



I Am the Leprechaun

Story by Daniel Charles Ross

Photograph by Taj Lewis

Wedding anniversaries are challenging for anyone, but perhaps more so for my wife and I. We have been married since 1940, and what can you buy for a woman who literally has everything she wants? I hustled around Manhattan to a few stores we liked, but without success. It's harder for me, because I am the Leprechaun.

Yes—*the* Leprechaun.

It wasn't always so.

Walking down these crowded Manhattan sidewalks, I remember my life before the conversion. One day I was a modestly successful New York advertising man, going about my day of quiet frustrations like everybody else. I loved walking in Manhattan then on a hot day, deliriously anonymous and carefree. Then, up in Westchester, it was early June 1940, and the war hadn't started for us yet. We had a picnic in the cool shade of a huge maple tree, Sadie and I, having a grand time on a classic red checkered tablecloth, minding our own business. And our business was us. We had dated for about seven months, with never a single whisper of argument between us. She was beautiful, I adored her, and I intended that day to ask her to marry me.

A wild storm blew up from nowhere and we took cover in a park shelter. It hadn't rained for more than two minutes, probably less. The sky cleared to intense blue. The birds returned to chirp in time with raindrops falling from the shelter to the concrete. Sadie laughed and my heart smiled. And there it was.

You never see them in front of you, do you? Always far away and behind trees or skyscrapers. But it landed in the grass right next to us, so I went to look at it. Had to go out and touch it. Of course I did.

The end of the rainbow.

In conformance with the legend, there was a sizable pot of gold coins bathed in spectral Neapolitan glory there on the grass, validating the rainbow's end (apologies to Vernor Vinge; read his book). It was soundless, but it pulsed in the color bands, just a barely noticeable glow that waxed and waned. And beckoned.

So, short story long (pardon the expression), the first thing I did was scoot out of the park shelter and go to the pot of gold. I stood in the rainbow, face and outstretched arms upturned to the azure sky and bathed in color. I felt warm, happy, saturated somehow in—what? Love? No, joy. Flooded with joy and the irrational certitude that I was in the right place at the right time.

The gold was like a magnet. The very moment my fingers closed around a coin, I received a mild electric shock, like you might get pulling clothes from the dryer. Just a tingle. Then the gold and the rainbow vanished, like flipping off a light switch. Instantly, my dark brown hair became Technicolor red, my tan skin became fair and freckled. Even my clothes changed into a green frock coat over green breeches, and a green top hat on my head with a Puritanical buckle. Poor Sadie, shocked, screamed and fainted dead away.

There are rules, I have learned. Some I can bend, some I must submit to. However I amend them now, my successor someday will have them back in place to discover on his own. Yes, regrettably, his own. Have you ever seen a legit female leprechaun? Neither have I, just drunk girls dressed up on St. Paddy's Day. I tried to convert a few, through various means, but only one such wish ever took. This is a mystery of the rules I think I've figured out.

I can change my appearance from the default red-hair-and-freckles, though changes can only be temporary. If I don't restore the default look within ninety-six hours, even for a moment, I snap back like a green rubber band. I set my watch timer with a margin to avoid surprises.

You've seen classic leprechauns, about three feet tall, more or less, all dressed in the team green uniform? They're usually hawking a St. Paddy's Day sale down at Mattress Warehouse, but they gotta eat, too. Those are traditionalists. Purists. I choose to be six-three and dress like a regular guy. I mean, I was six-one before, so the extra inches are just harmless self-indulgence. In all respects.

I needn't hold the obligatory coins in each hand, but I must keep them ready in left and right pockets. In compliance with legend, I spend the left-side coins and they later are returned to my pocket. I spend the right-side coins, and they later turn to dust or stones. If anyone knew enough

to “catch” me, they couldn’t make me do jack, actually. My subordinate leprechauns get “caught” from time to time, but that’s a game they play with humans to practice outwitting them.

I embraced the fair skin peppered with light freckles, and I really like the red hair in a Danny Kaye kind of way, but I’ve gone into bars as short as Peter Dinklage and to Renaissance Fairs as dark as Idris Elba, so I have a range of expression. I did discover, after too many Old Bushmills shots one night, that my transformative powers extend to gender. I tried that once. It was pretty exciting to run my hands over that body, because I didn’t hold back. I was freakin’ hot. But I made the mistake of getting a final check-out in a full-length mirror on my way out the door, and it was just too strange for my struggling 1940s sensibilities. God bless my human brothers and sisters struggling with gender identity, but mine is pretty set. I stayed home that night to satisfy some curiosities, but I’ve been my regular self ever since.

That’s enough for now, then. I succeeded in granting Sadie her wish in October of 1940. Turns out the magic ingredient is genuine love, something every songwriter knows. We’re celebrating its anniversary tonight with dinner. I love her red hair. We will grant each other’s wishes somewhat later.

That’s all, lad. May ye be in Heaven half an hour before the Devil knows ye’re gone.