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St. Patrick's Day

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"St. Patrick's Day"
Custom

Informant:

Kate is my youngest sister at 15 years old. She has a large personality and is perfectly innocent. She loves to dance, color, and participate in musical theater. Power rangers are her obsession. She has created a website where she displays each power ranger and explains small nuances and big ideas surrounding the tv shows and movies. She was born in 2003 with health problems. It took the doctors longer than usual to find a diagnosis but was finally determined to have Prader-Willi Syndrome. This is a unique type of disability where she never feels completely full and she is always hungry. This also comes with behavioral and mental challenges. She has a difficult but satisfying life with a loving family and many friends.

Context:

I called Kate in the late afternoon one day. She was playing in her room in Salt Lake, and I was sitting on my couch in Logan. I can imagine her sitting on her floor with all of her barbies and poly pockets splayed out around her in organized chaos; our mom calls it a mess. She gets distracted and loses interest rather quickly, so I had to guide our conversation more than with other informants. We decided to discuss our traditional customs of St. Patrick's Day. This holiday was especially fun when we were young and would wake up to an incredible mess. My mother told me that this tradition began when our oldest sister was very young in a dance class and her teacher warned the children about leprechauns who would be coming to get them the next day on St. Patrick's Day. My parents felt obligated to meet my sister's expectations. Then the celebration held. Initially, Kate did not want to help me with this project. She hung up on me a few times, but she was just teasing me. I finally got her attention when I promised she could tell me her list for Santa after we had a conversation.

Text:

Me: I was hoping you would tell me about St. Patrick's Day and all the traditions we take part in. Do you remember what we do? Can you just explain it to me in your own words? Maybe start on the day before when we make traps. Just explain it to me as if I was someone else and I didn't know what we do.

Kate: Ohh. Ok so, there is, we make these little stairs that come up to the place and then there is this little line where there is this little hole inside a little bowl. And he drops in the bowl and there are small stairs you push yourself off and climb up and then go down and that's your way to get out. Those are our traps and then in the morning our milk turns green.

Me: Oh my! What else?

Kate: So, our bread goes green.

Me: Do the leprechauns make messes?

Kate: Uh huh, and they turn our eggs green too.

Me: They do?

Kate: And they put green toilet paper all over the house.

Me: Yeah? And what about underwear? Do they throw underwear everywhere?

Kate: Um, there is clothes thrown all over the floor and toys that we like and then there is [pause].

Me: At the beginning you were talking about the traps. You were explaining one. Explain why we make traps the night before.

Kate: So that we can trap the leprechauns.

Me: Why do you want to catch them?

Kate: So that we can get their gold. Ask the where their gold is.

Me: Have you ever caught one?

Kate: Yes.

Me: You caught one??

Kate: Remember! The whole family caught one!

Me: Did you talk to him?

Kate: Nope, he got out.

Me: Did you see him?

Kate: I saw green [pause] footprints and hand-prints. One year we actually did caught one but he actually did get caught. But, when we looked inside, it just hopped right out and we didn't see it.

Me: Oh no. What happens if you don't wear green?

Kate: You get pinched.

Me: Yeah. Can you think of anything else that happens?

Kate: Nope. You have to clean up all the toilet paper [pause] and you pop all the balloons and I roll up toilet paper and we make some green foods and they also turn our ham green if we have ham [laughter].

Me: [laughter] What kind of green foods do we make?

Kate: We make ham. Green ham and green eggs [laughter].

Me: [laughter] Isn't that a book?

Kate: We made it when the leprechauns come.

Me: Do we make green pancakes?

Kate: Yes, we do.

Me: Do you like celebrating St. Patrick's Day even though the leprechauns create mischief?

Kate: Yes. I love how there is green all over the house and a mess everywhere.

Me: Do you like cleaning it up?

Kate: Yes [laughter].

Me: [laughter] You do?

Kate: [laughter] Yes!

Me: Will you explain one of you traps again and how it works?

Kate: So, the same old tricks. Ok. [pause] So there are little stairs that go up, up, up and the flat level and then if they go a little further and not look, they fall into the, inside the bowl.

Me: What are the stairs made out of?

Kate: Paper. All the way down to the floor. And then they fall into the bowl if they are smart enough.

They are not smart enough. And sometimes they hop out of the bowl and onto the other stairs where there is a little walking path. And there is a drop again where they might fall and then that's it.

Me: And then they are trapped?

Kate: The falling in the hole art means they're trapped. Sometimes they get out by the stairs.

Me: How big are the leprechauns?

Kate: You know like a really small.

Me: Like as big as a dog?

Kate: Smaller!

Me: As big as a mouse?

Kate: A little smaller than that.

Me: Why do they want to mess everything up and create a mess?

Kate: hold up [my dad's voice asking Kate a question]

Me: [pause] Kate did you hear my question?

Kate: What was it?

Me: Why do the leprechauns want to make a mess and play tricks on us?

Kate: [pause] To be funny and to play tricks and fun. They have fun.

Me: Why don't they do it every day?

Kate: So, people can be surprised, and you don't know what is going to happen and expecting things.

Thank you, and Emma, before I go, I am finding out about a thing I want to tell you.

Texture:

Speaking on the phone with Kate was interesting. Many times, it was difficult to understand her. She spoke differently than she does in face-to-face interactions. She fixated on small details like how she built the traps instead of focusing on the bigger ideas. She was not very emotional while she was explaining this tradition, and it was lighthearted. However, by the end she lost interest and her responses grew curt. Kate full-heartedly believes that leprechauns come and make a mess on St. Patrick's Day.

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