

The Golden Shamrock

James couldn't remember how he'd got there. He remembered he'd been walking for miles and that he'd been overwhelmingly tired. He knew that he needed to be somewhere important but he couldn't recollect where that was. He remembered closing his eyes, just for a moment, as he continued to trudge across the rocks and ledges.

That's when it must have happened.

Half asleep, he must have drifted off into slumber and slipped off the edge of the mountainside. That's how he ended up here, deep between the rocks.

James raised his hand to his head. It was throbbing with pain. He tried moving his body. Aside from his head and hands, he was covered in armour. It seemed too big for him. The metal scraped and clattered, the valley resounding with the echoes of the noise as he moved. Everywhere ached but, luckily, nothing seemed to be broken.

A thin ray of sunlight pierced its way between the crags, warming his face when he noticed something glinting in his hand. He lifted it closer.

A shamrock. He turned it gently, rubbing the heart-shaped leaves between his fingers. They were two-toned in colour: greeny-gold with huge leaves which seemed to ripple and glitter. Strange, he thought...



His eyes widened as the memories suddenly surged back. Visions of druids and knights and palaces filled his mind. There was a mission... something to do with the King of Ireland... his daughter...

"I am a knight," he whispered to himself. "I must be..." He glanced at the shamrock and carefully placed it inside a pouch he had hanging from his waist. "I must... continue," he muttered to himself. "The King is counting on me."

With all his energy, James pulled himself from the rocks. The armour grinded and clanged, disturbing the unnerving silence of the valley. Before long, he had reached the summit from where he must have fallen. There was an old path that led through the mountains and James set on his way.

He had been walking all day and all night when he eventually came to the city walls. James staggered. He could see guards rushing towards him as he collapsed to the floor.

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Then everything went black.

James awoke shivering and unwell. He opened his eyes. He was lying on the floor surrounded by pigs! He felt his body; the armour was gone! He was dressed in rags but he still had his pouch around his waist. Then he looked up and his heart sunk. He was in a prison!

"Let me out!" he yelled, rattling the iron bars. "I am a knight of the King's Court! The King's daughter – she's in grave danger! You must listen to me!"

From the darkness, a familiar-looking face emerged. It was old and thin, with white hair and a fuzzy beard. "We know she's in danger," the old man uttered in a low voice. "The princess is very ill."

"Who are you?" James said.

"Who am I?!" the old man spat. "Have you lost your mind? I am Anvir the druid, and you are my apprentice! You stole Sir Galway's steed and armour! Something about a mission to save the princess! You were gone for days! You've lost Sir Galway's prize horse and scratched all his armour!"

"N... not... a knight?" James stuttered. Suddenly it all came back to him. It was true. He was a druid's apprentice. He had needed the horse and armour to defeat the forest beasts on his way to the mountains. That was where the golden shamrock grew. It was the only thing that could save the...

"...princess!" James said, crestfallen.

"Alas, nothing but the golden shamrock can save her now," sighed the old man.

James fumbled inside his pouch and pulled out the sparkling plant.

The old man looked uncertainly at the object in James' hand. "I don't believe it..." he gasped. "Guards! Quick! We can save the princess."

A few months later, Sir James stood in his armour, surveying his estate and the green hills that rolled before him towards the horizon. He tried to remember how all this had happened. Not only had he been given a full pardon for saving the princess's life but he had also been knighted and rewarded with his own castle!

But what now? It was becoming unfulfilling being a knight...

Sir James looked towards the mountains and his imagination ran wild. "I think it's time for another adventure," he smiled to himself.

1. Which of these sentences best summarises the events of the third section of the story?

Tick **one**.

- James' efforts and valiance had been duly rewarded.
- James' opinion of imprisonment changed.
- James set out in an effort to discover a cure.
- James excelled within his role as an apprentice.

2. Match the section of the text to a summary of its contents.

Beginning: ●

Middle: ●

End: ●

● James came to a realisation about his true identity.

● James reaped the reward of his endeavour.

● James awoke disorientated and unwell.

3. Whose daughter required help?

4. **Not only had he been given a full pardon...**

Give another phrase the author could have used to convey the same meaning.

5. Find and copy a phrase from the story which explains the duration of James's journey.

6. **...he had reached the summit from where he must have fallen.**

What does this sentence imply about James's memory?

7. Explain how James' role within society develops as the story progresses.

8. Discuss the significance of the shamrock within the story.

9. How do you think James' relationship with the druid might have changed since he was made a knight?

10. Summarise the plot of the story in 30 words or less.
