a very momentous St. Patrick's Day, indeed.

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Jackson saw the man watching the police and fuming. He was leaned against the wall of a building that offered a narrow alley from the street—hiding, of course. Because the police had cleared the area, but this man had to see what was going on.

First, Jackson moved alongside the building's frontage as flat against it as he could while efficiently getting where he wanted to be.

Ten feet from his target, he was seen. And when the man looked at him, he knew.

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Knew before he saw the pin on the man's shirt that advertised him as being a Protest Pal. The organization itself wasn't illegal.

While nothing had been proven, it was suspected that many actions of its members were illegal; but freedom of speech and assembly were guaranteed. In his many years in law enforcement, Jackson had discovered that often those who went militant and fell for radical ideas had suffered less than warm and cuddly home life while growing up, though sometimes, they could be fooled.

This guy was in his early twenties, lithe and quick.

"No, no, no," the guy murmured to himself.

"Stop! Federal agent, just need to talk!" Jackson cried.

Because, of course, the guy was instantly on the run.

Jackson took off in pursuit, tearing down the alley. Taking a calculated risk, he jumped atop a dumpster to hurl himself on the fleeing subject.

While pinning the man to the ground, he started screaming at Jackson.

"Stop! Stop, stop! Police brutality!" he cried.

"Agent brutality," Jackson corrected wearily. "And I asked you to stop so I could ask you a few questions. I take it you took part in either creating or placing the bomb—"

"And that ass Evan Miller screwed it all up, hitting and thinking he killed that guy but not making sure he was dead. I mean, if you're going to kill someone, that someone needs to be dead. Well, he will be now!" the man beneath Jackson raged.

He will be now!

"Where is Evan Miller?" he demanded.

"What? Oh, no, I—"

"Where is Evan Miller?"

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The young man grinned. "Back to finish the job. A little too late; but . . . mess with us, and you get messed up."

None too gently, Jackson pulled the man up on the ground and then shoved him down the alley, handing him over to the first detective he could reach while quickly explaining the situation.

He had to get to the hospital.

And the hospital had to be warned.

And Angela . . .

They had worked together for years. He had absolute faith in her. But she was his wife, the mother of his children, and truly the love of his life.

No matter what his faith . . .

He had to get to the hospital himself.

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"You're insane," Angela said, staring at the man. She had a small gun in a holster at her ankle; but looking into the man's eyes, she knew if she bent down to retrieve it, Caitlin was dead.

"I'm insane? You're crazy, little miss ghostie-do-goodie. Oh, yes, I know who you are. Angela Jackson, field agent and computer research genius. Well, you're the crazy one. You have to crack a few eggs for an omelet, you know. Stir the pot to get anything good. And our pot is in a damned mess. We need to start looking at what the hell is going on; and well, go figure—might as well go back to the 1800s. Remember? Signs on the doors—Irish need not apply! Every faction except the real, good Americans seems to have a voice. Well, I had a plan. A good plan. And you screwed it up entirely."

"Wow. That was horrible. It's clear you've never kissed the Blarney Stone!" Angela said. She needed to play for time.

She needed to get the man away from Caitlin.

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“You,” Miller said, staring at her with the unfathomable hatred in his eyes. “You. You ruined everything. And this man, this friggin’ leprechaun—”

“Um, hm. Not really. His father helped, I think. Spoke through him for a minute or something like that. Or maybe, maybe it was St. Patrick looking out for the innocent!” Angela said.

“St. Patrick. Yeah, right. And idiots really believe in ghosts?” Miller demanded.

Caitlin let out a little cry. The knife had edged against her skin drawing blood.

“What? You don’t believe in ghosts?” Angela asked him. “Or seriously, don’t you ever study history? Whether you see him as a saint or not, St. Patrick existed.”

“Like ghosts and leprechauns,” Miller said.

Angela shook her head. “Just what is it you want? What do you want to happen?”

“You want to know?” Miller demanded, his lip curling, his words a snarl. “Revolution! I want them all killed, dead as doornails, the hell out of the way. We need a new regime—”

“With you as head?” Angela interrupted.

“Yeah. King, emperor, dictator for life, you name it. Because I’ll keep it all good, I’ll get rid of all the riffraff, and—”

“Wow. No riffraff in your background? None at all?” Angela said.

His hands didn’t appear to be steady. She was playing for time, but she needed to get him away from Caitlin.

“What can I do, what can I do, lass?” the ghost of Logan O’Conner pleaded desperately.

“Move something?” she asked.

“What?” Miller demanded.

“Nothing. Just talking to the ghost, the one you don’t believe in,” Angela told him. “So. Listen. You need to let Caitlin go—she didn’t stop the bomb. Oh, and if I were you, I’d be worried about getting out of here. Forensics have been all over that float, and every law enforcement officer from every

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agency known to man has been out there, and I'm sure they've rounded up some of your friends—they're good that way. Because you came back here, and I'm willing to bet that after you attacked Liam, you all headed back to see what death and damage you caused. And no matter how hateful you may be and how strong and wonderful you think your cause that includes killing children might be, the cops have ways to make terrorists sing like canaries. So—"

"I need to kill you all and get out," Miller said.

She smiled. "Only if you want to die," she told him.

"Oh, really? I slit her throat—"

"You do that, I reach for the gun in my ankle holster, and I shoot you."

"You can't shoot me; you're an oh, so, special agent!"

"Like hell, I won't shoot you," Angela said sweetly.

He started to laugh. "Oh, wow, yeah, St. Patrick's Day. I can hear the banshees wailing now!"

"Ah, hm. You have people who care that much? I guess you know—or don't—that banshees derived the cries of those who lost a loved one. Oh, wait, does anyone love you? Not even sure your mother could love you, Evan Miller!" Angela said.

"How dare you!" Miller said.

"Hey, just guessing. Oh!" She turned and looked at the ghost of Logan O'Conner. "Maybe?"

"I can try, lass," the ghost assured her. He moved over to the window and tried to rustle the drapes.

Maybe desperation worked for ghosts.

The drapes shifted about.

"There you go," Angela said. "I'm telling you, there is a ghost in the room."

Miller started to laugh. "Ghost, right! Honey, I think that's called air-conditioning."

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“Hey, you don’t get it. Ghosts have to learn to do things, too. You know, it’s kind of like a baby human being isn’t born walking or even talking. There are skills that must be learned. When we come around again—if we do, and really, the percentage of those who stay is small—we have to learn all kinds of skills all over again. The gentleman here is Logan O’Conner, dad to the guy you want to kill. And I really don’t think he likes you—trying to make tragedy out of a saint’s day!”

Miller shrugged. “Hey, I’d happily blow up everyone at a Day of the Dead party and make it real, real, real, or blow up a May Pole or . . . whatever.”

“Ah. Equal opportunity murderer.”

“Revolutionary.”

“Ah . . . better, Logan, better and better!” Angela cried. “That sound from the hall . . . he is getting so good!” Angela said.

There was sound from the hall. Shuffling . . . people.

It was a hospital. Of course, there were people. Doctors, nurses, therapists, patients, lab techs, visitors . . .

But there was something different. And she smiled. She wasn’t sure how, but Jackson knew. He knew that Evan Miller, bitter and furious, would have come back to finish the job.

“Look, listen!” she said.

Logan O’Conner hurried over by the window, trying to see out through the lattice that covered it. He put up a finger and managed to move one of the slats. With pride and surprise, he turned back to Angela.

She gave him a nod and a smile.

“There really is someone out there, lass!” Logan said.

She nodded. “They’re here!” she agreed.

And as she expected, the movement and her words drew Evan Miller’s attention.

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She made a flying leap across the room, slamming into him so hard and so fast, he released Caitlin, going flat over the prone body of Liam as he lay in his bed with Angela hard on top of him. She quickly rolled, leaping up to get back, to reach for the gun in her ankle holster, before he could regroup.

He hadn't lost his grip on his knife.

While, screaming hysterically, Caitlin fled the room.

Miller stared at Angela with pure hatred, lifting the knife, coming toward her.

But he didn't make it. A gunshot rang out; it caught Miller just below his right shoulder.

Miller screamed. Jackson came striding into the room. While the man raged and frothed about mistreatment and how Jackson and his kind should have been exterminated, Jackson just shook his head and reached for Angela's hand drawing her close to him as he stared at Miller.

"You tried to kill me!" Miller raged.

"Oh, no. I didn't. I'm a very good shot. I want you to survive. Yes, there's a death penalty for treason, but . . . I'd kind of rather you rot in prison for years and years and years," Jackson told him.

There were two uniformed officers at the door. Jackson turned to them. "Officers? If you don't mind? I've just gotten a few calls. Johnstone's men have gathered a few of the conspirators in the bombing attempt, but I believe this man to be their leader. Either way—"

"We'll get him the hell out of here, Special Agent Crow," one of the officers said as a doctor moved into the room.

"Thanks," Jackson told him, looking at Angela.

"We'd better let the doctor see—"

"See to Liam, our brave leprechaun," Jackson said. He nodded to the ghost of Liam's father.

"Thank you," he told him, leading Angela out.

The doctor nodded grimly and moved by them as they moved into the hall. To Angela's surprise, Caitlin came hurrying back, throwing her arms around Angela's neck.

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“You saved my life!” she cried.

Angela hugged her in return. “Thanks to you and Liam, many lives were saved,” she replied.

“Caitlin, your car is probably here, but I can arrange for someone to take you home—” Jackson said.

“I’m not going home. When the doc says I can go in, I’m going to sit with Liam,” Caitlin said.

“You must be exhausted,” Angela said worriedly.

“Ah, but alive!”

“Well, there’s that, and that’s always good,” Jackson said lightly, smiling.

But they all turned anxiously as the doctor came from the room.

But he was smiling.

“St. Pat was looking over the man!” he said. “Despite all that—and thank you, agents—my patient appears to be doing better. He is conscious—we’ll have to do some more tests, but seems the swelling has gone down, he is talking . . . and on the mend.”

Caitlin was in an emotional mood and threw her arms around the doctor, too. A good and decent man, he hugged her back and disentangled himself.

“I didn’t know he was a friend.”

“He is now,” Angela assured him. “May we—”

“Yes, but don’t tire him. Five minutes—”

“I want to stay,” Caitlin said.

“All right, but just one and you know—”

“Quietly, I will just sit by his bedside,” Caitlin promised.

The three of them re-entered Liam’s room. His eyes were open and he greeted them immediately with, “Thank you—”

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“No, sir, thank you,” Jackson told him. “Sir, your bravery saved so many lives tonight. We seriously can’t thank you enough.”

Liam nodded, a half-smile on his lips. “St. Patrick’s Day. You know . . . so weird. I saw Miller coming at me in the parking garage. I knew to look dead and hope he’d be in a hurry. But when he came back . . .”

“You knew he came back?” Jackson asked.

Liam nodded. “It’s all been so strange. I was in; I was out. And I kept thinking . . .”

“Kept thinking what?” Caitlin asked him.

“I kept thinking my dad was here, telling me I had to live, I had to help, had to talk, and I think . . . I think that I did.”

Angela smiled and squeezed his hand. “You know, I’ll bet the spirit of your dad was here, a fair, decent, honest, and brave man. That spirit was in you.”

“And we’re going to get out of here. We’ve been ordered to let you rest,” Jackson said.

“Except me. I’m staying. After all this, I’ll be watching over you,” Caitlin told him.

He smiled. She sank into the chair by his bed and Liam took her hand. “I started out the night as a leprechaun. I found a spirit—and an angel!”

Angela and Jackson smiled at one another and slipped out.

“A budding romance?” Jackson asked.

“Two great people,” Angela said with a shrug.

He looked at his watch. “Do you believe we still have a little time before midnight? One green beer!”

“We have reports. You fired your weapon—”

“And we’ll deal with it all tomorrow. Our team has us covered,” he assured her. “One green beer.”

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“What a St. Pat’s Day!” Angela said.

And Jackson grinned. “Hey, this time, the luck of the Irish was with us—good luck!”

“The luck of the Irish,” she agreed. “And Saint Paddy working overtime. Sometimes . . . yeah, I guess I really want to thank St. Pat. And Logan and Liam O’Conner. Because you’re right. This St. Patrick’s Day, the luck of the Irish—good luck—was with us!”