

Saint Patrick's Next Trick

by Matthew Hanlon



“Okay Pat, so what else’ve you got for us?”

The last snake’s tail had just disappeared off the edge of the cliff, joining its brethren raining down below into the choppy Atlantic.

“Umm hey Pat, it looks like they’re just heading down to Lahinch.” Jimmy pointed at the giant tangle of snakes surging against the tide of the incoming sea.

“They’re not, they’re banished. I’ve cast them out of Ireland.”

“Well but where’re they gonna go? I see them swimming down along the cliffs, looking to get back on.”

“I promise you they won’t.”

“Pat.” The rotund fellow named Frank raised his hand this time. “What next? I personally don’t mind snakes so much.”

Patrick thrust his face, red and sweaty from his effort at ridding Ireland of snakes, into Frank’s. *Saint* Patrick, since the Vatican representative, who was on hand to record and verify the world’s largest snake banishing, had just conferred sainthood upon him.

“What do you mean? I’ve only banished all your snakes.”

“Well, listen, you banished them because they were biting you. They never gave me any trouble.”

Saint Patrick stared out at the snakes, who were undulating southwards, sure enough.

The little man from the Vatican stopped writing in his notebook. He didn’t mark the progress of the snakes. If they returned to shore they would create a bureaucratic nightmare for him, having to rescind sainthood and all. He did, however, look expectantly at Patrick.

“Listen, if that’s it,” said Molly, whose skirts rattled in the wind, “that’s fine. Good job, casting out the snakes. I was sick of them always underfoot or in my brogues when I was getting up in the morning. Anyway.” Molly turned back to the road inland. Others began to follow.

“No, wait! I have more!” Saint Patrick held up his hands, his robes billowing towards the crowd, many of whom had turned their back. He frantically searched the ground for a moment. He hopped back to his feet, “Aha!”

The crowd stopped, turning to see what the fuss was about.

“I have in my hand a clover! See the three leaves?”

“Pat, we saw this one already. Father, son, Holy G— wait, is that a four leaf clover?”

“What?” Patrick examined the clover in his hand.

“No. It just looks it, maybe, when the wind blows it around.”

“Ah, okay.” The horde began dissipating again, back to their daily lives.

Saint Patrick turned to the ocean, the stiff breeze bringing in heavy clouds which felt as if the ocean itself were lifted up and carried ashore. The few stragglers looked out with him, as well.

After a count of forty, Patrick turned around again and boomed, “Okay.” His voice rushed across the verdant green fields. “I will cast out one remaining thing today.” His eyes flared just a little wilder. “I will banish the whales from the sea!”

“The what?” Molly turned around. “The what did you say?”

“The whales. Out of the sea.” Patrick raised his arms this time as he said it.

Molly strode back towards Patrick and so did a good portion of the crowd, who were only hoping to avoid going back to digging turf. She got to the edge of the cliff and peered seawards, which looked like the sea on any normal day.

“I will banish the whales from the sea.” Patrick kept his arms up, hoping the people farther away would interpret it as a call to come back.

“Why are you going to do that?”

“Well.” Patrick’s arms were shaking, some of which he could attribute to the buffeting winds. “They’re the great Leviathan, a scourge for your fisherfolk.”

“They’ve never bothered me,” said Jimmy, who was a fisherman over from the Aran Islands for the day. A few people in the crowd near enough to hear nodded their heads in agreement.

“Okay, how about...” At that moment, the Vatican representative swatted a mosquito which had landed on his arm, “Mosquitos! Gone, all gone!”

A few heads nodded their approval. “Anything else for us?”

Dusk swept across the now empty fields and advanced on the sea. The Vatican observer patted the saint on the back, “Good job, Pat, I’ve got to be getting home now.” His ledger was full of the things Pat had banished from Ireland: snakes, mosquitos, moose, ~~chickens~~, tigers, tacos — the list went on and on.

But during the ferry ride back over to Holyhead a brisk wind blew up, carrying off the pages of his book, except for that first one with the snakes.