

Leprechaun Land

by Maggie
Murphy

MAEVE WAS ENJOYING a country stroll near a castle's ruins, a book of fairy tales tucked under her arm, daydreaming as usual. Then she heard a sound her magical imagination definitely hadn't conjured up: from behind a screen of bushes floated the murmur of little voices. Peering through a gap in the greenery, Maeve saw dozens of leprechauns relaxing in personalized, carved chairs and cradling their pots of gold.

A leprechaun named Declan popped up and addressed the group. "My friends, nobody loves St. Patrick's Day more than we do, but there's a downside to so much publicity. I'm talking about the hordes of pesky humans who turn our special day into one long game of hide-and-seek by clomping around the countryside trying to catch us and get our gold."

"Too true!" said Harpfiddle, running his fingers through his glittering coins. "It's the Gold Rush all over again,



EVERYTHING I
CONJURED UP
CREATED,
WENT WRONG.

THIS IS NOT
THE KIND OF
PUBLICITY,
ATTENTION,
A YOUNG
MAGICIAN
NEEDS.

YEP, YOUR
HORDES,
CROWDS,
OF FANS
ARE SO
DISAPPOINTED.

A GOOD MAGICIAN
CAN START A
GOLD RUSH,
LOTS OF PEOPLE RUSHING TO AN
AREA WHERE GOLD HAS BEEN FOUND.
MAKE THE PEOPLE RUSH,
SPIDER THE STUPENDOUS.

right here in Ireland. Last year, while trying to enjoy a simple cup of tea, I had to flicker invisible three times, leaving behind three very visible, deliciously warm currant scones. My day's disappearings totaled no less than twenty-six."

"I hate to propose it," Declan said. "But perhaps this year we should clear out of the region altogether and spend St. Patrick's Day somewhere else."

This suggestion so upset Maeve that she stepped into view and said, "I promise I'm not after your



gold. I just can't stand the thought of the land losing its leprechauns on St. Patrick's Day. I want to help you!"

At first, the stunned leprechauns just stared at her. Finally, Declan spoke. "Well, Maeve, seeing as you're no gold grabber, something tells me you're meant to be here. Sit down. What do you think we should do?"

The grass bulged up into a green velvet armchair. Maeve sank into its softness, feeling special. Still, she now had the worry of solving the leprechauns' big problem. Telling herself that surely her magical imagination would come up with something, Maeve thought hard.

She then said excitedly, "Instead of spending St. Patrick's Day pouring your magic powers into last-minute escapes, why not combine your energies and . . ."

After Maeve finished speaking, the leprechauns applauded. Soon Declan was handing out job assignments. "Let's see.

Harpfiddle, please gather our twigs, leaves, and mist twists. Finnbar, you hunt up those abandoned cart wheels and lost toy cars. Malachy, you can provide the walnuts. Brendan's our expert at collecting webs and water-sparkle. Cormac, let's put you in charge of hiring the bees and working out their pollen-per-hour pay rate. I'll zip briefly into the town movie theater's silent film festival to bottle the smell of fresh popcorn and the sound of live organ music. And Maeve, you'll let your aunt in on our secret so we can set things up in our—I mean, *her*—field?"

"Oh yes!" Maeve said happily.

And so she did. It wasn't long before everything was ready.

On St. Patrick's Day, the treasure seekers combing the area followed a lilting tune to a traveling carnival whose glowing emerald sign read:

ENJOY FREE FUN AT
LEPRECHAUN LAND!

Weaving her way through the merry crowds, Maeve admired the delicate lights sparkling everywhere. Helpful workers in snappy gold-and-black uniforms bustled to and fro. A Ferris wheel spun, a boat ride whirled, bumper cars thumped. And in the center of a carousel, happy leprechauns played instruments, danced, and counted coins.



WAIT A SEC...
WHAT'S THAT
LILTING,
LIGHT AND
RHYTHMIC,
SOUND?

SAY,
DO YOU HAVE
LEAPY-CORNS?

THAT'S KIND OF
A PERSONAL
QUESTIONS
SPIDER.

I THINK
SPIDIE
MEANT
LEPRECHAUNS.



"Just look at the lifelike eyes and beards on those mechanical leprechauns," said a woman to Maeve.

The woman's husband laughed. "If only their gold were real!"

In the late afternoon, the fairground closed, and the contented people headed home. Maeve was

the only human left to see what happened next. Sprouting wings, the tireless carnival employees shape-shifted in a golden wave and buzzed off to their beehive. Poles toppled, and green silk tents collapsed, changing back into twigs and leaves. Boats wrinkled, diminishing to halved walnut shells; strands of lights shimmered into dew-speckled spider webs. Maeve sat with the leprechauns on a slowly shrinking cart wheel, still spinning lazily to a few lingering swirls of faraway music.

“What a show!” said Harpfiddle. “The big folk will never know that our air-popped popcorn really *did* pop out of thin air!”

They all watched Brendan release the last coil of water-sparkle, which danced west to the lake in a shining chain. Then Declan said, “Our guests had a wonderful day. We hid our gold in plain sight and had a fabulous time, too, thanks to you, Maeve. Thanks to you, and your magical imagination.” ✨

