



Savannah, Georgia

March 17, 2054, 9:03 am

Mark Flynne pushed through the growing crowd outside the cathedral. It looked like the morning Mass had just finished, and now everyone was heading to the sidewalks and the nearby square to get ready for the Saint Patrick's Day parade. He had thought that his green T-shirt, beads, and leprechaun hat would make him stand out a little bit in this crowd, but he actually felt underdressed. James hadn't been joking when he said Saint Patrick's Day in Savannah rivalled Mardi Gras in New Orleans.

James had invited him, Petyr, and Arkeda to the parade this year, since they were all now done with college. Except for Petyr – he was in his first year of grad school in Statesboro, not far from Savannah. Arkeda was working in the marketing department of some big publishing company in Waukesha, Wisconsin, the city where he had grown up. Mark would be starting as a legal assistant for a firm in Portland, Oregon, at the beginning of April. James was still looking for a job.

Mark slipped around a woman in a green-spangly shirt and feather boa, and a man in a green suit patterned with shamrocks, trying to avoid knocking his folding camp chair into anyone. James had said he'd be sitting right in front of the cathedral. Where was he?

"Hey, Mark!"

Mark stopped and looked around.

"Over here!"

Mark spotted Petyr standing at the corner, waving. Like Mark, Petyr was wearing a green shirt and beads. Mark started towards him, then someone clapped him on the shoulder, and he jumped. He turned to see Arkeda beside him. Arkeda was wearing green beads, but the rest of his outfit wasn't Saint Patrick's Day at all.

"Sorry," Arkeda said. "I didn't mean to startle you."

“No, you’re just naturally sneaky,” Mark said, referencing Arkeda’s alien levitation ability. “How’s work treating you?”

They continued along the sidewalk, heading towards where Petyr and James were sitting.

“Pretty good. Although I met the CEO at the company Christmas lunch back in December, and I think she suspects something.”

“About where you’re from?”

“Yeah. I – what on earth are you wearing, James?”

James stood up from his chair with a grin. He was wearing a costume with a pair of legs and a leprechaun head attached, so it looked like he was riding a leprechaun; a green Saint Patrick’s Day parade T-shirt; a leprechaun hat patterned in green, orange, and white squares; and a necklace with green-and-orange beads the size of Mark’s fist. There was an Irish flag tied around his neck like a cape, and he had a shamrock painted on each cheek.

“Come on, it’s Saint Patrick’s Day!” James exclaimed, spreading his arms. “Arkeda, where’s your green?”

Arkeda lifted his beads with a thumb. “I have this.”

James scoffed. “That doesn’t count.” He took off his hat, revealing hair dyed green and orange, and plopped it on Arkeda’s head. “There. Much better.”

Mark shook his head. “Why?”

“Aren’t you Irish?” James asked.

“Yeah, but we don’t celebrate like…” He gestured to James’ crazy outfit. “This.”

James just grinned again. “Get your chairs set up while there’s still room. It’s gonna be packed by the time the parade starts.”

Mark and Arkeda set up their chairs. As Mark was getting settled, James pointed to the guy sitting on his other side, who was wearing a leprechaun suit. He had dyed his hair green and his beard orange. “This is Brandon, the only one of my high school friends who still lives in the area. Brandon, this is Mark and Arkeda.”

“Hey,” Brandon said, giving a little wave.

They sat there for over an hour, talking and people watching as the sidewalks filled. The square to their left was full of canopy tents, tourists lined the bleachers across the street, the cathedral steps behind them were packed – except for the center where the bishop and several priests waited – and a news crew was setting up down the street to their right.

James pulled out his phone to check the time. “It’s almost ten thirty. The parade should be reaching us any minute.”

“How long is the parade?” Petyr asked.

“Usually around four hours,” James said. “That’s why I brought lunch.” He pointed to a soft-sided cooler at his feet.

“Four hours?” Mark asked. “And here I thought Boring’s Christmas parade was long.”

“Boring?” Brandon asked, leaning forward to look at Mark around James and Petyr between them. “You’re from a town called Boring?”

“Yeah. Boring, Oregon.”

Brandon snorted and started to respond, but James shushed him. “It’s Kimberly Publishing,” James said, looking at the caller ID on his phone. “I applied there and Arkeda gave me a recommendation.” He answered the call. “Hello?... Yes...” His eyes widened, mouth dropped open. “Really? Can you send me that in an email?... You did? Okay... How much?... Awesome... No, I don’t need time. I accept... Great, thanks!”

James hung up, grinning. “I am officially employed!”

Brandon held up a hand, and James high-fived him. “Finally!”

“Congratulations,” Mark said.

“Yes, great job,” Petyr said.

“Looks like we’re coworkers,” Arkeda said.

“Yeah, thanks for the recommendation,” James said.

Mark heard sirens approaching from the other side of the square. “Is that the start of the parade?”

“Yep, that’s it. Get comfortable. We’re gonna be here a while.”

“But it is so worth it,” Brandon said.

“Definitely. Especially since I’m no longer worrying about a job.”

Mark snorted. “Can you imagine how they would’ve reacted if they knew what you’re wearing?”

Petyr laughed. “Only an American would accept a job offer in a leprechaun costume.”

James grinned. “It’s Saint Patrick’s Day. Being a little nutty is expected.”

Mark just shook his head. “Happy Saint Patrick’s Day, guys.”