

A LEPRECHAUNS' LASER LIGHT OF LIFE

As I made rounds, glowing laughter radiated from the cancer ward's lounge warmly inseminating the sterile hallway; but not my heart. It was the first St. Patrick's Day since lung cancer devoured my tough Irish dad.

I half-heartedly thumbed a patients' chart and struggled to rekindle an emerald memory of me, a wet behind the wings USAF 2nd Lt, and my dad crooning "Danny Boy" at Danny Boys' Manhattan pub. I couldn't.

Suddenly, intruding through the funk was the unmistakable sound of a Buck Rogers's ray gun. It was right behind my left ear magically mixing with leprechaun like chortling and giggles.

I spun on my heels and was bowled over by the impish grin and grandiose posturing of my toy toting assailant. Hopping and toe dancing as light as a shamrock and half naked in hospital regalia with cosmic carbine in hand, recently returned from the dead retired USAF Chief Master Sergeant Pat O'Reilly squealed, "Ah-eee, Gotcha Doc"!

That knobby kneed, goateed leprechaun had amazingly recovered from massive chemotherapy for a dormant lymphoma which had gone super-nova three weeks prior. That was his family in the lounge. Spying my doleful drudge he left the warmth of family and friends to fire a laser beam of life my way. Clearly unfazed by his cancer, he surrendered his plastic phaser and quipped, "Zap me cancer with this thing; better than those piss-ant poisons, eh Doc?"

Pat had whistled and skipped to an easy truce with a sleeping cancer for over six years. His blarney bested the beast and his acceptance of the capriciousness of life was a therapeutic balm. I loved this man and we both knew it.

Routine check ups had consisted of fabulous tale spinning, unabashed limerick singing and other sound medical practices. Clinic visits from the sage retired chief leprechaun of the USAF always ended with a pat on my head and a wink at the nurses. An emeritus professor of mirth and mentorship, Pat was one of the wisest men I knew.

When you connect with another, magical things are ordinary. So when the limber leprechaun said his "shillelagh was itching" to go back to Ireland, we decided to be sure the cancer was still slumbering. Sadly, his lymphoma was exploding into banshee like furor. It would end poorly, even with no holds barred war. Nonplussed at the change in travel plans, Pat sprightly assured me, "I'll kick its ass"

As certain as his smile, he jiggled into a temporary remission. Now on St. Pat's three weeks later he was bald, beaming and zapping my dour spirits and working his magic. One of my "doctor-patients" was ministering to me.

Pat then used his hiatus from hell to weave wonders with the staff. His laser sights of love focused on one particularly dedicated but overly intense nurse devoted to his care.

His final wishes were simple; a little intimate time with Mrs. Leprechaun and some Guinness Stout. Both were obliged. In addition, the day before he died he ordained that he would see only the struggling nurse.

Shaken by his passing the next morning; I was more concerned for his special nurse. I was wrong. She ran up to me glowing, her eyes brimming with tears of joy. She reached into her pocket, produced the leprechauns' laser gun and broadly smiled, "He shot me". Leprechauns of love are not only Irish.

When we are most absorbed in our sorrows we might be most vulnerable to the powers of those who by all rights should be sorrowful, yet are not. So if somebody pops up and shoots a laser beam of the light of life your way when you're lost in the fetid fog of sadness, follow the light. Happy St. Patrick (O'reilly) Day.

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