

The Leprechauns in the Record Player

Marc Edward DiPaolo (March 16, 2008)



This story may not technically be true, but let's pretend it is.



Staten Island, New York. Once Upon a Time... (circa 1980)

(Author's Note: I'm about five-years-old when this story takes place.)

I was not sure if leprechauns enjoyed the simple pleasures of cookies and milk, but it was the only meal I knew how to make without my mother's help, so it would have to do.

With two chubby hands, I laid a plate of thirty chocolate chip cookies on the carpeted floor in front of the record player, hoping that there was enough food to satisfy however many leprechauns were busy at work inside the machine. I then scampered quickly back into the kitchen, poured milk into seven paper cups – managing not to spill too much of the beverage onto the breakfast table – and then made several trips back and forth between the kitchen and living room, each time gingerly placing a paper cup before the record player and crossing my fingers that every single cup would remain standing on the soft, plush carpet.

Once again, I had some small anxiety that I should be providing more milk, and worried that the cups would be too big for leprechaun hands, but I was doing the best I could with the information I had. When Grandpa DiPaolo, had explained to me that morning that record players were operated by hordes of little men who lived inside the machine, and whose sole purpose in life appeared to be to stand ready for whenever I (or my mom) felt the urge to listen to an Elvis Presley vinyl record, grandpa had been very earnest in his claim but very sketchy in detail.

The conversation had begun innocently enough. It had been early that afternoon and I had been dancing around the room blasting “Maybe I Know” by Lesley Gore when grandpa, a skinny fellow with white hair, a white moustache, and black-plastic rimmed glasses who was dressed in white slacks and a white, button-down shirt, came in and politely asked me to lower the volume. My younger brother was taking a nap, and shouldn't be disturbed. The music softened and grandpa settled himself into the plush love seat across from the record player, casually scanning the rows of books jammed together on the shelves nailed up on the wall next to him. I followed his gaze and read off some myself – The Films of Alfred Hitchcock, Jane Eyre, The Time-Life Book of Sharks. These books, like most of the books in our household, were mainly works of literature, history, and zoology, with a liberal smattering of books on the movies – genre criticism, Hollywood tell-alls, surveys of the careers of various movie stars and directors. I had never read any of these books, but my parents liked them so much that I knew some day I would. In the meantime, I could enjoy the glossy color pictures in them whenever I flipped through them.

“So, Marc,” Grandpa began in a faraway tone as his eyes glided over the tiles.

“Yes?” I was always taught to say “yes” and not “yeah.”

“You like listening to old music?”

It took me a second to understand the question. “You mean mom's rock albums?”

“‘Rock Around the Clock’ and the like.” Grandpa returned his eyes to my round face. I had no way of knowing it, but my thick, curly hair was as out-of-control as ever, standing up in large clumps at the back of my head.

“It's not old,” I declared, still standing awkwardly in front of the record player, my eyes cast down on the floor. “Mozart is old. This is new.”

Grandpa smiled thinly. “Mozart is really old. Why not listen to new music?”

“New?”

“Like Blondie or Bruce Springsteen?”



Finally leaving my post next to the record player, I sat beside my grandfather. "Who are they?"

Grandpa chuckled. "Never mind."

I frowned and a silence came between them.

"Your parents will be home from the Poconos tomorrow," Grandpa ventured.

I nodded, my eyes returning to the record player.

"Got something on your mind?"

I shifted in my seat and looked down at my feet, which were invariably dressed in white tennis socks. "Yes."

"Is it a secret?"

"I want to know how record players work."

"Oh?"

"You know...why does the record start spinning when you put the needle on the record? And why does it stop spinning when you lift it? And how do you get all those voices on the record? And why do records all have different music on them when they all look the same?"

Grandpa smiled enigmatically.

"Do you know?"

"There is one thing I do know."

And that's when Grandpa explained that there were leprechauns in the record player. According to Grandpa, they were the ones who made the record spin, who made the lights flash under the sign that read Stereo Control Amplifier, and who made the sound come out of the speakers. Naturally, I had asked a stream of questions. How many were there? How big were they? What did they eat? Did they get any days off? Did they ever get to leave the record player? Do other appliances have leprechauns in them, like televisions or electric can openers? And if leprechauns exist, does that mean fairies exist, too?

With each question I hurled at Grandpa, the man's face grew ever more amazed and amused. He offered an array of explanations ranging from somewhat vague to completely vague, consistently annoying me with his lack of scientific data. Thanks to my dad, I knew a lot about the animal kingdom, especially about sharks, and everything I knew was very scientific. I knew that sharks could perceive prey by the electrical field generated by its beating heart or by the vibrations that a fish or human makes in the water while it swims. And I knew a lot about the different species of sharks, too. (My particular favorite was the funny-looking Hammerhead shark.) What I wanted was similarly detailed information about leprechauns' biology, psychology, and social mores, especially since I had heard somewhere that they didn't exist and I was somewhat dubious about their presence in the record player. But Grandpa did insist.

And so, that evening, I found myself sneaking downstairs past my bedtime, after I suspected that grandpa had went to sleep (and knew that my brother was still asleep, since we shared a room) and provided the leprechauns with a little after-dinner snack gleaned from a store-bought bag of cookies and a half-empty carton of milk purchased yesterday from the deli up the block. I kept the lights off, not wanting to wake Grandpa or to scare the little green men away, and hid behind the sofa with an unlit flashlight and a camera, awaiting the arrival of the miniature workers. I rested on my belly, rolling the flashlight over in my hands as I looked at the camera.

The camera was a simple point-and-shoot variety that I had never touched before in my life, but it



looked like the world's easiest thing to use. I was eager to obtain photographic proof of the leprechauns because I suspected that the other kids on the block would not believe my tall tales if I could not produce evidence of my encounter with the fantastic. Besides, even at that age, I was discovering a love of photographs and was excited at the prospect of taking my first snapshot.

And so, I waited for the little men to emerge from their wooden and plastic home. And I waited. I yawned. The grandfather clock chimed midnight and I counted the gongs, wondering when they ceased how I had only managed to count eleven. I decided that I must have missed a gong somehow. "Where are these darn guys?" I whispered to myself.

I felt foolish laying there in the dark, clutching a camera and flashlight, staring through the gloom at a plate of cookies and seven Dixie cups. By one in the morning, I was beginning to think I had been conned. But I waited a little longer, remembering the fairy tale of The Elves and The Shoemaker. Of course, in the fairy tale, the elves didn't come out until after the humans were asleep, so perhaps this was part of it. I knew that I would miss them if I went to sleep, but if I awoke to find the cookies eaten and the milk drunk then I would accept them as proof enough of the leprechauns' existence. I would feel a little disappointed at missing a personal encounter with the little people but, as mom would say, "What can you do?" So I lowered her head to the carpet and went to sleep.

The living room light snapped on at four-thirty in the morning, waking me. I lifted my head groggily from the floor, trying to see through the sleep mucus that clouded my eyes. There was a red blotch on my face where the carpet had scratched against my skin. A bemused Grandpa stood over me, looking back and forth between the little girl and the after-dinner snack in front of the record player, which remained untouched. "I woke up to go to the bathroom, I check on you, and you aren't in bed," Grandpa said flatly.

"I wanted to feed the leprechauns," I muttered. "I wanted to thank them for working so hard."

Grandpa sighed and picked me up off the floor by the elbow. He let go of me when he felt that I had found my footing and was standing under my own, half-asleep power. "I was just kidding with you. You're a smart kid. I thought you knew that."

I looked back at the record player, half expecting to see a legion of emerald gentlemen come crawling out from every nook and cranny in the music-maker, shouting in unison, "We exist! We exist! Don't say that! We exist!"

Grandpa rubbed my head affectionately. "Come on. You didn't really believe all that, did you?"

"You told me that they used to work sixty-hour weeks but now they only work forty because they have a union."

"I made that up."

"And you said that they were in all Japanese record players."

"They aren't in any record players."

I stared up at my grandfather. "They aren't in any record player?"

"They aren't anywhere. Leprechauns don't exist."

"Leprechauns don't exist?"

"No."

"Leprechauns don't exist."

"That's what I said. Now you really need to go to bed."



"What about all that other stuff?"

"What other stuff?"

"You know. The other stuff you don't see. The Tooth Fairy, Santa Claus, angels, souls, ghosts. All that stuff."

"Well..." Grandpa paused.

"Do they exist?" I asked.

"No. All that stuff is made up, too." Grandpa renewed his attempt to urge me towards the stairs and my upstairs bedroom, but I was too lost in thought to notice.

"So you lied to me when you made all that stuff up," I said suddenly.

Grandpa looked mad for a moment, but then stopped himself from speaking. A moment later, he said, "I wouldn't call it a lie, Marc. It was just a nice story to entertain you. All these things are nice stories for kids to cheer them up. But I guess you're too old for them now. You've figured out that they're just stories, so I guess it would be wrong of me and your parents to keep telling them to you. You're just too sharp for the rest of us."

I looked extremely dubious.

"Are you okay there, pal?"

I scowled.

"Are we still friends?"

I broke away from my grandfather, briskly scooped up the plate of cookies in my right hand and one of the cups of milk in my left. "I guess I'll eat these myself, then."

"Can I have one before we go back to sleep?" Grandpa asked.

"No. You're a jerk. I'm not giving you any cookies."

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