

THE LEPRECHAUN

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Incomplete novel that King was writing for his son Owen in 1983. King had written several pages of the story in longhand in a notebook and then transcribed them. While on a trip to California, he wrote about 30 more pages of the story in the same notebook, which was lost off the back of his motorcycle (somewhere in coastal New Hampshire) on a trip from Boston to Bangor. He mentioned that he could reconstruct what was lost, but had not gotten around to it (as of June, 1983). The only part that still exists today is the 5 typescript pages that had been transcribed. The 5 pages, plus a 3-page cover letter to a senior editor at Viking are now owned by a King collector.

Once upon a time—which is how all the best stories start— a little boy named Owen was playing outside his big red house. He was pretty bored because his big brother and big sister, who could always think of things to do, were in school. His daddy was working, and his mom was sleeping upstairs. She asked him if he would like a nap, but Owen didn't really like naps. He thought they were boring.

He played with his G.I. Joe men for awhile, and then he went around to the back and swung on the swing for awhile. He gave the tetherball a big hit with his first—ka-bamp!—and watched the rope wind up as the ball went around and around the pole. He saw his big sister's softball bat lying in the grass and wished Chris, the big boy who sometimes came to play with him, was there to throw him a few pitches. But Chris was in school too. Owen walked around the house again. He thought he would pick some flowers for his mother. She liked flowers pretty well.

He got around to the front of the house and that was when he saw Springsteen in the grass. Springsteen was his big sister's new cat. Owen liked most cats, but he didn't like Springsteen much. He was big and black, with deep green eyes that seemed to see everything. Every day Owen had to make sure that Springsteen wasn't trying to eat Butler. Butler was Owen's guinea pig. When Springsteen thought no one was around, he would jump up on the shelf where Butler's big glass cage was and stare in through the screen on top with his hungry green eyes. Springsteen would sit there, all crouched down,

and hardly move at all. Springsteen's tail would wag back and forth a little, and sometimes one of his ears would flick a bit, but that was all. I'll get in there pretty soon, you cruddy little guinea pig, Springsteen seemed to say. And when I get you, I'll eat you! Better believe it! If guinea pigs say prayers, you better say yours!

Whenever Owen saw Springsteen the cat up on Butler's shelf, he would make him get down. Sometimes Springsteen put his claws out (although he knew better than to try to put them in Owen) and Owen imagined the black cat saying, You caught me this time, but so what? Big deal! Someday you won't! And then, yum! yum! dinner is served! Owen tried to tell people that Springsteen wanted to eat Butler, but nobody believed him.

"Don't worry, Owen," Daddy said, and went off to work on a novel that's what he did for work.

"Don't worry, Owen," Mommy said, and went off to work on a novel —because that was what she did for work, too.

"Don't worry, Owen" Big Brother said, and went off to watch The Tomorrow People on TV.

"You just hate my cat!" Big sister said, and went off to play The Entertainer on the piano.

But no matter what they said, Owen knew he'd better keep a good old eye on Springsteen, because Springsteen certainly did like to kill things. Worse, he liked to play with them before he killed them. Sometimes Owen would open the door in the morning and there would be a dead bird on the doorsteo. Then he would look further, and there would be Springsteen crouched on the porch rail, the tip of his tail switching slightly and his big green eyes looking at Owen, as if to say: Ha! I got another one... and you couldn't stop me, could you? Then Owen would ask permission to bury the dead bird. Sometimes his mommy or daddy would help him.

So when Owen saw Springsteen on the grass of the front lawn, all crouched down with his tail twitching, he thought right away that the cat might be playing with some poor, hurt little animal. Owen forgot about picking flowers for his mom and ran over to see what Springsteen had caught.

At first he thought Springsteen didn't have anything at all. Then the cat leaped, and Owen heard a very tiny scream from the grass. He saw something green and blue between Springsteen had was shrieking and trying to get away. And now Owen saw something else—little spots of blood on the grass.

“No!” Owen shouted. “Get away, Springsteen!” The cat flattened his ears back and turned towards the sound of Owen's voice. His big green eyes glared. The green and blue thing between Springsteen paws squiggled and wiggled and got away. I started to run and Owen saw it was a person, a little tiny man wearing a green hat made out of a leaf. The little man looked back over his shoulder, and Owen saw how scared the little guy was. He was no bigger than the mice Springsteen sometimes killed in their big dark cellar. The little man had a cut down one of his cheeks from one of Springsteen's claws.

Springsteen hissed at Owen and Owen could almost hear him say: “Leave me alone, he's mine and I'm going to have him!”

Then Springsteen jumped for the little man again, just as quick as a cat can jump—and if you have a cat of your own, you'll know that is very fast. The little man in the grass tried to dodge away, but he didn't quite make it, Owen saw the back of the little man's shirt tear open as Springsteen's claws ripped it apart. And, I am sorry to say, he saw more blood and heard the little man cry out in pain. He went tumbling in the grass. His little leaf hat went flying. Springsteen got ready to jump again.

“No, Springsteen, no!” Owen cried. “Bad cat!”

He grabbed Springsteen. Springsteen hissed again, and his needle-sharp teeth sank into one of Owen's hands. It hurt worse than a

doctor's shot. "Ow!" Owen yelled, tears coming to his eyes. But he didn't let go of Springsteen. Now Springsteen started clawing at Owen, but Owen would not let go. He ran all the way to the driveway with Springsteen in his hands. Then he put Springsteen down.

"Leave him alone, Springsteen!" Owen said, and, trying to think of the very worst thing he could, he added: "Leave him alone or I'll put you in the Oven and bake you like a pizza!"

Springsteen hissed, showing his teeth. His tail switched back and forth—not just the tip now but the whole thing.

"I don't care if you are mad!" Owen yelled at him. He was still crying a little, because his hands hurt as if he had put them in the fire. They were both bleeding, one from Springsteen biting him and one from Springsteen clawing him. "You can't kill people on our lawn even if they are little!"

Springsteen hissed again and backed away. Okay, his mean green eyes seemed to say. Okay for this time. Next time... we'll see! Then he turned and ran away. Owen hurried back to see if the little man was all right.

At first he thought the little man was gone. Then he saw the blood on the grass, and the little leaf hat. The little man was nearby, lying on his side. The reason Owen hadn't been able to see him at first was the little man's shirt was the exact color of the grass. Owen touched him gently with his finger. He was terribly afraid the little man was dead. But when Owen touched him, the little man groaned and sat up.

"Are you all right?" Owen asked.

The fellow in the grass made a face and clapped his hands to his ears. For a moment Owen thought Springsteen must have hurt the little guy's head as well as his back, and then he realized that his voice must sound like thunder to such a small person. The little man in the grass was not much longer than Owen's thumb. This was Owen's first good look at the little fellow he had rescued, and he saw

right away why the little man had been so hard to find again. His green shirt was not just the color of grass; it was grass. Carefully woven blades of green grass. Owen wondered how come they didn't turn brown.