



SHAMROCK HUNT

BOOK 2

S. E. GROSSKOPF

PREVIEW

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CHAPTER I

Wednesday, March 11, 1931

Liam Callahan strolled down York Street. The streets were dark and quiet, and he had a lot on his mind. An upcoming exam on ancient Celtic mythology, a paper on the poetry of Egan O'Rahilly due next week, the bills he had to pay before the end of the month, and. . . Maeve. Marrying two months ago had been impulsive, but he didn't care who objected. He wished he could provide more for her than the grimy little third-floor apartment they shared.

After college, he would make up for it. She wouldn't have to work as a waitress anymore and he wouldn't spend his days at the university and his evenings cooking at the Lucky Lady Restaurant. He'd only stepped away from his late-night studies now to clear his head. He could only read so much 17th century poetry before the lines blurred together.

A light flickered in one of the windows on the other side of the street. This late at night, the businesses should all be closed. At first, he ignored it. A second glance illuminated the lettering on the window—the Lucky Lady. O'Brien wouldn't be there this late. Nobody should be. He jogged across the street and looked through the glass.

A man with a flashlight picked his way through the maze of tables and chairs in the dining room, not toward the cash register,

but across the room to the fireplace. Light flashed off a large Celtic medallion over the mantle.

Liam tried the front door and found it locked, then jogged down the alley and around the building to the back. The door had been forced. The smell of stale cabbage and yesterday's stew drifted out. He thudded down the hallway into the dining room. A beam of light hit him in the face. He threw his arm up over his eyes.

"Callahan?"

The voice was familiar. Extensively familiar—a voice he spent hours listening to every day, droning on and on about the significance of the Ulster Cycle of heroic myths or making historiographical comparisons of various theories concerning the purpose of the neolithic passage tomb at Newgrange. He put his arm down and blinked into the brightness. "Professor MacKenna?"

"Callahan, what are you doing here?" MacKenna lowered the flashlight. He clutched the medallion under his arm, standing with his back to the stone fireplace.

"I work here, and I was just walking past—" He wasn't the one who should have to explain himself. "What are you doing here?"

"This is it!" MacKenna's voice rose with breathless enthusiasm, punctuated by a sound like a giggle. He held up the bronze plate-sized object as if presenting the crown jewels. "The Aisling Medallion."

"ASH-ling?" Callahan enunciated. "Like the seventeenth and eighteenth century Gaelic poetry?"

"Of course, you know that."

"But this isn't real. It's just the prize for the Shamrock Hunt. Tully Brannigan's charity fundraiser next week." Defending Brannigan's property was the last thing Callahan ever expected to find himself doing.

"It is real." MacKenna shined the flashlight over it. His eyes glinted wildly in the glow. Frantic. Maniacal. He practically drooled. "Look at it. Look at the design, the craftsmanship, the tool markings along the edge. . . . It matches the legend exactly."

“Brannigan made the whole thing up to sell more raffle tickets.” That was the sort of thing he would expect from Brannigan. Cheating the whole city in the name of charity. Maybe it wasn’t that important if the money actually went to charity, but Callahan doubted that. Maybe nobody else cared. Brannigan was influential enough to get away with anything. “Put it back and let’s get out of here.”

“It’s mine!” Trembling with excitement, he tucked it under his arm again.

“It’s Brannigan’s until the raffle. If you want it, buy more tickets.”

“You know the legend . . .”

“It’ll bestow the wisdom of the ancestors upon you, grant you wealth and happiness, and make all your dreams come true.” Much to the amusement of every student, MacKenna had once spent an entire class period on it. “It’s fake. Put it back.”

“I’ve waited so long for this day . . .” He tried to brush past him, flicking the flashlight carelessly across the floor and windows.

“You’re not leaving with that.” Callahan grabbed the medallion and tried to pull it away.

Still gripping the medallion with one hand, MacKenna swung the flashlight and whacked him over the head. “I’ll flunk you on the final exam.” *Whack!* “You’ll never graduate.” *Whack!* “I’ll have you expelled from the university.”

Blood trickled down the side of Callahan’s face. His vision blurred, but he wouldn’t let go. The flashlight caught him across the ear. He twisted harder. MacKenna fought like a madman, alternately screeching and giggling while swinging the flashlight.

Callahan shoved the old professor backwards, dislodging him from the bronze plate. MacKenna toppled over and fell. The back of his head struck the stone hearth. The flashlight rolled across the floor.

“Professor?” Callahan struggled to catch his breath. He wiped the blood off his face with the back of his sleeve and blinked to clear his vision. “Professor MacKenna?”

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He nudged him with his foot. MacKenna didn't respond. Blood pooled on the stones. Callahan's stomach lurched. The medallion felt cold and heavy in his hands. His fingers were too stiff to release it. He ran.



CHAPTER II

Thursday morning, Detective Lieutenant Marx stepped into the Lucky Lady Restaurant. The room felt crowded, but not with diners. Dark wood paneling lined the room, accented by oil paintings of lush pastoral scenes and shelves of sports memorabilia.

Malone, the police technician, gave directions to one of his men about photographing the scene. Their attention centered around a man lying on the floor near the stone fireplace. A couple of the coroner's men waited nearby.

Marx made his way through the rows of tables and chairs. Malone looked up and motioned him closer. The snapping camera interrupted them.

"What happened?" Marx waited for the photographer to finish, then bent down to go through the dead man's pockets. He pulled out a wallet.

"I'd say he fell and hit his head on the hearth." Malone pointed out blood on the stones. "Nobody was supposed to be in here overnight, so unless he wandered in randomly and happened to fall over backwards, I'd say he was pushed. Maybe it was intentional, maybe it wasn't." He pointed to a flashlight a short distance from the body. "Blood there too, but not consistent with any wound on the victim. I'd bet he hit his assailant with the flashlight."

"How did they get in here?"

“Through the back door. I’ll be going over it for fingerprints.”

“Anything missing?” He flipped through the wallet and found a decent stack of cash and several business cards. Seamus MacKenna: Historian.

“You’d have to ask O’Brien.” He pointed to a man at the counter near the register, talking with Officers Sullivan and O’Neill. “He owns the restaurant and found this when he came in this morning. Okay to move the body?”

“Sure.” He kept one of the cards, but put the wallet back with the body, then joined the men at the counter. They dropped their conversation and turned toward him, resenting his intrusion. Nobody smiled. “Mr. O’Brien?”

“Who are you?” The man behind the counter didn’t introduce himself, but squared his shoulders like he owned the place. “I was expecting this to be O’Conner’s case.”

“I’m Detective Lieutenant Marx.” He showed his badge. “I have more experience in homicide investigations than Detective Sergeant O’Conner. Is anything missing?” The cash register looked intact. Not only that, but a jar of money sat beside it. The jar had a shamrock painted on the front. This time of the year, it fit the décor.

“Only the Aisling Medallion.” He pronounced it as *ash-ling*. “It’s the prize for the Shamrock Hunt.”

“The what?”

“Look, no offence to you, but I’d rather talk to O’Conner. He already knows all about the Shamrock Hunt. He lives a few blocks away and he’s in here all the time—”

“If you want to call headquarters, talk to my superiors, and have the case reassigned, I’d be happy to turn it over to him. In the meantime, what about the medallion? What’s a Shamrock Hunt?”

“It’s a charity fundraiser.” He grabbed the shamrock jar and thudded it on the counter. The change rattled. “You can buy shamrock tokens at all the local businesses, then turn them in for raffle tickets on Saint Patrick’s Day. Different businesses have different tokens, and you get extra tickets for collecting as many different kinds as you can. The winner gets the medallion, but now

it's been stolen." He shook the change jar again. "When can I open the restaurant? Whichever business sells the most shamrock tokens gets a plaque." He motioned to the back wall where he had several already. "If I'm closed all day, I don't have a chance. If O'Conner was here . . ."

"Alright, alright." Marx reached into his pocket for a few pieces of change and clinked them into the jar. That was supposed to be his lunch money. Payday wasn't until tomorrow, so he wouldn't eat today. "There's for your fundraiser and it's all I've got. Will you tell me about the medallion now?"

"Tully Brannigan donated it for the fundraiser. He can tell you more about it. He's busy organizing the whole parade, but I can give you his phone number."

"Tully . . . *Brannigan*?" Marx stepped back and held his breath, trying not to faint. Flashing spots bounced around his vision. He pressed his eyes shut, rubbed his forehead, and wished he could reach into the jar to take his money back.

"You know him?"

"Years ago." Organizing charity events wasn't what he expected from the biggest bully in school, but the man might have changed in the past twenty years. "He sponsored the raffle?"

"Sure, he does some kind of event most years, plus he organizes the whole parade." O'Brien wrote a telephone number on a slip of paper and passed it across the counter. "I don't know when he'll have time to talk to you, but I already told him about the medallion getting stolen."

"Uh, thanks." He took the paper, but wouldn't look at the number. Brannigan was the last person he wanted to talk to. Behind him, the coroner's men carried a stretcher out to their van. "One more thing. Did you know the victim? Any idea what he was doing here?" He checked the name on the card. "*See-mus* MacKenna?"

"*SHAY-mus*," O'Brien corrected.

"Huh, sorry." It looked like see-mus. To Marx, the way O'Brien said it sounded too much like shamus, and that didn't have anything to do with historians.

“I didn’t know his name, but he’s been in here for dinner a few times. Ordered pork chops two nights ago. He did seem excited when he saw the medallion, and he bought about five dollars in tokens, so maybe he figured on sneaking in here to have another look at it. What happened after that, I don’t know.”

“Thanks.” He found Sullivan and O’Neill chatting with Malone and shoved Brannigan’s number at them, happy to get rid of it. “I need one of you to call Tully Brannigan and ask him about the missing medallion, what it looked like, and how much it was worth. Also start telling the jewelry stores or antique shops or whoever else might buy it that it’s stolen. I’m going to see what I can find out about the dead guy.”

“Sure, Lieutenant.” O’Neill took the paper, then went back to his conversation with Malone.

Marx wouldn’t find anything else here. He turned toward the door.

“Hey, Lieutenant,” O’Brien called after him. He jogged across the room and offered a few green coins that looked like poker chips with clovers on them. “Don’t you want your shamrock tokens?”

“Give them to O’Conner.” Marx waved O’Brien away and turned around. This wasn’t the first time Tully Brannigan had gotten his lunch money. He reached for the door and yanked it open.



CHAPTER III

Lowan went over his diagrams, schematics, and pages of notes and calculations, hoping to come up with a new idea. Nothing. He'd developed a lot of useful components in the past five years and had financially benefited from several patents, but still hadn't found the solution to the one problem—

“Uncle Lowan.” Rita Nanning, his secretary, tapped on his workshop door. “There’s a Mr. Brannigan on the telephone. He wants to talk to you about finding a stolen medallion.”

He followed her out into the main office. Aside from working as a radio engineer, mostly as a hobby, he was a licensed private detective. Though his office suite had been designed as an outer reception area with an inner office, the back room served as his workshop. The front room housed his desk and his secretary’s, drab gray walls, a coatrack, one window, and very little else. He sat down and reached for the telephone. “Mr. Brannigan?”

“I’m calling about the Shamrock Hunt fundraiser for Saint Patrick’s Day.”

“Are you seeking donations? My secretary mentioned a missing medallion.”

“I’m coming to that. The medallion is the prize for the fundraiser raffle. The problem is, it was stolen last night. I could have another one custom-made, but not soon enough for the event. I’m offering a hundred-dollar public reward for it, but if you find it, I’ll double your fee in addition to the reward.”

The offer of money didn't particularly set him on edge, since he wasn't in any financial hardship, but he also had no other case at the moment. He'd just finished tracking down a clever jewel thief. "Where was the medallion kept? What were the circumstances of the robbery?"

"It was on display at the Thacker O'Brien's Lucky Lady Restaurant. Do you know the place?"

"I can find it." He'd never been there, but knew it was downtown. "What is a good time for me to come?"

"Go anytime and talk to O'Brien. You'll have to pardon me, but I have several other calls to make. I organize the parade, so I'm busier than a bee stuck in a tar bucket at the moment."

"Certainly. Was there anything special about this medallion? How much is it worth? Do you have any suspects?"

"It was just a bronze trinket, hardly worth the few dollars I paid for it, but it was large and rather handsome, with a green Celtic knot design. There's a legend floating around about how it was made by druids or some such nonsense, but that's just tourist stuff. It was on display at the restaurant, so anyone could have seen it there. Apparently, several thieves broke in overnight. One killed the other and got away with the medallion."

"Someone was killed over a worthless trinket? I assume the police have been notified."

"They're there at this moment and they can handle the murder. I'm not expecting you to do anything about that. O'Brien only called me a few minutes ago about the medallion. It's already been advertised as the prize and there isn't enough time to get a new one like it. If there isn't a prize for the charity raffle, participation will go down."

"I see. I will come to have a look." He finished the conversation and set the phone down. "Rita, could you please call a taxi—"

The door opened. A woman stepped into the office, glanced around, and padded past Rita toward his desk as softly as a timid cat. Young with soft golden hair, but she dressed plainly. Nervous tension surrounded her. She wore a knitted shawl wrapped over her

shoulders and fidgeted with the fringe along the edge. “Are you a detective?”

“Yes.” He rose to greet her, inviting her to take the chair opposite. “How may I help you?”

“My husband is missing. He went out last night and didn’t come home. I went to the police, but they said he hasn’t been gone long enough to do anything. It hasn’t been twenty-four hours, but I know something is wrong.”

“What is your name?” He offered to shake hands. The brief moment of contact showed him her genuine worry.

“Maeve Callahan. I’m a waitress at the Lucky Lady Restaurant. My husband works in the kitchen, but that’s just for now. His name is Liam. He’s studying at the university. He wants to be a history professor, and then we won’t have to work at the restaurant anymore. We were married only two months ago.”

“I see. Has he been upset about anything recently? Did he mention anything specific or tell you where he was going?”

“He seemed happy enough at dinner. Maybe quieter than usual, but I thought that was just my imagination, and he does have a lot going on right now with his studies. Writing papers, studying for exams, and on top of working. He never has enough time to eat or sleep. I was doing the dishes and he said he was just going out for a walk to clear his head and would be back before long. He never came back. Can you help? I mean, how much would it cost? If I could make payments . . .”

“Do not worry about the money.” Lowan gave instructions for Rita to take the rest of her information. His advertised fee was a hundred dollars a day, far out of her price range. He had no problem forgoing a fee in cases when someone’s life might be at risk. Charging Tully Brannigan double for finding a worthless medallion would more than make up for it.

While she gave her contact information to Rita and repeated the details of her statement, Lowan reached for the telephone and dialed the office number for Detective Lieutenant Marx. No answer. He tried the main number.

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“Milford Falls Police Department, Sergeant O’Leary speaking.”

“Is Lieutenant Marx in?”

“He’s out on a case right now. Can I take a message?”

“No, thank you.” Given that Marx handled most of the homicide investigations, there was only one place he was likely to be. “If he is at the Lucky Lady, I will see him in person.”

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