

Detective Donnally and The Little People

by

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The Irish blessings used are traditional.

Chapter 1: Detective Donnally's Dilemma

Detective Sergeant Donnally, Joe to his friends, sat at his desk in the station house staring at the screen in front of him. Not that there was anything to see. He hadn't switched on the computer yet. He knew he'd have to, soon, but just for now he was giving his eyes a break. They were red, sore and tired. What he really needed was a good night's sleep. What with the baby waking a couple of times a night to be fed, the plumbing playing a solo Gene Krupa would have been proud of, and a light show outside his bedroom window to rival anything Las Vegas had to offer, sleep was a thing of the past.

However, as he leaned forwards to press the "on" switch, something happened which made him forget all about crying babies and everything else. The screen lit up. On its own. No Windows, no familiar icons, just a face. Odd sort of face it was too. Kind of - unformed. Like it was melting. And somewhat wrinkled in appearance. Joe, being a cop, noticed things like that.

"What the...?" he exclaimed, frowning. "Where'd that come from?"

Joe looked cautiously around, wondering if one of the guys was playing tricks on him and was lurking somewhere to see his reactions. But no. No-one anywhere. He gave his full attention to the monitor once more. The face was still there, and staring at him with a kind of expectant smile. He checked the various controls and switches. No! Definitely not switched on.

This was baffling. Completely outside of his admittedly limited experience of computers. But in spite of his lack of knowledge and training, he knew this shouldn't be happening.

Joe Donnally was a simple man. Pointed in the right direction he could follow a trail of clues and come to a conclusion, but he wasn't the most imaginative of people. He lived a fairly simple life and that's how he liked it. Not too many complications to worry his grey matter. His work, his family, his home, and a few beers occasionally. What more could a man want?

"Wonder what would happen if I turn it on anyway," he thought as he reached forward again. As he did so the screen started to flash and a voice shouted from the speakers:

"DON'T BE TOUCHIN' THAT! Jesus, Mary and Joseph, do you want to electrocute me?"

Startled, Joe froze. Slowly he sank back into his chair, while making a mental note that the voice had a distinctly Irish accent. Cop training again, you see. He peered around the room, just to be doubly sure there was no one around, before he did anything else. Then, feeling extremely foolish, he addressed the computer.

"Uh. Hi. Can I help you? Whaddya want?"

"What do Oi want? What do Oi want?" came the reply as the face continued to undulate alarmingly. "The question is, me boyo, what do you want?"

Joe looked even more perplexed, if that's possible. "What do I want? I want a good night's sleep buddy, that's what I want. Sheesh, I'm hallucinating from lack of it!"

"Ah, to be sure, you're doin' nothing of the sort. Aren't I every bit as real as you are yourself?"

" Hmmm. That remains to be seen, I guess. At this moment I'm not even sure if I'm real."

"Well, whoile you're making up you're moind about that perhaps you could also be thinkin' of somethin' else you moight be wantin'. Try thinkin' a bit bigger."

"Ok" Joe responded, " a whole lotta nights' sleep."

"No! That won't do at all. Something worth me whoile doin' for you."

Joe blinked. "Doing for me?" he repeated, stupidly.

"Of course. It's your turn you see. It's a long story, so unless you really have the toime to sit and listen..."

"My turn." Joe was becoming more monosyllabic by the minute.

"Yes. Don't be tellin' me you don't know who Oi am?"

"Uh, well, " Joe began.

The face and the voice broke into laughter.

"Ah, Oi see it all now. You didn't get the email, didja? That's explains everythin'. Bejaysus, do I have to do everythin' meself? You just can't get the staff you know!"

"Email. No. I guess not."

"Oim a leprechaun! One of the little people! You must have heard of us!"

"A - a leprechaun. Right."

"Of course, and Oi'm here to grant you a wish."

"A wish. I thought leprechauns made shoes."

"Ah well, yes, traditionally, but these days, well, with all the foreign competition we've had to doiversifoy."

Joe struggled with this for a few moments. "Let me get this straight, I have a leprechaun on my computer wanting to grant me a wish, right? Jeez, what did I drink last night?"

"Ah, well now, I don't know about that, but here Oi am, and here Oi'll stay until me work's done."

"I see," said Joe, not seeing at all. "And just where is here?"

"In Oireland, o' course, Eire, the land o' your forefathers."

"But also in my computer?"

"Ah well now, it's all this modern technology you see. We have to keep up with the toimes. And it's a soight easier than some of the ways we had to foind people in the past, I don't moind tellin' you."

"Uhuh. OK. I'll tell you what. If you can move my apartment somewhere quieter, where a guy can get a good night's sleep, then I'll believe all this crap."

"No sooner said than done!" The leprechaun grinned from ear to ear and vanished.

Joe sat for a while, determined to get more sleep somehow or other. Hallucinating now! What next. Sheesh! He thought about seeing a shrink. This was just not normal, even from lack of sleep, surely? But in the meantime he had work to do and the computer appeared to behave perfectly normally for the rest of the day.

When his shift ended Joe drove home and climbed the stairs to his apartment rehearsing in his head what he would tell Katie about this afternoon's events, as a way of explaining his need for more sleep. He got to his floor and realised that he'd gone up one flight too many, this was the apartment above his. He laughed at himself and went back down one flight. But now he was one floor below his!

Joe scratched his head and went up and down another couple of times, he even went outside to make sure he was in the right building, but no matter how many times he did it, the awful truth remained. His apartment simply wasn't there. It had vanished.

Det Sgt Joe Donnally was once again sitting before a computer terminal in the station house. He hadn't quite got over the shock of losing his apartment yet, nor his wife and baby. He'd spent some considerable time trying to track them down of course. In his job you have the contacts all right but it still takes time. At the end of his search though he was no nearer to knowing where they had vanished to than when he started.

There are some things you can tell your friends and your boss about, Joe mused, but disappearing apartments and little people just weren't among them.

He sat now, in the closet they optimistically called his office, as he had been doing every spare minute of every day, watching the blank screen and hoping against hope that the leprechaun who had spirited his life away would appear once more; if not to apologise then at least to gloat. But day after day, the same thing; just a blank empty screen. Until he turned the computer on, of course.

Just then the telephone sprang to life, startling him out of his reverie. He leaned across and picked up the receiver.

"Hello, yes, Donnally speaking" he grunted into it.

"Ah, wouldja look at that now? It's himself speakin', as Oi live and breathe."

Joe almost dropped the handset in shock. All this time he'd been expecting the strange little man to appear on the computer again and here he was using the phone!

"Hello!" he almost shouted, "Is that you? I mean is it really you?"

"Well of course, me boyo. Who else would it be but meself?"

"Errr, yeah right. Listen here, what have you done with my family? And the goddam apartment?"

"Please, please, calm yourself now. No need to be gettin' all aeriated that way," said the leprechaun. "Oi only did whatcha wanted me to do. One wish you were entitled to and one wish Oi granted you and that was it. Move the apartment somewhere else, somewhere you could get some sleep, you said."

"Hey! I didn't know you was serious," Donnally raged, "I thought, well, I thought I was hallucinatin' or somethin'."

"Ah, well, yes. That's one of the hazards of this loine of work, especially in today's cloimate of suspicion and economic downturn."

"Economic d...What's economics got to do with anything?"

"Never moind. Don't be frettin' yourself. Oi'm here to help."

"Help! Help is it?" ranted the detective, rapidly becoming apoplectic. "And just how do you intend to do that? Huh?"

"Well now, if you'll just calm down an' listen a whoile, Oi'll tell you."

This had better be good, thought Joe. All the skills he had learned as a hostage negotiator had abandoned him and he was wound up like line on a fishing reel.

"Roight. Are you ready to listen now?" enquired his tormentor. "Ok. It's loike this. Oi was goin' through me doairy yesterday and you'll never guess what today is. "

"That's one thing you've got right," admitted Joe grumpily.

"I knew you'd see it loike that. Well it just so happens that this is the start of Elf Awareness week."

Donnally's jaw dropped. Elf Awareness? What the hell was Elf Awareness? And what did it have to do with him getting his family back? He cleared his throat, noisily. "I beg your pardon," he began, "but..."

"Oh no need for that. Really."

Joe had just opened his mouth to burst forth again when the little man continued.

"Roight, as Oi was sayin. It's the start of Elf Awareness week and me seein' that, I decided to call the National Elf Service."

At this point Joe's jaw, already slack, began to sink towards his chest. His eyes glazed over and his breathing slowed to become almost imperceptible. In all his years as a cop nothing had prepared him for this. This was beyond all human understanding.

"Now then," the leprechaun went on, "Oim aware thatcha may not know about the Elf Service but believe you me, it's a very good thing."

Donnelly dragged his beleaguered brain back into focus long enough to mutter "Elf Service?" before the leprechaun continued.

"Ah you see now? It's beginning to come clear to you already."

Joe blinked. Not once, but repeatedly. He shook his head from side to side in the hope that something like that might return him to normality, then slapped the side of it as one might slap a recalcitrant television. It was in vain however. As if talking to a leprechaun wasn't bizarre enough, now he was being asked to believe in elves! This was becoming decidedly surreal, though those weren't exactly the words Joe would have used. He was interrupted once again by the little voice in his ear.

"Hello? Are you there Joe? Hello? Jesus, Mary and Joseph, where's he got to now?"

Suddenly the detective's cop training kick-started him into something approaching rational thought. Of course! Some mean bastard was playing a trick on him. He should have noticed the play on words sooner. Elf awareness, huh? Elf Service! He shook his head again, this time in disbelief at his own foolishness. "Ok," he said into the phone, "who is this? Give a man a break, will ya?"

"Ah, Joe, Joe, " the little Irish voice continued, " please, don't be loik that."

"Ah, jeez! How long are you going to keep this up? My sanity's at stake here! Either say something useful or get off the damn phone!"

"Ah, Oi see we have a problem," the leprechaun said sadly. "Oi was hoping you'd want to get some help to find the things you lost, but Oi can see you're a man of independent spirit. Not that that's a bad thing, no indeed, but..."

"Lost!" interrupted Joe. "Lost?! I had them snatched away! By you!"

"Hmmm. Well, there's something in whatcha say of course..."

Joe could take no more. He slammed down the receiver in disgust. Elf Service! Elf awareness! What would it have been next, he wondered. Elf improvement? He turned back to face the computer screen. Might as well get some work done instead of wasting time on a stupid prank-playing - whatever.

At that moment the screen sprang to life of its own accord, just as it had on a previous occasion.

Joe watched in some trepidation as the now familiar face flickered before him, even more green and wrinkled and undulating than he remembered it. It was actually making him feel quite queasy.

"Oh my god," he said. "Oh - my - god! He's back. It is him, the pesky little ..." He was interrupted yet again by the thick brogue emanating from the computer.

"Hello again. We got cut off. Anyway this is better 'cause you can see me this way."

Joe almost cried. Had he been a weaker man, a man of lesser fortitude, he almost certainly would have. Damn and blast him to hell and back, he thought. Why can't a man get some peace? Was it really too much to ask?

The fact that this was what he had been hoping to see, for some considerable time, was neither here nor there. Now that it had happened, it was more than flesh and blood could stand. He just wanted the obnoxious little creature before him to disappear. Preferably for ever, but certainly for a good while. However, it was not to be.

"Now then, where were we? Ah yes! the Elf Service. Well now, they have a missing persons bureau you know. No, Oi don't suppose you would know that, but no matter. They do. And Oi was thinking they might have some news on your family."

The detective pondered this for a moment then said, "How is it you need help? Don't you know where they are? After all it was you that spirited them away." Got him this time, thought Joe. Answer that if you can. Cops can be tricky too, you know.

"Ah well, you'd think so, wouldn'tcha?" came the reply, "But in fact Oi have no oidea, no oidea at all. Ya see, Oi just make it happen. I don't do it meself. Ah no, that wouldn't do at all, at all. Oi'd have the trade unions breathin' down me neck in no toime. Work to rule, you see. Can't go upsettin' the system, can Oi now. "

For the umpteenth time that day Joe took a deep breath and then sighed a deeply unhappy and remarkably patient sigh. "Couldn't you find out though? From whichever branch of Spells R Us did do it?" he asked.

"Ah now, that's where the problem loies you see. All the records have been pretty much lost Oi'm afraid. Otherwise d'you think Oi'd have left it this long without lettin' you know where they are? No indeed, the elves that held the ledgers just collapsed one day and we've had the very divil of a toime ever since, sorting it all out."

"Elves that held the...ledgers?" enquired the detective. "I thought you people were keeping up with the times. Why ledgers? Why not discs?"

"Oh, we are, Joe, we are. Us leprechauns anyhow. But those elves - what can I tell you? There's a lot of room for..."

"Don't say it, please. Just - don't, ok?"

Slowly but surely, the bottom was dropping out of Joe Donnally's world for the second time.

Chapter 2: A Strange Awakening

It was not just the loss of his family and the strange disappearance of his apartment that troubled the detective as he sat ruminating on what the exasperating little leprechaun had told him earlier that day. There were other problems in his life. His job, for one. Since the start of these bizarre events he'd been unable to concentrate with anything like his old efficiency; though, to be fair, he had never been the sharpest knife in the drawer.

Nowadays he was being watched very carefully by his chief who considered, not without good reason, that Donnally was losing it. Big time. Much more of his aberrant - what his boss referred to somewhat less politely as "freakin" - behaviour and he would be in real danger of losing his job.

Added to this were the problems of simply keeping a roof over his head. When your apartment just vanishes into thin air that way it's a little inconvenient to say the least. Staying overnight with colleagues was fine for a while, but hospitality had worn thin now and as he was still paying the rent on his own apartment - wherever it was - there was little left over for another place.

He'd spent some nights in bus or rail terminals, sleeping on benches, which was the best he could come up with, never having been homeless before. If the cells in the station house were empty he slept in one of those, explaining his need for sleep as the reason. He could have gone to a relative's house and asked for help, maybe saying he'd been kicked out for some marital misdemeanour or other, but thought it might cause even more complications. Especially as time went on.

His wife - wherever she was - was still drawing money from his bank account, and who could blame her? After all, he reasoned, it wasn't as if she'd asked to be transported bodily along with her immediate surroundings to god knows where. She was no doubt even more dismayed by the whole thing than he was, having had no explanation at all for this odd turn of events. I mean, how often does that happen? And though she had wanted to move away, this took the phrase "moving house" to a whole new level.

Joe sat, his head in his hands, and sighed. Elves now. Jeez. What next? Fairies? Pixies? The goddam Loch Ness monster? Bigfoot? UFO's perhaps? He shook his head and heaved another sigh.

It wasn't long before he decided that the answer to his problems lay at the bottom of a whiskey bottle, so he left the station house and headed for the nearest bar. There was no one in there he knew, so Joe felt safe to indulge in his one real weakness.

"Large whiskey, Irish," he gruffly told the obviously gay bartender.

"Oh dear. Had a bad day, sweetie?"

Joe scowled. "Bad? Bad doesn't come close. And not just day either. Try month."

"Oh my! Want to tell me? I'm a very good listener."

"You wouldn't believe me if I did. Nobody would. It's unbelievable. Crazy. Outa this freakin' world."

"Oh dear! We are in a mood aren't we? No need to bite my head off, I'm sure. Never mind, it'll probably look better in the morning. Things generally do, after a good night's sleep."

Joe glared at the man with a look of pure hatred. Never in his life had he been regaled with such vacuous inanities or, in Joe's mind, "bullshit". He swallowed the drink in one go and ordered another, settling himself onto a stool. Several large ones later - he wasn't counting after all - a strange thing happened.

Now the detective was getting used to strange things happening, to some degree anyway, but this - this was very strange. A stunning redhead entered the bar and headed straight for Joe. She sat on an adjacent stool and smiled at him.

Joe blinked, slowly, as his eyelids were only just under his control - as indeed were his eyes, which had developed a mind of their own at some point and now moved independently of him and, what was worse, of each other. In spite of this though he could see she was a looker. He took his time visually absorbing the long swathe of red hair, pale creamy skin daintily dotted with freckles, a full mouth, pert nose, sparkling green eyes, slender yet curvacious body, and legs that went on for ever. A real fine lady.

She wore a green dress that covered everything but hid nothing. It clung to her curves like a president to his appointment and stopped just below her knees which were no doubt as beautiful as the rest of her.

What in the name of all that's holy was a lady like her doing smiling at him? He had little going for him. Katie had married him out of pity he reckoned. Face it, he thought now, she was better off without him. Perhaps he should just leave her to her new life, wherever it was. What could he offer her anyway? He wasn't going anywhere. Just a dumb cop, that's all he was.

He turned to the woman, smiled blearily and stupidly back at her, his eyes almost closed, and promptly fell off his barstool. He lay looking up at the ceiling with a puzzled frown which lent him the appearance of a very relaxed bulldog.

The woman leaned over him. "Here. Let me give you a hand," she said in a soft, lilting voice.

"Hey! That's ok. I got two of my own, see?" said Joe, and chuckled at his own wit.

The woman held out her hand anyway. She was looking rather amused now. "Erin," she said.

"Huh? No. Joe, acshally," said Joe, and grinned again.

"Well now, Joe," said Erin, "I think perhaps you need to sleep this off, don't you?"

"Ah, sleep. Yes. That's what I need. Shleeeeeeeep. You are quite correct in your assess-assessmen-ment of the factsh as I shee them."

Without further thought he allowed Erin to take his hand and lead him from the bar and into a waiting cab where he, slowly but inexorably, passed out cold.

The following morning found Joe lying in a large bed, alone, with not a stitch on under the pale silk sheets. His head felt like the city's rush hour traffic had recently run through it and his mouth felt like the bottom of a parrot's cage. He tried to sit up, failed and collapsed back into the downy pillows beneath his head. Prying his eyes open he attempted to look around the room, and what he saw through half lowered lids was just sensational.

The walls were a soft shade of gold and all the woodwork was gilded. Above him was a large crystal chandelier, and a deep soft looking carpet, the color of thick cream, covered the floor.

Pheewwwww, thought Joe. Have I died and gone to heaven? Jeez, how'd I get here? I must be hallucinatin' again. Yeah, that's probably it. Face it Donnally. A guy like you don't get this lucky.

A soft tap at the door interrupted his thoughts.

Joe pulled himself together and the sheet up over his chest. "He - hello?" he said, as loudly as he dared, allowing for the banging it set off in his brain. "Wh - who's there?"

"Are you decent?" asked an almost familiar voice.

Funny, he thought, it reminds me a bit of - oh no! Not that! But a slight trace of an Irish accent - now where - I'm sure I know that voice from somewhere. Last night - yeah - in the bar - some classy dame - yes! Ouch. That hurt. So - is this her place? Sure as hell ain't mine.

"Hello?" came the voice again. "Is it all right to come in? I have your clothes here."

Suddenly being made aware of his nakedness all over again, Joe grabbed the sheet and pulled it even higher, up under his chin. "Er, ok, you can come in," he said, very carefully.

The door opened and in walked the vision from the evening before. She was just as outstanding as he remembered her. Looked at drunk or sober, she was a real babe. This time she was wearing some flimsy thing in pale green that hid most of her and floated like the morning mist around her.

"Good day," said the vision. "Here, your clothes."

"Thanks," replied Joe, then, wincing with every word, "er, can I ask something? Who are you? Where am I? And what am I doing here?"

Erin smiled. "That's three things," she said. "I'll talk to you later, but for now you should get dressed - there's a bathroom behind that door - then I'll get you some juice. Help that head of yours."

Some while later Joe was seated at a patio table, white, wrought iron, fancy, as Joe was later to write in his note book, and drinking fresh orange juice.

The shower he had taken had helped bring him round a little and now he felt almost human again. But only almost. He spoke to the lovely creature opposite him.

"So, are you going to tell me what gives?"

"All in good time, all in good time."

Hah, thought Joe, like that is it? Why can I never get a straight answer any more? Has the whole world gone crazy?

Joe, now considerably sobered up, walked in an apparently untamed garden that could have been designed to titillate the senses; which in fact it was, though Joe would never have thought of anyone doing such a thing. Various fragrances - the sweet apple-like aroma of roses, the heady scent of lilies, and others he did not recognise - combined to make a tantalising bouquet which did not overpower but gently and stealthily crept into his consciousness, "like a real professional thief" as he was to describe it later, and played with his emotions.

His ears were similarly entertained by the gentle sussuration of leaves moved by a balmy summer breeze. This was joined by the splashing sounds of a fountain, as yet unseen, while the soft insistent droning of bees added a counterpoint to the melody. Joe sat himself down on a conveniently placed moss-covered log and drank it all in. He looked up at the sky, wonderfully blue, with fluffy white clouds drifting almost imperceptibly across it and thought how rarely he noticed skies, living in the city.

Joe's thoughts were confused and uncertain. He still had no idea why he was here in this place, who it belonged to or even how he had gotten here. His companion of earlier had excused herself and left some while ago, leaving Joe to his own devices, which is why he was now sitting here, just passing time. What he had seen of the inside of the house was enough to convince him of its beauty and tranquility. Now he could see that the outside, with its old ivy covered walls, provided a perfect backdrop to this paradise of a garden.

"Paradise, yeah," murmured Joe. "That's what it is - paradise..." though it has to be said that he lacked the education necessary to a full understanding of the connection between a paradise and a garden. Glancing down he noticed a plant that struck a chord - three leaved...

"Shamrock? Jeez, if that's shamrock then she is Irish. Heh! Nothing much gets past Joe Donnally!" he said to himself. "Damn, I could get used to this," he continued. "Oh yeah. Beats the crap outa my place. What am I saying? My place! I ain't got a place no more!"

His face fell, and the suspicion of a tear started to form in the corner of one eye, but the combination of warm sun and the intoxicating scents and sounds around him were making him very drowsy and, before he could get too depressed, persuaded Joe to lie down in the longish grass, mingled with wild flowers, and drift into a deep sleep in which he was to dream of undulating leprechauns and fairy princesses luring him into an unknown future.

The detective awoke some hours later with a slight shiver. He yawned and stretched, scratched himself a little and rubbed his eyelids with his knuckles in an attempt to remove what remained of his bleariness. Cautiously, he opened his eyes and looked around. He was still in the garden.

Joe could be forgiven for his caution as this whole thing had a feeling of Alice in Wonderland about it; he wasn't sure whether he'd dreamed the whole thing and would wake up in some flop house or police cell, or even some back alley somewhere. He didn't even know whether to be pleased or sorry to find himself still here. On the one hand, it was nice to know that this place hadn't all been a dream, but on the other hand, getting his normal life back would have been even better.

Clambering to his feet, Joe realised that he had been there no little time. The sun was getting low in the sky and, more importantly, his stomach was demanding attention so he set off back to the house in search of food.

Entering at the back door he had come out of earlier in the day, he searched for a source of sustenance. His natural instincts and the mouth watering smell of food cooking led him in the right direction and he entered the kind of kitchen he'd only ever seen in the glossy magazines his Katie read sometimes. His eyes widened in amazement as he took in the size of it and the range of furnishings and appliances. He said nothing to embarrass himself however as there was already someone in the room.

A somewhat diminutive middle aged woman sat at a well scrubbed table reading a paperback book and sipping from a teacup. As Joe moved closer she looked up and, without a change of expression, said: "You'll be Joe. Hungry are we?"

Uh huh! thought Joe, that Irish accent again. "Uh, yeah," he replied. "And you are?"

"Bridget. Cook. Herself told me to feed you. Whatcha fancy?"

"Uh, whaddya got?"

"Stew."

"Stew is fine, thanks."

"Uhuh. Dumplings? Bread?"

"Gee, yeah, ok."

"Right. Sit yourself down then."

It sounded like it might be best to obey, so Joe sat at the table and watched Bridget bustling around, fetching a plate, cutlery and bread, then ladling out stew from the steaming pan on the hob. She was dressed all in black except for a white apron around her middle. He cleared his throat and ventured a question.

"Uh, who owns this place then?"

Bridget plonked the plate of stew and dumplings down in front of him, added a plate with thick slices of what appeared to be home made bread, then stood looking down at him, her arms folded across her chest.

"If you don't know that already, why the devil should I be tellin' you?"

Joe thought about this as he ate, but the logic of her remark escaped him. If he'd known already he wouldn't need telling. He shook his head in bewilderment and carried on eating.

When he'd finished eating he got up from the table and tried again to converse with the cook, who was sitting reading again.

"Uh, any idea when the owner's getting back?"

Looking up from her paperback, Bridget sighed. "What am I, a mind reader?" she enquired of no one in particular. "No," she continued in Joe's direction, "I have no idea. At all. If you've finished you can go into the drawing room and amuse yourself there."

Joe was rather relieved to be leaving the presence of this rather intimidating woman but hadn't the nerve to ask anything further, so he left the kitchen and went quickly through the first door he came to. It was clearly a study, all dark panelling and leather chairs, so he left and tried again. After another couple of wrong guesses - a library and a dining room - he came to what appeared to be the room in question.

It was beautifully appointed, like the other rooms he'd seen. A long low sofa stretched before a magnificent open fireplace which was presently adorned by a huge arrangement

of flowers. Joe sat down on this sofa and looked around. He noticed a big wide screen television with video and dvd players beneath, an impressive stack system with flat wall mounted speakers, and glass fronted cabinets full of expensive looking china and silverware. He whistled slowly. Got money whoever she is, he thought.

Having decided he'd been given permission to do what he liked here Joe turned on the tv.

It soon became apparent that the things he was seeing bore no resemblance to what he was accustomed to. Half the time he couldn't understand the language and when he could they all had Irish accents! Some foreign programme, obviously. When the news came on though, things got even crazier. "Telefis Eireann", the logo said.

Chapter 3: In Erin's Isle

The detective sat gaping as his jaw dropped. Did that logo mean what he thought it meant? Irish tv? If so, was this cable or satellite or - nah. Couldn't be. No way could he be in Ireland. It just wasn't possible. Was it? He wasted no more time but, taking his courage in both hands, strode back into the kitchen and faced the now dozing Bridget.

"Hey, I gotta question for ya," he said.

Bridget opened an eye and glared balefully with it in Joe's direction. "Oh have you now?" she said. "And what would that be?"

"Where the hell am I?"

Bridget now opened the other eye and used them both to sweep first down and then up the length of the man standing before her. "What in the name of all that's holy do you mean by that?" she asked. "Aren't you standing in the halls of Brian Boru himself?"

"Brian who? He the owner of this place then?"

The cook looked as though she might burst at any minute and was clearly struggling to keep her imminent explosion under control.

"Brian Boru. Do you know nothing?"

Joe blinked. "Obviously not," he admitted. "All I know is, I got drunk last night and this beautiful dame brought me here. Period. And that was in the States, so if I'm any place else I'd really like to know how I got here. And why."

"Lord have mercy," gasped Bridget. "Sure I thought that was a strange way of talkin' you had. As if I don't have enough to do with looking after herself and her ilk, now she's bringin' in foreigners."

The detective was a little taken aback but stood his ground.

"Foreigners. So you're saying - what?"

"I'm saying, you eejit, that you're here in Erin's Isle. Eire. Ireland!"

Donnally stood clutching his head. Before long his legs felt decidedly unsteady so he reached blindly for a chair and sank into it; then, resting his elbows on the table, cradled his head in his hands.

"Ireland," he said. "Ireland. Ireland?"

He repeated this a few more times, with different inflections - as if rehearsing a speech, before fixing Bridget the cook with a look of utter dismay and emitting a final "Ireland?"

"Yes, Ireland, you great gobdaw."

Poor Joe was at a loss for words. He felt as if life had taken him by the short and curlies and tossed him into the middle of next week; which by anybody's reckoning was not unreasonable.

So bewildered was he by this latest piece of information that he didn't hear the telephone when it rang, nor did he notice Bridget answering its insistent demands. He was first aware of it when the cook poked him in the back with a bony finger and said, "Telephone."

Joe looked up, a bewildered look on his face, and said, "But no one knows I'm here!"

"Well some one obviously does; they're wantin' to speak to you."

Joe reached out a tentative hand and spoke into the receiver. "Hello?"

"Ah, Joe, it's only meself wantin' to see how you're gettin' on."

At the sound of the leprechaun's voice Joe's eyes took on the appearance of table tennis balls. Table tennis balls, that is, with eyes painted on them.

"Getting on!" he spluttered, "Getting on? How the hell d'you suppose I'm getting on? What in god's name am I doing here? In Ireland for god's sakes."

"Easy now, Joe, easy. Calm down, there's a good fella. We thought you needed a break, a little holiday, so Oi asked a friend to take you for bit. It seemed like the least we could do. Under the circumstances."

"Uhuh. Right. So first you ruin my life and then you drive me crazy, right?"

"Oi take it it isn't to your loikin then? Sorry about that. It's the noicest place Oi could think of straight away."

"Oh the place is great. Very nice. It's just, I wish I'd had some warning."

"Hmmm, well it was out of moy hands, really, you see. They asked for a place to send you and Oi had to think quick."

"Uh, they? Who is they?"

"Oh, the insurance people. We have insurance, you know, to cover this koind of thing. And a good thing, too. Where would we be without Elf Insurance? Tricky little beggars, elves."

"Elf - Insurance. Here we go with the elf thing again. Jeez."

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