

# LOST RAINBOWS

BY THE AUTHORS OF "THE BROWN RAIN" SERIES



# CONNIE COCKRELL

# Lost Rainbows

By Connie Cockrell

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## Dedication

To my daughter, for challenging me to try.

## Acknowledgements

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## Theft

It was a typical evening in the court of the Leprechaun King, Mac Shadenan. The throne room was full. Harpists, drummers, flautists and horn players were halfway down the left wall from the King. The center of the hall's polished wood floor was filled with dancers. Shamus O'Malley was standing on the right side of the hall near the buffet table, a silver goblet of Irish Whisky in his hand.

Dressed in his court best, he tugged at the collar of his lemon-yellow shirt. Like most of the male leprechauns present, he had on his cherry-red wool weskit and frock coat with seven rows of seven buttons. It was annoying to button all forty-nine buttons but luck was luck. He didn't want to push any away. His pantaloons and stockings were white and his brogans were black leather and as shiny as his polishing could make them.

He had his eye on Princess Lyeen. She was dancing in the middle of the floor with that half-wit Banar Donovan. Shamus sipped his drink. Banar, he snorted to himself. More like banal, and boring to boot. Lyeen wouldn't be givin' him a second look if it weren't for the five rainbows with their pots of gold at the end that he owned. He put the goblet he was holding down on the table and began to edge his way into the dancers. As soon as the music for this dance stopped, he was going to ask the Princess to dance.

She was a vision. Like most leprechauns, a smattering of freckles crossed the bridge of her nose, accenting the creamy, smooth skin of her complexion. Merry blue eyes flashed with her laughter. Best of all though, to Shamus, was her hair. His own could be best described as orange. But hers, left unbound as was customary among unmarried maids, hung to her waist. The burnished gold highlights in her dark red hair set off the gold of the dainty, diamond-encrusted crown around her forehead that held her hair back from her face. She'd chosen to wear green today, setting her apart from the traditionalists in the court. When she'd come into the room earlier in the evening, she'd set their tongues wagging.

"She's not wearing the traditional red!" one old biddy whispered loud enough for the people on the other side of the hall to hear.

Her neighbor nodded. "What are young people coming to?" she lamented. "Defiance, that's what it is."

That's what Shamus loved about Lyeen. She had spirit and flair. Too bad

her father didn't consider Shamus's worthy. True, he was tall for a leprechaun, four foot three inches, which worked in his favor. But there was only one rainbow among his whole, large family. The gold was spread thin. Despite that, he was determined to get the Princess's attention, gold or no gold.

He had nearly reached her when the guardsmen at the door to the throne room called out, "Courier for the King, the great Mac Shadenan! Make way for the Courier!"

The dancers split apart, moving to each side of the hall. He was separated from the Princess as she moved to the other side. Reluctantly he backed up to make way. The courier, dressed in woodland colors to better blend into the environment, entered the hall and staggered across the floor to the king. Dirty and road weary, the man looked as if he had been through every bramble in the kingdom.

Twenty feet from the throne, the courier dropped to his knees in exhaustion. King Mac Shadenan leaned forward on the carved, backless wooden seat. The red pillows could barely be seen under the red wool cloak the king wore, with a gold harp pin holding it together at his shoulder. His advisors, two on each side of the throne, whispered to each other.

"What say you, courier?" the King asked.

"My Lord," the man gasped. "The rainbows are gone!"

While one of the advisors hurried to the courier's side with a goblet of wine to help revive him, the court burst into loud cries and lamentations. Shamus noticed that Banar grew quite pale. Princess Lyeen, though, he saw with a great deal of admiration, straightened her spine and, head held high, strode to the front of the room to stand beside her father's chair.

There was so much confusion and consternation, the King signaled the guard near him to pound on the floor with the butt of his spear. He stood up.

"What is this caterwauling? You all sound worse than the animals in the humans' zoo at feeding time." King Shadenan glared at the people in the hall. The horror of being compared to those poor creatures confined in unnatural habitats stunned them. They shut up.

He stepped off of the throne's platform and pulled the courier to his feet. "Come, man." He clapped the courier on the shoulder. "You've had a bit of wine to refresh yourself. Tell us your news."

The courier nodded. "I'm Draum, son of Fitz."

The courtiers nodded. Fitz was a high-ranking member of the court. Draum was in service to the King, as every courtier's able-bodied sons were at one time or another. Shamus had been a courier himself upon his eighteenth birthday for twenty years. That had been a long time ago.

"Sire, the treasury was robbed. All of the guards are dead. I don't know how I escaped the explosion but something large and ferocious chased me nearly all the way here." He looked down at his appearance. "My apologies, Sire, for appearing before you in such a state."

The King clapped him on the shoulder. "No need to apologize, young Draum." He motioned for one of the guards standing near the throne to come to him. "Take Draum to the baths. Get him food and drink and fresh clothing. We'll talk to him again in two hours."

The guard led Draum away through a side-door of the hall near the throne. The courtiers refilled the hall and whispered to each other. Shamus began edging his way to the front of the room. The Advisors had surrounded the King. As he neared he could hear a furious discussion going on between them.

"Sire," the eldest Advisor said, "we need to send guards to assess the damage."

"Yes," said the youngest. "How do we know if Draum is telling the truth?"

"Majesty, we should send someone to bring back the rainbows."

The King stood still in the rain of comments and suggestions, nodding at each person as they spoke. Shamus moved up to stand directly behind the King. When the suggestions died down, the Advisors waited for the King to speak.

"We will send an investigator," the King announced. "Someone from our court, someone trustworthy."

They all nodded.

"But who?" the eldest Advisor asked. "Perhaps the savage beast that chased Draum is still lurking about."

"I'll go," Shamus piped up.

The entire group turned to stare. Shamus began to blush under the inspection.

The King nodded. "It's dangerous, you know. The beast may still be outside the sidhe." Their villages, the sidhe, pronounced shee, were hidden by magic. The leprechauns had long separated themselves from the world of men. King Mac Shadenan ruled all the sidhe of the leprechaun kingdom, scattered far and wide across the men's countries of Ireland, Scotland, Wales and England. The leprechauns kept track of the world of men but since the loss of their gods, the Tuatha De Danann many centuries ago, they had no choice but to hide. It was safer to stay in their hidden kingdom, and they flourished in their own way.

Shamus breathed a sigh of relief. As a courier, he'd always gotten along

with King Mac. "I understand, Sire. But the kingdom's treasury has been stolen. If we wait too long, all evidence of the dastard will be gone and the trail cold. I'll leave immediately. The sooner I go, the sooner the rainbows may be recovered."

Lyeen had joined the circle of Advisors. She smiled at Shamus and he nearly missed the King's words.

"Good idea, Shamus. You will be my representative in this. Leave at once. Draw whatever you need from the armory."

Shamus bowed. "Thank you, Sire. I'll depart as soon as I can."

He turned and hustled down the middle of the court, the courtiers parting in front of him. The murmurs began as soon as he passed.

## Taking His Leave

Shamus was in his room, putting the last things he needed in his rucksack. As he buckled the leather straps, a knock came at his door. When he opened it his heart skipped a beat. It was Lyeen, dressed now in a plain, light-green lambs-wool frock, a white linen blouse underneath, lace at the blouse's collar and cuffs. He stepped back and bowed. "Princess Lyeen."

She stepped into the room. "I see you're nearly ready."

He nodded, his heart beating so fast he could barely hear. "Yes, Princess."

"Be at ease, Shamus. We've known each other since childhood."

He bowed again. "True, but we're no longer children."

She sighed. "Also true." She looked around. Shamus had made the court-appointed space comfortable, despite the fact it was one of the smallest apartments a courtier could get. He had painted the room a light green so it resembled the light drifting through a clear pond. On the small window-sill opposite the door, a potted rose grew. A single blossom was just unfurling, yellow as the sun. On either side of the window, under which stood his bed, his father's weapons were displayed. The sword was mounted on one side and bow and arrows on the other. One end wall held a tapestry his mother had woven. It told the story of the family O'Malley. The other end wall held framed, pressed ferns and flowers. The wall on the right side of the door held hooks over a chest for his clothing. On the other side of the door he'd hung drawings and paintings he'd done.

"I like it," she said as she turned back to him with a smile. "I see much of you in this room."

"Thank you." He moved to the bed where the rucksack lay. "I leave as soon as I stop by the armory. I want to get a better sword."

She looked at him. His shirt was the color of lichen, a blend of grey, green and olive. His jacket and pantaloons were sage green as was the wide-brimmed hat, lain on the bed beside the rucksack. An overcoat also lay on the bed. It was the traditional coarse wool, curly side out, to be worn in inclement weather. "You don't like your sword? Isn't that your father's sword?"

"It is Father's sword, but I don't like it for this task. The magic in it is too weak. If I'm to pursue thieves bold enough to steal from the King, I need a more powerful weapon. Father will understand."

Lyeen nodded. "Of course." She paused and looked him in the eye. "I have something for you."

Shamus's heart, which had begun to slow its rapid beating, sped back up. He repressed the desire to wipe his forehead.

She pulled a pale green silk kerchief, sheer as gossamer, from the bosom of her dress. "This is for you, for luck." She smiled as she tied the kerchief to his left upper arm. "May it bring you home safely."

He could hardly believe his luck. They'd always gotten along as children and she'd treated him with kindness and respect during his time as a courier. But this was more than he could have hoped for. Maidens, especially princesses, didn't give their kerchiefs away lightly. "Th...Thank you, my lady." He bowed low to hide the blush on his face.

She turned and walked to the door. He heard her open it, and he stood upright. She bowed back. "Good luck, Shamus O'Malley."

#

Shamus left his father's sword in his apartment and procured a more powerful sword from the armory. His kind used swords for war and as magic wands. He was sure the thief had used powerful magic to steal the rainbows and wanted to be ready with a weapon capable of fighting back. The King met him in the courtyard where flickering torches lit the cobbled space.

"Majesty." Shamus bowed.

"Rise, Shamus. I want to wish you luck."

"I appreciate the blessing, Sire."

King Shadenan looked around the courtyard. "No horse?"

"No, Sire. I plan on taking the magical roads. I can move faster and the magic used to move the gold will be more apparent."

The King clapped him on the shoulder. "Good plan. I can see my trust in

you is merited." Shadenan grew somber. "Take care, boy. I would send a platoon with you if any of those sniveling courtiers had an ounce of courage."

"I appreciate it, my lord, but I can move faster by myself." He paused. "Did Draum have any other news?"

The King shook his head. "Nothing pertinent to your quest." Shadenan glanced at Shamus's upper arm. "I see you have received another blessing."

A blush crept up Shamus's neck. "Aye, Sire."

The King nodded. "Be careful. We don't know if the monster is still about." He stepped back and Shamus bowed.

"I'll send word if I can." With that Shamus turned and strode out of the sidhe gate.

## Tracking the Thief

A quarter mile from the sidhe boundary, Shamus reached the entrance to one of the secret leprechaun roads. He drew his sword. It would glow green when it detected magic along the road and for a short distance outside of it in the real world. The road was more of a tunnel than anything else. The walls glowed pale green, like sunlight through a woodland canopy. With the sword drawn, Shamus could see eddies of residual magic as he followed the road. Once he reached the treasury he looked around for clues. Even in the darkness he could see the torn ground and broken bushes.

His sword glowed bright green. A lot of magic had been used here. The treasury doors, usually secured by strong spells, were shattered into splinters. The bodies of the guards sprawled near them. They'd been blasted by strong magic as well. Shamus straightened them out. He knew these men and their families and he ground his teeth in anger. Who would do this? The humans didn't know about the treasury. Like the sidhe, it was protected by ancient magic. It had to be leprechauns or perhaps a dragon. They were very fond of gold.

He re-examined the area. No, there were no burned areas. Not a dragon. Leprechaun then. He left the bodies with a salute. Guards from the King would be along soon to take them back to the sidhe. He re-entered the magic road, determined to find the culprits.

The road led toward the sea. Travel was fast within the road. He bypassed much of the countryside and, in what would have taken him four days of travel in the real world, was at an exit in four hours. The magic led him out of



the door.

Dawn was breaking when he emerged. He was at the bottom of a hill and as he faced it he could see the sun would soon appear over its left shoulder. The top of the hill was covered by the ruin of a castle. It wasn't uncommon for a road door to come out near a castle or castle ruins. Hundreds of years ago the leprechauns were friendlier with humans. Now there were too many humans and they no longer believed in leprechauns, so his people stayed out of sight.

He followed the magic trail along a newly hewn path through the brambles up the hill. He moved quietly. There was no need to alert the thieves to his presence. Shamus followed the trail through the ruins. Blocks from the internal walls had been restacked to clear a path. Noise reached him and he stopped to listen, back against the moss-covered granite. The noise was a high-pitched whine, not natural. Shamus moved forward slowly, sword held out in front of him, until he reached a corner. The noise was louder.

Machinery? What machinery would be here? He turned the corner, ready to defend himself. In a cleared space in front of him were several pots of gold. It was a man, human from the look of him, dressed in a long gray gown with a dark blue cloak, and a leather belt cinched it all at the man's waist. He was moving the pots by magic into the glass of a mirror with a wand. As each pot went through, the mirror flashed red light across the space.

Shamus shook himself out of his shock. The wizard, as he supposed the man was, lifted the last pot. "You!" he shouted.

The wizard looked up at the call but never stopped moving the gold.  
"Stop!"

The wizard moved the pot through the mirror. He looked at Shamus once more, then slid the wand through his leather belt and stepped through the mirror.

Shamus ran forward as the whine increased. Without understanding why, Shamus knew he had to get through the mirror fast. He flung himself forward as the whine reached an ear-splitting crescendo. He tucked himself into a ball and rolled as he hit grass, leaping to his feet, sword at the ready.

It was dark. Shamus spun around, breath coming fast, expecting to be attacked. There was nothing. He lowered his sword. There was no sign of the mirror either. He slid the sword into his scabbard and took a deep breath. The night was broken by lights many feet overhead, placed at regular intervals along a wide paved road. He was outside a high stone wall with a metal-grilled gate ahead and to his right. He hurried to it and peeked around the corner through the gate. A large castle lay beyond, at the end of another

paved road, about a quarter mile away. Dogs were barking inside.

He wondered why he'd come out of the mirror here, instead of where the wizard was. He suspected the mirror shut off in some way so he didn't make it all the way through. Shamus shuddered. He didn't want to think about where he might have come out of the mirror, or if he would have come out at all. He could sense the iron in the gate. Iron and magic never mixed. Touching it would burn him. A gentle kick confirmed the gate was locked. Now what?

The night air was cool. Shamus adjusted his floppy hat and weskit, then settled his pack more comfortably on his back. A quick look around showed him large mansions across the street. They had huge expanses of lawn. From the size, he knew they had to be human habitations. He needed to get inside the gated castle and find the wizard. Could he hide across the street and watch the gate?

Lights approached along the roadway. He ducked into the bushes beside the gate. It took only a moment for the thing to pass. It had been many years since he'd left the safety of the sidhe but he remembered the humans called those automobiles. It was much quieter than the ones he had seen so long ago. He pulled his sword--it wasn't glowing. He was reassured there was no magic nearby.

He crossed the road to see if he could find a good hiding place. Half an hour later he was back at the gate. The houses across the street and on either side had no good hiding spots. His only choice now was to walk along the wall and find a way to climb over.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Connie Cockrell began writing in response to a challenge from her daughter in October 2011 and has been hooked ever since. Her books run the gamut from SciFi to Contemporary stories. She's published two stand alone novels, a complete four book series and has now started a Dystopian SciFi, a Cozy Mystery, and a Contemporary New Adult series along with three collections of short stories. She has been included in four different anthologies. Connie continues to write about whatever comes into her head.

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Her books are available in print at most online retailers.

Her next published book will be *Mystery at the Fair*. This is the first of the Jean Hays series of cozy mysteries. See the excerpt below.

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## Excerpt from *Mystery at the Fair*

Jean Hays trudged across the fair grounds. Sweat dripped down her temples. The sun beat down out of a cornflower blue sky while end of the monsoon season thunderheads built up into towering blinding white and ominous portents of future rain. Wish I'd remembered my hat, was her thought. That's what I get. March seemed so pleasant. Who knew September would mimic an oven with misters.

She reached the first of two shipping containers the Hise County Fair used as storage lockers. Rain every year for the fair, she remembered the Exhibits

team say as she trudged to the storage container where the plastic tubs of left over ribbons, banners and other fair paraphernalia resided the rest of the year. She checked the clouds in the sky once more then wiped her face and hoped the units were unlocked. The Fair Board President, Arris Van Horn wasn't answering his phone. *I hope Arris came by and unlocked these. He should have them open by now.* Jean examined the two part mechanism to open the container. She briefly touched the handles. The face of the doors received full sun all day. They were hot but not hot enough to give a burn. Jean pulled on one lever. Part of the mechanism moved a rod that connected with a top and bottom notch but it didn't allow the door to open. She wiped the sweat from her forehead. *I really need to learn to wear a hat.*

Jean had moved to Greyson, Arizona in February. It was winter, there was even a bit of snow. Old northeastern habits died hard. She never used to wear a hat. Now though, she wished for her wide brim hiking hat to give her some relief. *Must be ninety degrees out here.*

She tried the second handle on the door. It lifted another bar. *Maybe both of them at the same time?* Jean lifted them both. The vertical bars lifted and lowered, freeing the door. She tugged it open. *Now I don't have to track Arris down.* Arris VanHorn was the fair board president. He had the keys and the combinations to every lock and door on the fair grounds. Jean was totally dependent on his expertise. She hadn't been VP of Exhibits more than four months so she was still learning how things worked in this county.

She swung the container doors open wide. The doorway was a tangled mess of everything the Fair Grounds needed to have stored. Jean pulled a wooden tripod out of the doorway and used it to prop the right hand door open. It looked as though it was a sign post. A lot of other events that were held at the Fair Grounds used these containers. Five feet into the container she wished she'd brought a flashlight. Sweat began dripping in earnest. Smells like mice in here, hope they haven't gotten into the tubs, she thought.

Winding her way past safety cones, stacked tables, buckets of rope, steel cable and broken metal chairs, she stepped over a pile of rebar to reach her stack of tubs. One, two, three, four, she counted, where's the fifth tub? The heat was giving her a headache so she massaged her temples after she wiped her filthy hands on her shorts. She hauled the bins out to the front of the container. When those were outside she thought, maybe it's farther to the back. The Exhibits team was sure there were five bins. A pile of cardboard boxes labeled, Mud Run, blocked her way. Jean moved the three boxes behind her and stepped over a pile of rusting chain. Wish I'd brought a flashlight, she thought. It's dark back here.

Squinting, she saw a medium blue tub labeled Fair Ribbons four feet away on top of another stack of bins. *There you are.* She wiped her face again and held her breath. The smell of dead things was over whelming. *I hope nothing crawled into my bin. The ribbons will be ruined.* She picked her way past boxes, rusting metal things she couldn't identify and a broken ladder. She pulled the tilted bin toward her and the pile of bins it was on fell over. Her bin slid to the floor, taking part of her thumbnail with it and raising a cloud of dust. "Owww," she cried as she jerked her hand away and stuck the injured digit in her mouth. In front of her, the two doors of a metal cabinet against the right hand wall of the container creaked open and a desiccated human body fell in seeming slow motion on top of her bin. She shrieked and scrambled outside.

Mystery At The Fair is due out the end of March, 2015.

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