



St. Patrick's Day

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It's almost St. Patrick's Day, but . . .

The gardener at an historic cemetery has come across strange words newly etched into a centuries-old gravestone. A real threat? Or just words to taunt the authorities?

The police ask the Krewe for help.

Because they are so close to D.C., and they can't take chances. There are groups and individuals who will use any occasion or date to create havoc and mayhem.

Jackson and Angela usually celebrate St. Patrick's Day with their family, both having a wee bit of the Irish in their backgrounds.

But this St. Patrick's Day, they will be on surveillance.

They will have some unexpected help through their son, Corby . . .

And the arrival of a strange and unexpected visitor to the graveyard.

Dedication

**To my mom, born in Dublin, always Irish, while
embracing America with all her heart.**

**And to Granny B, Granda, my cousin, Patrick,
and the beautiful family I was blessed to
know as I grew up.**

And, of course, to banshees and leprechauns everywhere!

Heather Graham

St. Patrick's Day

Slush Pile Players

An owl hooted just as the moon, rising over the crimson and gray shades of dusk, slipped behind a cloud.

The cemetery was bathed in a strange red glow and shadows.

One shadow seemed to watch her from the cover of darkness, and then disappear into the very void created by the coming of the night.

Angela Hawkins wasn't afraid of cemeteries.

And she wasn't afraid of the dead.

Some who were dead in fact became very good friends; and many before moving on, helped the Krewe of Hunters find justice again and again.

But something had seemed extremely eerie about the shadow. Or maybe it was because she and others were on stake-out in the cemetery for a reason.

She slipped around the side of the huge oak where she'd been waiting and watching, though it had not been the dead she had been looking for, but rather the living.

The shadow had slipped behind one of the Gothic family mausoleums that dotted the rolling landscape. She crept around, heading along the structure herself, searching.

But whatever it was she had seen—or thought she had seen—it was gone.

And there was nothing here tonight to fear.

She gave herself a mental shake. She knew Jackson would stay through the night along with the local police and a handful of Krewe members. But she'd come back in the morning. Instinct told her nothing was going to happen that night.

Instinct, or her gut, and nothing special about that. While she and other Krewe members saw and spoke with the dead—when they remained and chose to be seen—her feeling about this had nothing to do with any special gift, curse, or talent.

She just didn't think anything was going to happen that night.

Time to go find Jackson.

*

"What do you think," Detective Angus Connell asked Jackson Crow, walking around one of the small mausoleums in the historic cemetery.

Jackson leaned against the concrete of the building, shaking his head.

"I wish I had a definitive answer for you," he said.

Connell had come to the Krewe offices specifically asking for help.

A threat had come from the cemetery; and while the Krewe of Hunters members naturally kept the secret of some of their success, local law enforcement in the D.C., Northern Virginia, and Maryland regions often came to Jackson with strange problems.

This time it was words discovered by the groundskeeper etched into a centuries-old tombstone. The groundskeeper had discovered them when he had cut back a growth of weeds by an ancient oak.

"For the love of freedom, for the saints who bled, we will rise to arms and defend the land! Gather ye here, for ye'll not be left to bear the burden alone, for we are one, no matter our place of birth."

Intelligence analysts theorized that it was a threat centered on St. Patrick's Day, which seemed strange to Jackson.

He'd read about the historical figure of St. Patrick.

He hadn't been a man fond of violence and trouble.

Jackson didn't think he'd banished the snakes from Ireland, but rather that 'snakes' meant he had perhaps banished some pagan practices. He'd led a rough life himself and believed in his calling to a tee.

The kind of guy he'd have liked to have met.

"It may be nothing," Jackson said. "But it's not St. Patrick's Day until tomorrow."

"And everyone is a little bit Irish on St. Patrick's Day," Connell murmured. He nodded his head, disturbed. "There were times when we didn't take graffiti in cemeteries seriously. But this place has a dozen entrances. Several dozen family mausoleums and concrete or marble tombs. Places to hide weapons—places for people to hide. But . . ."

"Hey. It's all right. We'll stay on guard," Jackson said. "Better to be safe than sorry."

Connell agreed. "No choice these days. And then there's Covid. We weren't planning a mega-St.-Pat's Day party anyway."

Connell knew Jackson—they had worked together before. But after Jackson's words, Connell studied him curiously; and Jackson grinned at him and said, "Yes, like about ten percent of the American population, I have some Irish in me. My father was a Native American. My mom—mostly Irish."

Connell grimaced. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to be—"

"You're not at all offensive," Jackson assured him. "Connell?" he asked in return. "Sounds Irish to me."

"Oh, hell, yeah. Irish, English, French, German and Indian. Indian from India," he explained quickly. "My mom's grandmother immigrated during World War II. They say I have her beautiful brown eyes," he added, grinning.

"Ah, yeah," Jackson said. "Beautiful brown eyes," he agreed and grinned.

The man did have a good face. Lean features and a strong jaw. He liked Connell and had worked a case with him before, a missing person's case with a happy ending. A young woman had gone missing

on her way to Harpers Ferry. She'd been found, having had an accident in the Blue Ridge, alone and terrified. Her cell hadn't been able to find a satellite connection, and she'd been crawling her way to the road with a broken ankle.

They'd even found the man who had driven her off the road—thanks to a long-dead Civil War soldier.

Connell grew serious. "Do you think the etching in the old stone is serious—or someone's concept of a joke?" he asked. "Or just plain old vandalism?"

Jackson had studied the stone—so had Angela Hawkins, his wife and second-in-command at Krewe headquarters, and other Krewe members.

Who could say? Maybe before, he would have shrugged it off. But he understood Connell's concern. The last year had been tough. Too many people had been lost. Too many had lost their jobs. And it seemed people had cabin fever—and cabin fever made them violently determined they were right, no matter what their cause. And maybe violence would prove their point.

The etching was evidently fresh. If it was a joke, it had been done recently.

"The bureau doesn't take any threat lightly," Jackson said. "So, it may be a joke. It may be simple vandalism. But we'll keep covering this with you. No problem."

He saw Angela coming toward them. She had been walking around the cemetery, searching for any other sign that someone might be planning a violent protest or attack in the midst of whatever St. Patrick's Day activities or performances or speeches there might be.

"I haven't found anything that might suggest someone is using the cemetery as a staging ground," she said. "But there are all kinds of places where . . . well, weapons could be hidden, bombs set . . . and it isn't St. Patrick's Day yet."

"I might be dragging you all out for nothing. There are other saints. St. Patrick seems to have been a cool one—usually it's pretty amazing to be in cities like Savannah or Chicago or others on St.

Patrick's Day. But . . . the words could refer to a different saint. Patrick wasn't warlike. Hey, St. George is the one famous for slaying the dragon," Connell noted. "We may be way off."

"Or we may find a trickster tomorrow and nothing more. Hopefully," Angela said. She looked at Jackson.

"I'll take night," he said. "The McFadden brothers, all three, will stay through. And Axel Tiger. Axel told me to make sure to give Mary his love."

Mary Tiger, Special Agent Axel Tiger's aunt, watched the children for them. She had her own apartment, but she had a room in their Arlington home, too.

Angela smiled. "Okay, then. I'll be back at about eight." She grinned at him. "I'll bring donuts and coffee."

"Crow, you really could go home with Special Agent Hawkins," Connell said, nodding to Angela. He wasn't usually so formal, but they were on a stakeout. "I have six cops holding here through the night, too," he added.

"I'll bring lots of donuts," Angela assured him.

"Oh, sorry, I didn't mean—"

"Hey! I'm happy to bring donuts. Donuts are easy."

"And we've all got some Irish in us," Connell said. "We should be . . . well, it will be different this year. Last St. Paddy's Day, I watched a parade and had a great evening at my brother's house, hoping it would be the same as in a pub. This year . . ."

"Covid has made everything different," Angela said. "Though I'm sure many people will be out and there will be celebrations to see. Anyway, since it's not such a great year for parades and parties, it's not so bad to be working. Anyway . . ." she murmured, and paused, looking around.

Jackson knew his wife. She was appreciating the history and beauty of the cemetery.

Most of the graves were in-ground with flat or stone markers. Although some work had been done in the cemetery to re-etch and preserve historic markers, many were illegible, rounded stones. But as the years had gone by, different forms of memorials had been utilized. Some were in single-body tombs above ground stone or concrete tombs, and in the mid-1800s, the mausoleums had started going up. But there were still beautiful stretches of land where markers had disappeared all together, along with clumps of trees and brush. The earliest graves were those of a few Revolutionary war soldiers, one who had perished in the conflict and three who had survived into the early 1800s. There was a small chapel on the grounds that had once been an Anglican church but was now deconsecrated and simply seen as a lovely little place for any who felt the need to pray or find a moment of quiet.

There was also a holding vault for those who had died when the ground had been too hard to dig out.

The whole of the cemetery was well-kept, thanks to a local 'save our cemeteries' group.

"Angela?" he murmured.

"Nothing. It's a strangely beautiful, peaceful place," she said. She looked at Connell. "We're not seeing anything that might be trouble at the moment, right?"

"My men on the outside would have contacted me," Connell said.

"I'm going to head home, then," she said. "But I will be back bright and early, and I promise not to forget the tons of donuts!"

"I'll walk you to the car," Jackson told her.

Connell bid her goodnight and slid against the mausoleum wall to sit and lean against it.

Darkness had come. Luckily, the world around the cemetery had grown. Lights from the surrounding areas cast a glow that gave them some vision. But it was shadowed, and Jackson thought such a place would not be great for the faint of heart at such a time.

"Any thoughts on the cemetery?" he asked Angela as they made their way to the path that wove through the various sections of the park-like setting.

"Technically, it began life as a graveyard," she said.

"What?"

"The term 'cemetery' was used to describe burial grounds that were free-standing. Graveyards go to churches, but the chapel was a church, still is, so . . . oh, and vaults are dug into cliffs or mountains, so what we often call vaults are mausoleums. Or so said the book I just read on old burials and interments. I mean, obviously, if you're in a mausoleum, you weren't buried. You were interred."

Jackson shook his head and smiled. "Okay. So, again, any thoughts?"

"The etching on that stone was fresh. Our forensic experts agreed on that."

"So? Prank or real?"

"I don't know. But I wasn't expecting anything today. Tomorrow is St. Patrick's Day. It's a happy day—usually a time to get together, and people may get together a little bit too much, since we're crawling out of a pandemic, but still in it. But here, it's always been a time to celebrate Irish heritage in America and the life of a good man. But some people will use any date as an excuse to create trouble or cause violence. I still believe most people just want to live nice normal lives, working and raising their families. But we know there is a percentage—small, I still believe—who will cause trouble. So. We can't let any perceived threat go."

"Wow."

"Wow, what?"

He laughed. "I was looking for a 'yes' or a 'no.'"

She made a face at him. "How about an 'I don't know.'"

"I don't either," he said. "But . . . I'm going to hang through the night with the detective."

Angela nodded. "That's good." But she paused as they neared the road. "I'm tempted to call Mary and do the same," she said softly.

"Oh?"

"There's something . . . I don't know. I thought I saw a shadow moving earlier. I walked through the trees—especially where the words were written on that stone."

"So, you think there is someone in the cemetery?"

She looked at him with a dry smile. "There are tons of people in the cemetery. But I haven't seen any ghosts hanging around today, though most like to hang around other places. Seems like they still check in with fiends where they are buried."

"Or interred."

"Or interred," she agreed smiling. "Hey, it's a strange time of day—or was. The darkness is already coming on for real."

"It is," he said. They'd reached the car. "Kiss the kids for me."

"Will do," she promised.

They were alone. On a professional level, they kept hands off one another when working. But no one was around. He pulled her close for a minute and kissed her forehead. "By the way, glazed donuts seem to be the main draw, so lots of glazed," he told her.

"Lots of glazed," she promised, slipping into the driver's seat of their SUV. She gave him a last smile and revved the engine.

He watched her car lights disappear and then headed back to the mausoleum. Connell was still sitting there, leaned back, his eyes closed.

He opened them as he heard Jackson approach.

"This is probably silly," Connell said.

"I always prefer silly to deadly," Jackson assured him. "No need to take any chances. You look tired. Go ahead and doze off. I'll take first watch."

"There are other cops out there, scattered around the sections."

"And we have three agents on. It's like camping, right?"

"Well . . . hm," Connell said.

But the man did look tired. He closed his eyes again and slept.

And Jackson kept watch, rising, walking a few feet here and there, but maintaining position; they were at a place where they could see the stone and the trees.

He wondered about Angela's shadow.

His wife didn't see things or imagine things that weren't real.

But the hours wore on.

And he didn't see a soul—living or dead.

*

Victoria Sophia—just eight months old—was sleeping when Angela arrived home. Corby was watching one of his favorite movies.

"I hadn't seen it myself, and it is adorable and charming!" Mary said.

"Don't tell me—'Darby O'Gill and the Little People,'" Angela said.

Mary nodded.

"Well, get in there, and see the end! In fact, do you mind just staying? That will save you driving home late and waking up early?"

"Don't mind a bit," Mary assured her. Mary had been an incredible gift in their lives. Her real home was down in Florida with the Miccosukee people, but she had loved coming north to be near her nephew and to look after Corby and the baby, Victoria Sophia.

Corby hadn't heard her come in. The dogs had greeted her, but Corby had been glued to the TV.

"Hey!" she said, and he jumped up to give her a hug, watching the television all the while.

"Sorry, Mom, love this movie. Where's Dad?"

"Working through the night. Mary is going to stay. I'm going to have to go back early, okay?"

She was surprised when he stopped looking at the TV and gave her his attention. "Back to the cemetery?" he asked.

She nodded. He looked at her strangely.

"Corby, is something wrong?" she asked him.

He shook his head. "Um, movie is almost over!" he told her.

"Okay," she said, and didn't press him. And she sat by him, slipping an arm around his shoulders as they watched the movie come to an end.

Mary yawned. "Okay. Over and out. Corby, that was adorable. But now, what are we going to watch tomorrow?"

"Leprechaun'?" Corby suggested.

"Sure. That sounds good for St. Patrick's Day," Mary said.

"No!" Angela said. "It's a horror movie—and no!" she said to Corby.

"I was just teasing," Corby assured her.

Mary shook her head, grinned, and headed for the stairs. "Night, all!"

"Goodnight, Mary, thank you!" Angela called.

When she was gone, Angela looked at Corby.

"Okay, what's wrong?"

"There's something at that cemetery," he said.

Corby was 'gifted.' He was their adopted son, but she couldn't have loved any child more. He was giving and sweet and she believed he would grow to be a man with an incredible sense of integrity.

"Something as in . . . ghosts, you mean? Corby, we all know this. Most of the time, ghosts like to hang out where they loved being in life; but they do come 'home' more or less because they meet others like themselves. But I didn't see any ghosts today or this evening, and certainly not anyone or anything that might be dangerous."

"But they think something might happen there."

She hesitated, wondering if she had done the right thing. Mary had been taking care of the baby, but Corby had been with her when she'd stopped in the office for some paperwork and gotten the call about the strange writing on the stone.

She'd stopped by with him quickly before taking him home to be with Mary, and then returning to wait with the others until dark.

"Why do you say that?" she asked.

"He was watching me," Corby said.

Angela frowned. Her arms tightened around his shoulders. She realized she might be an overprotective parent since nothing was threatening them in their living room.

"He—who? A visitor to the cemetery?"

"A strange man. In a very strange outfit."

"You don't mean a police uniform, do you?"

"No, no, he was . . . really weird. He was wearing like a dress . . . and a robe and a strange hat, and he was . . . just there. Then he wasn't."

Angela frowned. "A dress and a robe and a strange hat."

"I think he was an old-time priest," Corby said. He shrugged. "He looked nice, but weird. Not the bad kind of weird." He gave her a grin. "I'm a smart kid—look at who I have for parents!"

"Flattery!" she warned him.

He was still grinning and shaking his head.

"Wait, the whole thing was weird. I knew he'd never hurt anyone. There was just something gentle about him . . . I don't know. I—hey! Can I go back there with you tomorrow?"

"Do you think he was a priest? Maybe someone dressed for funeral rites?"

"Maybe." He looked at her strangely. "I don't think he was . . ."

"He was what?"

"Living," Corby said. "Mom, they didn't close the cemetery to the public, right?"

They hadn't. The police and the bureau had chosen not to. They wanted to watch for anyone coming in.

"No."

"May I just go with you for the donuts part of the day? Mom! It's St. Patrick's Day tomorrow! The luck of the Irish will be with you!"

"You know what they say sometimes, don't you?" she asked him.

"What's that?"

"If the Irish didn't have bad luck, they'd have no luck at all!"

"Mom, do you know why the Irish wear shamrocks?"

"I actually do," she told him. "St. Patrick was born in Britain; his father had been Romanized, but he was taken as a slave to Ireland. It was there he began teaching and preaching. And he used the shamrock to describe God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. Three in one."

"Bummer."

"What?"

Corby laughed. "Bummer. I wanted to tell you something!"

She grinned. "I have always loved St. Patrick's Day. And so, I know a lot about St. Patrick!"

"Did you know that he wasn't Irish?"

"Born in Britain."

"He was taken by Irish raiders when he was sixteen."

"And he spent six years as a slave," Angela said, "and he was often lonely and afraid. His father had been with the Christian church, so Patrick turned to his religion in all his solitude. He had dreams and visions, and after he'd escaped, he walked to the shore and made his way back to Britain. He believed he needed to go back and bring his faith to the Irish people. But first, he studied for years and years—and years—and was then ordained as a priest. He was sent to Ireland then—to administer to the Irish who were Christians and to bring Christianity to those who weren't."

"Mom, you're good. And annoying."

Angela laughed. "I'm sorry!"

"He was smart—he didn't try to convince people they were bad or wrong. They had their own religion based mainly on nature. So, he incorporated the sun with the cross. He had bonfires at Easter," Corby said.

Angela nodded. "I'm very proud of you. You read up on what you want to know."

Corby nodded in acknowledgement. "He's known as the Patron Saint of Ireland—but he was never canonized a saint, mainly because they really weren't doing that way back when. But he's a better saint—he was proclaimed a saint by popular demand!"

"All true. They believe he died on March 16th around 460 A.D. Much of his life was a mystery, but he was accredited with miracles and bringing the people of Ireland to a new way of believing. He didn't judge or condemn others, and—"

"He was just an all-around darned good guy!"

"The history we know says that is so," Angela agreed.

"If Dad says it's okay, could I come out for just an hour and have donuts with everyone?"

"If Dad says it's okay," Angela told him. "For now, to bed."

He gave her a kiss on the cheek. "I'll go right to sleep. And I'll be up," he warned her, grinning again. "You won't be running out on me because you didn't want to wake me up!"

"I won't run out on you," Angela promised.

He went off. She stayed on the couch a minute longer, staring at the blank TV.

There was no reason he couldn't come with her when it was early. The cemetery was open, and police officers were watching all points of entry; and if there was anything suspicious going on, she'd be warned before coming in.

And yet . . .

She dialed Jackson, hoping he hadn't gotten to doze off for a few minutes. But he answered right away.

"Hey, kids okay?" he asked.

"Fine. And Mary is staying over."

"Great. Get some rest, huh?"

"You, too," she told him. "I guess it's not too comfortable, but . . ."

"I can catch a power nap just about anywhere," he told her.

"Jackson, Corby wants to come back for a half hour or so in the morning."

"Does he understand why we're here?"

"Oh, yes. But he—he saw someone in the cemetery."

"There are lots of people in the cemetery—we've established that!"

"Someone curious. A priest. Or someone dressed up like an old-fashioned priest."

"St. Patrick's costume party? Or a priest none of us saw?"

"I don't know. We should never bring him into possible danger, but the cemetery is open. We don't even know if there is a real threat. I think it would mean a great deal to him. Also, the baby has no

clue as to what any day is, but I think Corby wants a bit of us for the holiday. He's studied up on St. Patrick."

"I'll talk to one of the McFadden brothers. Have one of them drive him home. I'm sending them home and we'll bring in Axel and a few others for the day shift here."

"So, bring him?"

"As long as he comes and goes," Jackson said.

"I'm thinking the morning will be all right. I'll call before I drive into the grounds and make sure everything is still just on surveillance. I think it will be all right. I just hope I'm not a terrible parent. I don't want to risk his life."

She turned toward the stairs. Corby was standing there.

"Okay, see you in the morning," she told Jackson.

"Love you."

"Love you."

She ended the call.

"I'm sorry. I just came down to give you a last kiss goodnight. I didn't mean to eavesdrop, but . . . you and Dad risk your lives all the time."

"We're well-trained. And we're adults," she said.

He smiled. "I just know—it will be okay."

He rushed over, kissed her, and headed back for the stairs. "And Dad said I could come, right?"

He didn't wait for his answer. He already knew what Jackson had said.

She shook her head and smiled, rose, and went to the baby's room. Their precious daughter was sleeping sweetly.

Going into her own room, she realized Jackson might power-nap just fine.

She'd be having trouble sleeping.

She was too accustomed to the heat and strength of his body next to her own.

*

The night had been quiet.

Cops and agents from various areas of the cemetery had walked the grounds through the night. They had searched where they could, every conceivable open mausoleum, big or small, through brush and trees, over the acres of grounds.

"I'm not sure whether to feel badly—or grateful," Connell told Jackson.

"Good," Jackson told him. "It's always better when a threat is nothing. And maybe the words mean something else entirely."

Daylight Savings Time had started, and while Jackson liked the extra hour of light in the afternoon, the morning had seemed long in coming. And the day had come much as the day before had disappeared, with strange rays of gold and crimson light mixed with the haze of night. But as Angela called him to say they were on the way, the sun was up and bright.

And visitors were coming to the cemetery.

There was a tour group that had come in. Bruce McFadden, one of their Krewe members, had signed on to the tour.

No better way to watch what was going on than to be part of it.

"Angela is coming through; our son is with her. He wanted donuts with the group here since it's St. Patrick's Day. But I'd like—"

"I've had a report from the entries—nothing unusual. So far, we have the one tour group and four cars, eight people in all. We'll be watching; we'll get your son out of here safely," Connell said. "I'm just hoping, well . . . if there is a threat, it's probably for night again. I'm hoping we don't drop our vigilance."

"We won't," Jackson said.

"Have you slept many nights, trying to catch a few ZZZ's in a cemetery, cuddled up at a mausoleum?" Connell asked.

Jackson laughed. "Yeah, I'm afraid I've done a few. You?"

"Can't say I have. But I have spent more nights than I want to remember sitting in my car keeping surveillance on things because something might happen or because we needed to keep tabs on a suspect," he said. "Yeah, a few hours sleep—we'll be fine. And tomorrow . . . well, I'm going to find a good bar and bring my own food coloring so I can have a green beer, even though it's the day after St. Patrick's Day!"

"There's a plan for you," Jackson murmured.

He could see Angela driving in, coming close to their location. She parked the car up behind a clump of trees, something which made him frown at first. But he realized she'd be setting boxes of donuts and paper carafes of coffee on the car and wouldn't want it visible to anyone attempting anything.

Corby got out of the car and ran to him giving him a hug.

"Dad! Thanks," Corby said.

"You can't stay long," Jackson said.

"Yeah, I know. You and Mom are adults. I'm a child. Got it. But you do know I will be like you one day. I will be FBI," Corby said.

"That's a great compliment to your Mom and me," Jackson told him. "But today, you're still a kid. Donuts with the guys wandering over, and then you're heading home."

Angela was setting out the boxes on the hood of the car. He saw a few officers and agents were emerging, but their group of law enforcement was good. They'd gage who was there and who needed to keep blending in with the scenery.

"I'm a kid, so I need to run back to the car. There's a green-frosted donut in there with a cool candy shamrock, and I believe it's got my name on it!" Corby told him.

"Go for it," Jackson told him.

Angela had finished setting out her purchases. She strode toward Jackson just as Corby was heading back to the car. Through the trees, Jackson could see several of Connell's police officers were there. Corby was surrounded by safety.

She greeted Connell, smiling and saying, "You look worn out. You should go try a donut and coffee!"

"I'll do that," Connell said. "Crow?"

"We'll hang here for a few minutes," Jackson said. "You go. Remember, I'm the one who is accustomed to catching a few ZZZ's in a mausoleum."

Connell grinned, thanked Angela for following through on her promise, and headed toward the trees and the car bearing donuts.

"Corby really wanted to come. And I guess . . . well, he is surrounded by cops."

"And an engraving in a stone is just an engraving in a stone," Jackson said.

Angela shrugged. "But there was . . . something yesterday. It was twilight, and so much is lost in the strange glows and shades and shadows we get then."

"I keep thinking if there had been something major going on—like a massive cache of weapons—someone dead would have found us by now. I know I've seen ghosts or souls drifting around here before."

"You didn't see anyone . . . not living last night?"

"No. Of course, I spent the night taking turns and taking naps with Detective Connell."

"Oh! Right—and happy St. Patrick's Day!"

He smiled. "Happy St. Patrick's. For the Irish in all of us—and for a man who lived a good life and gave to many. You didn't happen to bring a cup of coffee over here, did you? Hm. Guess not. I'm an investigator—I'd have seen you carrying it."

Angela laughed. "No, but hang in. I'll bring cups for both of us, and we can toast to a good man, Saint Patrick!"

She walked back to the car. He saw her disappear behind a tree.

Connell came back a minute later, happily munching on a jelly-filled donut—or so it appeared from the bit of blueberry on his chin.

"I don't know how she did it these days, but she honestly found fresh donuts!" Connell said.

"She's good—even when it comes down to finding decent donuts," Jackson said. He grimaced. "But right now, caffeine will do it for me."

It seemed to be taking her time to get back to him. But he thought he'd seen one of the McFadden brothers head to the car—maybe they were talking.

"Did you see her getting coffee and heading back?" Jackson asked Connell.

"No, I . . . your boy was walking off to read something on a tomb. She went after him. I guess you're going to need to get your own coffee."

Jackson stared at him.

"Hey, the place is crawling with law enforcement," Connell said. "I'm sure they're all right."

"Like I said, she's good. But she said she was coming back. She didn't." Jackson nodded grimly and walked toward the car and the trees. Then he began to run.

Angela had said she was coming back.

She hadn't done so.

And she always did what she said. Unless . . .

*

"Mom! He's there!" Corby whispered to her. "Come on."

Angela prided herself on moving quickly, but Corby was gone so fast she was left to smile at one of the officers and murmur, "Kids," and take off after him.

But he was ahead.

He rounded the corner of a small mausoleum and headed toward the old chapel, sliding through the door before she could reach him.

It was okay, she assured herself, but she still felt desperation even if she'd only be away a matter of minutes.

And there were people about! The tour group was there, the cops were there, her own agents were only a shout away.

She burst into the chapel.

Sunlight was streaking its way through the stained-glass windows, but the chapel itself seemed dark and shadowy.

And Corby was there.

Along with the man he'd seen before.

A priest, she thought, from a Catholic or High Episcopal church, judging by his conical headwear and the long robe he wore. He was an older man, nice-looking still, with a trimmed beard and bright eyes.

"Ah, lad, you brought your mum along! Well as need be!"

"Father?" Angela said. He was wearing the attire of a holy man, but trust was something she held in check until she knew.

"Aye," he said, his burr soft. The man was definitely Irish. Of course, it was St. Patrick's Day.

And coming closer, she saw he was not among the living.

"Is there danger coming, sir?"

"Not if this young lad will help."

"Corby? You want to risk my son—"

"I never ask others to take risk. But there's a boy here who lost his father recently in a bad way, and he has no mother. The state is watching him, waiting for his grandparents. He is pretending to blend in with the tour group. His Da was killed when gang members fought with with police—a victim of crossfire. And I fear . . . well, he didna put the inscription in the stone, he—"

"Father, I wouldn't contradict you, but our forensic people are very good, and they say the etching—"

"He found the stone on the day they buried his father. He figured out the writing. He's a bright boy, a fine artist perhaps one day, as long as he does not lose himself in pain. He's a bit older than your lad, but I think he might be the one to tell him that . . . that I'm here, that I'm speaking with him."

"Father . . . um . . ."

He grinned at her. "Patrick, dear lass, Father Patrick."

She nodded, grimacing, not sure if he was joking, or if his name had really happened to have been Patrick. It was, especially among the Irish, a common enough name.

"Father Patrick, I see you, obviously, as does my son. And there are others here. But a boy, no matter how hurt, may not—"

"With help from this young lad, he might. Lass, I'd not see a boy—little more than a child—shot down in the pain of his loss. He saw violence, and he believes he must be violent in return. He has a gun here, and . . . and I think his pain is so great he would aim it so he might be shot in turn. There is no big protest or event on the horizon—just a boy in pain. And if you let me help . . ."

He didn't finish speaking. A teenager, perhaps as old seventeen, slipped into the chapel.

He evidently wasn't expecting to find anyone there and he didn't see them at first—he slipped behind the inner wall and looked out.

The tour group was over at a Revolutionary War grave. He seemed please to have lost them. But there was a police officer in uniform and the young man took his hand and fingers and mimicked a gun, pulling the pretend trigger of his gun and let out a clicking sound.

Angela's hand rested on her weapon.

"Please!" the dead priest, Patrick, whispered.

She paused.

"That's not the way, Sean," Father Patrick said clearly.

The young man swirled around and stared at the three of them.

He had a headful of wild brown hair. His face and body were lean, and his height suggested he'd be well above six feet when he finished growing.

"What? You know my name? I . . . what . . ."

He made a dive, trying to get to something under one of the few wooden pews in the small chapel.

"No," Angela said firmly, and this time she moved with the speed of a bullet, diving after him and catching his ankles and pulling him back.

"Shooting a cop will not bring your Da back. And he was a good and faithful Irishman, Sean. He'd not see you like this."

"How do you know my name? How do you . . . who are you? What are you?" he demanded.

Angela wasn't sure if he was talking to her—or the ghost.

He was certainly surprised a woman had been strong enough to pull him back. "And who is talking? Are you a ventriloquist?" he demanded, staring at her.

He could hear Patrick; he just couldn't see him.

"We're people who don't want to see you die or ruin your life," Angela said. She winced, ready to attempt to explain.

But she didn't have to. She and the boy, Sean, were still on the floor. Corby slid next to her. "I know this sounds ridiculous, but he's here! St. Patrick is here. He didn't just want to save the Irish, he wanted to save all he could. But you are apparently Irish, so that's cool."

Sean stared at Corby incredulously and then he started to laugh.

"St. Patrick is here? His ghost? He was buried in what's now Northern Ireland!"

"Ah, for the love of a leprechaun!" Father Patrick said. "I've seen the world, I have! Come on, lad! There have been ships crossing the great oceans for hundreds of years now, and I've managed to get meself on a good flight now and then as well! Ah, indeed, most don't be knowin' they need beware of hitch-hiking ghosts!"

Father Patrick—or the ghost of Father Patrick—knelt by them as well. "I come where I'm needed. Ah, lad! You and your art class came and talked about re-etching old stones. And you came back alone, and you found a saying you thought was a call to you. Aye, the etching is fresh, for you wrote over what was, and thought it was calling to you. And that it would draw the police. They don't know as yet what gun killed your Da. You thought you would draw police here with your etching, and you did that, lad. But you're not meant to die. There is still goodness in the world. There are people who care for you, and more to love you in the future."

"People don't care. I don't think my grandparents want me . . . not even for the year left I'll have of high school!" Sean said. There were tears in his eyes. "My dad! He was a good man. He . . ."

"He was a good man. And you must do him proud. You must grow to adulthood and be a good man as well," Patrick said.

The boy reached out, not seeing, but trying to touch Patrick.

"Have I gone crazy?" he whispered. "I feel . . ."

"Indeed, aye, and I'm sorry about the cold, I am," Patrick said. "But y'hear me! Bless it all! Lad, ye be special! Don't throw it all away."

"All you've done is re-etch an old stone," Angela said gently. "We'll tell everyone, and we'll apologize, and explain you had no idea it might cause such concern."

Sean was openly crying then.

But before he could answer, the door burst open.

Against the shadow and myriad hazy and multi-colored light in the chapel, all Angela saw at first was a man with a gun in both hands—that gun aimed at Sean.

She threw herself over the boy.

"Special Agent Angela Hawkins!" she cried. "Don't shoot!"

"Angela, Corby? Ah . . . Father?" Jackson said.

He holstered his weapon, stepped in and closed the door.

"This is Sean, Jackson. And Father—Patrick. Sean etched the stone, or re-etched it, I should say. Father Patrick . . . saw him do it, and had us all in here to . . . explain," she said.

There was more to it than that, of course, and she knew Jackson realized it.

But he also knew how to assess a situation.

He pulled out his phone and dialed Connell, who answered just about instantly.

"We can call off the surveillance," he said. "There's a young man here who started talking with Angela and Corby. He did the stone—he didn't realize he needed to get permission. The words were there from hundreds of years ago. He and his friends want to do more of the old stones—preserve history. He had no idea people might think he wanted to cause some kind of an insurrection."

Angela could hear Connell swearing.

"Yeah. Always better safe than sorry," Jackson told him.

Connell went on again.

"My Krewe members are always happier working when nothing happens, Detective. Not to worry. We don't mind at all."

They ended the call. Jackson stared at Angela and Corby, and then at Father Patrick.

"Father Patrick—really?"

"Now, come, have a heart, sir! There's many a Patrick out there, and many a Patrick who is an ordained priest! Ah, but then again . . . peace and faith are my calling. And lad! I need you to have faith."

Sean wasn't even trying to see who was speaking then. He was staring at Angela.

"You threw yourself over me. Someone might have fired at me—and you threw yourself over me."

"I—um, yes," Angela murmured. "But Jackson is trained and—"

"You didn't know it was going to be . . . this man," Sean said.

"All officers are trained," she said, offering him a smile. "So, now—"

"We have to bring Sean to Detective Connell and have them talk. We'll get this all cleared up."

Jackson stared at Sean. "You'd better get me whatever you had here, too, so that I can get rid of it. That is . . ."

"I . . . I'll never want to hurt anyone again!" Sean whispered. He looked at Angela. "You would have died for me. I guess . . ."

"There's hurt in the world and goodness, too. Goodness worth living for—and goodness worth sharing," Patrick said. "Goodness in everyone from everywhere, no matter what their color, their background, or anything else. Goodness is in the character of a man—or woman—and you have the potential for great character, Sean. I know you do."

"There's a ghost in here—I can hear it. Speaking plain as if . . . as if he was real," Sean said, still somewhat shell-shocked and scared.

"He is a real ghost," Corby said. "But don't tell anybody, huh? Trust me, they'll just think you're crazy. I've been the route. "

Sean looked at Corby and smiled. "Uh . . . no, but these people . . ."

"My mom and dad," Corby said.

"Oh." Sean didn't argue, though Jackson was obviously Native American, and Angela was blonde, and Corby was bi-racial.

"I'm adopted," Corby said grinning. "And trust me, they're the coolest. In fact . . ."

He looked pleadingly from Angela to Jackson.

Jackson answered with a quick smile. "I think we have a bit of straightening out to do. And then, of course, it's St. Patrick's Day. We'll see Sean is cleared with child services, and he can come spend the day with us. We'll find some Irish fare and bring it home and celebrate. For the saint who first bore your name, Father!" Jackson added.

"Now there's a plan!" Angela said.

She turned to look at Father Patrick.

But perhaps his work there was done. He was gone.

"Really?"

"Yes, but business first! When you speak with Detective Connell, let him know you thought you were preserving the cemetery. And whatever is stashed in here, I need it. Now," Jackson said.

Sean stood up, dusting his hands on his jeans and turning quickly to Angela, offering her his hand to help her up. She'd smiled and accepted it.

Sean got the gun he'd hidden in the church and gave it to Jackson. Jackson looked at her and said, "Let me deal with all this then we'll all go. Sean, you're with me. What is your last name?" he asked.

"O'Brien, sir."

The two went out. Corby looked at Angela, smiled, and then threw his arms around her.

"Life can really suck," he whispered.

"Corby," she murmured.

"But I've been the luckiest kid in the world," he told her. "And Sean . . . I know he's going to be a good kid and grow into a good man. I mean, how many people get to meet St. Patrick himself?"

"Oh, Corby. Lots of people are named Patrick. And I'm willing to bet a ton of priests are named Patrick. It's a popular name. Yes, he was Father Patrick. A Father Patrick. He's probably buried here in the cemetery somewhere."

But Corby shook his head. "No. We just met the real deal! That was St. Patrick."

"Ah, now, Corby. The real St. Patrick would have been speaking Latin or possibly Gaelic, I'm not sure, honestly, we'd have to look that up. But—"

"Mom! He's been haunting people and bringing them faith for hundreds and hundreds of years! Plenty of time to learn to speak English!"

"Well, we'll look into it," she promised.

There were still many things to be done, but eventually, they could all leave.

And Sean would be coming with them for the afternoon and evening.

His grandparents were due the next day. They would be taking him home. They were his mother's parents and had been all the way across the country when his dad had been killed.

Jackson told Angela she wasn't supposed to put herself in the way of a bullet.

She had expected that.

But the strange day wound up being a wonderful one. They found an Irish restaurant serving at outdoor tables. They had Mary with them, since Axel was out of town, and the baby. They had something of a wonderful family grouping—socially distant from others, of course.

Sean told them all about himself and his art, and about how he did want to be an artist and create art that mattered. Corby told him all about himself.

And ghosts.

And that they had met St. Patrick.

"Corby, we don't know—"

"Oh, but we do!" Corby said.

And Sean smiled, too. "I will always believe I was truly saved by Saint Patrick!" He turned to Angela.

"And you, too," he said softly. "And, of course, you, too, sir!" he told Jackson.

Jackson laughed and looked at Angela.

He lifted his glass.

"To Saint Patrick! Real? Not real? A different Patrick?"

"Saint Patrick lives in the heart!" Corby said.

"And we're all Irish on St. Patrick's Day!" Angela said, and lifted her glass, too.

"Slainte!" she said.