

## Sure, a Little Bit of Blarney

*By Dennis Payton Knight*

I had the good fortune some seven decades ago of getting born into an American family of mostly Irish descent. Mom and Dad passed to my brothers and sisters their good looks and brains. What I got was the gift of blarney. Not the sort of smooth blarney that woos the ladies, I regret, but the kind that compels me to wax fantastic at me every fancy.

Per the Oxford English Dictionary, blarney is talk that aims to charm, pleasantly flatter, or persuade. Those oh, so English lexicographers, after all these years, do not get the Irish at all. Blarney is way more than sweet talk. It is the magic that makes leprechauns dance, and rainbows deposit gold. It makes the banshee cry and pookas roam at night.

An Irish travel consultant named Bernd Biege, in an internet article, uses some of his own blarney to explain the source of the expression. During the Reformation, Queen Elizabeth the First was trying to negotiate a deal with Cormac MacCarthy, then the lord of Blarney Castle, to put his domain under her reign.

Determined to keep his independence, Cormac spoke flattering words to the Queen but met her royal demands without deeds or commitments. Instead he offered elaborations on why certain things could not be done, or not soon enough, or not without some modification which would always be to his advantage. MacCarthy became what Biege reports as a pain in the royal posterior, until Queen Bess one day cracked and screamed, "This is all Blarney, what he says he never means."

MacCarthy's descendants still connected with the castle tell stories about the Blarney Stone and its magic powers, putting it first in Ireland, farming it off to Scotland, then bringing it back to Ireland in 1314. Their blarney connects it with the biblical Jacob who used the stone for his pillow, and it is also said to be the rock Moses struck with his staff for water as the Israelites fled slavery in Egypt.

Bishop Fulton J. Sheen, a man of deep Catholic faith, and plenty of blarney, too, held sway on American television with informative but entertaining lectures in the nineteen-fifties, including his own take on blarney. His was a sophisticated view that distinguished blarney from lunch meat, saying, "Baloney is flattery laid on so thick it cannot be true, and blarney is flattery so thin we love it."

I am a natural practitioner of blarney, if mostly in its baloney form. If you are hunting for treasure or plotting your route to heaven, use me as your travel agent, I will happily send you on your way, and get you there by way of Albuquerque, Jersey City, and Missoula, and you will thank me for the scenery. If you have a boat, I'll even toss Havana into the itinerary.

And if ye fancy all that, I've a fair lovely bridge on the Auld Sod I'd be tickled to sell ye.