



The Claddagh: Book 1: The Loyalty of the Leprechauns

M. R. Street

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Told in mythic prose, the coming-of-age novel The Claddagh involves both leprechaun magic and a rescue quest.

In M. R. Street's family-centered novel *The Claddagh*, a leprechaun grows into his destined leadership role as he comes to terms with the magic he possesses.

Dune, a teenage leprechaun, belongs to the Kelly clan. His father Paddy is the Keeper of the Clover, charged with protecting the clan's ancient relic, a golden clover. But Paddy is hard on Dune, insisting that he learn his role as his family's protector.

Dune is given the chance to prove himself when Mother Cass, the clan matriarch, asks him to rescue part of the clan, the Greenapple family, who were captured by humans. Kyna, Dune's love interest, ends up joining him on the quest. She has already found her magic: she can conjure images, such as one of a dragon, out of natural elements, which help when the leprechauns have to trick or hide from humans. Dune and Kyna are soon accompanied by a pony, Cairdeen.

The worldbuilding is limited and centers the understanding that the leprechaun world is at odds with the human world. The Irish setting is fleshed out via the presence of local dialects and familiar descriptions of green, rolling hills. But most of the focus is placed on the leprechauns' magical abilities rather than who they are as individuals beyond those skills.

The book establishes leprechaun magic as both a blessing and a curse: it makes leprechauns attractive to humans, who want to abuse it for their personal gain. Mother Cass's magic is the strongest; Dune's mother casts runes, creating protective shields with her stones when humans or other threats draw near; and Dune's sister mixes healing poultices. Leprechaun magic also seems inextricable from self-confidence: while Kyna is comfortable with her magic and is confident that Dune will grow into abilities, at almost sixteen, Dune remains ambivalent about the promise of his own coming magic, as his father's doubts about him impact his own self-worth.

The prose has a mythic quality that befits its concentration on leprechaun magic. Bits of verse weave in too, as with the incantation that Dune's mother chants while casting her runes, which repeats throughout the text. And stories within the story deepen the text: Dune tells tales to his siblings, resulting in a richer atmosphere.

The book holds mild tension and is heavy on symbolism, with the image of the claddagh framing its story—a hero's journey in which three storylines converge: the mission to rescue the Greenapple family; Dune grappling with his inheritance; and the intertwining of the leprechauns' respective abilities with those of their pony, Cairdeen, who accompanies them on their quest. Themes of friendship, love, and loyalty—signaled by the names of the leprechauns and their pony—direct the book's forward movement. Its succinct chapters are each narrated from one individual's perspective—often, Dune's or Kyna's. Later on, the Kelly family's symbol, the four-leaf clover, undergoes a transformation too, in order to reflect the importance of friendship alongside the other established values. But despite

the story beginning with the disturbing capture of the Greenapple family, a sense that the Kelly clan's future is bright—and that Dune's will be, too, despite the troubles he faces while coming into his own—reigns throughout.

Luck wins out in the triumphant novel *The Claddagh*, in which a young leprechaun grows into his magic, hoping to live up to his destined role.

RACHEL TELLJOHN (March 1, 2024)

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