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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK ATTENTION SAINT PATRICK ***

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ATTENTION

SAINT PATRICK

BY MURRAY LEINSTER
(Pseudonym of William Fitzgerald Jenkins)

Illustrated by Bernklau

Legends do, of course, get somewhat distorted in the passage of time. In the future, the passage across space to other planets may cause a slight modification here and there ...

President O'Hanrahan of the planetary government of Eire listened unhappily to his official guest. He had to, because Sean O'Donohue was chairman of the Dail—of Eire on Earth—Committee on the Condition of the Planet Eire. He could cut off all support from the still-struggling colony if he chose. He was short and opinionated, he had sharp, gimlet eyes, he had bristling white hair that once had been red, and he was the grandfather of Moira O'Donohue, who'd traveled to Eire with him on a very uncomfortable spaceship. That last was a mark in his favor, but now he stood four-square upon the sagging porch of the presidential mansion of Eire, and laid down the law.

"I've been here three days." he told the president sternly, while his granddaughter looked sympathetic, "and I'm of the opinion that there's been shenanigans goin' on to keep this fine world from becoming' what it was meant for—a place for the people of Eire on Earth to emigrate to when there was more of them than Erin has room for. Which is now!"

"We've had difficulties——" began the president uneasily.

"This world should be ready!" snapped Sean O'Donohue accusingly. "It should be waitin' for the Caseys and Bradys and Fitzpatricks and other fine Erse people to move to and thrive on while the rest of the galaxy goes to pot with its new-fangled notions. That's the reason for this world's very existence. What set aside Erin on Earth, where our ancestors lived an' where their descendants are breathin' down each other's necks because there's so many of them? There was no snakes there! St. Patrick drove them out. What sets this world apart from all the other livable planets men have put down their smelly spaceships on? There's no snakes here! St. Patrick has great influence up in Heaven. He knew his fine Erse people would presently need more room than there was on Earth for them. So he'd a world set aside, and marked by the sign that no least trace of a serpent could exist on it. No creature like the one that blarneyed Mother Eve could be here! No——"

"Our trouble's been dinies," began the president apologetically.

But he froze. Something dark and sinuous and complacent oozed around the corner of the presidential mansion. The president of Eire sweated. He recognized the dark object. He'd believed it safely put away in pleasant confinement until the Dail Committee went away. But it wasn't. It was Timothy, the amiable six-foot black snake who faithfully and cordially did his best to keep the presidential mansion from falling down. Without him innumerable mouse-sized holes, gnawed by mouse-sized dinies, would assuredly have brought about its collapse. The president was grateful, but he'd meant to keep Timothy out of sight. Timothy must have escaped and as a faithful snake, loyal to his duty, he'd wriggled straight back to the presidential mansion.

Like all Eire, he undoubtedly knew of the pious tradition that St. Patrick had brought the snakes to Eire, and he wasn't one to let St. Patrick down. So he'd returned and doubtless patrolled all the diny tunnels in the sagging structure. He'd cleaned out any miniature, dinosaurlike creatures who might be planning to eat some more nails. He now prepared to nap, with a clear conscience. But if Sean O'Donohue saw him—!

Perspiration stood out on President O'Hanrahan's forehead. The droplets joined and ran down his nose.

"It's evident," said the chairman of the Dail Committee, with truculence, "that we're a pack of worthless, finagling' and maybe even Protestant renegades from the ways an' the traditions of your fathers! There is been shenanigans goin' on! I'll find 'em!"

The president could not speak, with Timothy in full view. But then what was practically a miracle took place. A diny popped out of a hole in the turf. He looked interestedly about. He was all of three inches long, with red eyes and a blue tail, and in every proportion he

was a miniature of the extinct dinosaurs of Earth. But he was an improved model. The dinies of Eire were fitted by evolution—or Satan—to plague human settlers. They ate their crops, destroyed their homes, devoured their tools, and when other comestibles turned up they'd take care of them, too.

This diny surveyed its surroundings. The presidential mansion looked promising. The diny moved toward it. But Timothy—nap plans abandoned—flung himself at the diny like the crack of a whip. The diny plunged back into its hole. Timothy hurtled after it in pursuit. He disappeared.

The president of Eire breathed. He'd neglected that matter for some minutes, it seemed. He heard a voice continuing, formidably:

"And I know ye'll try to hide the shenanigans that've destroyed all the sacrifices Earth's made to have Eire a true Erse colony, ready for Erse lads and colleens to move to and have room for their children and their grandchildren too. I know ye'll try! But unless I do find out—not another bit of help will this colony get from Earth! No more tools! No more machinery that ye can't have worn out! No more provisions that ye should be raisin' for yourselves! Your cold-storage plant should be bulgin' with food! It's near empty! It will not be refilled! And even the ship that we pay to have stop here every three months, for mail—no ship!"

"It's the dinies," said the president feebly. "They're a great trouble to us, sir. They're our great handicap."

"Blather and nonsense!" snapped Sean O'Donohue. "They're no bigger than mice! Ye could've trapped 'em! Ye could've raised cats! Don't tell me that fancy-colored little lizards could hinder a world especially set aside by the intercession of St. Patrick for the Erse people to thrive on! The token's plain! There's no snakes! And with such a sign to go by, there must've been shenanigans goin' on to make things go wrong! And till those shenanigans are exposed an' stopped—there'll be no more help from Earth for ye blaggards!"

He stamped his way into the presidential mansion. The door slammed shut. Moira, his granddaughter, regarded the president with sympathy. He looked bedraggled and crushed. He mopped his forehead. He did not raise his eyes to her. It was bad enough to be president of a planetary government that couldn't even pay his salary, so there were patches in his breeches that Moira must have noticed. It was worse that the colony was, as a whole, entirely too much like the remaining shanty areas in Eire back on Earth. But it was tragic that it was ridiculous for any man on Eire to ask a girl from Earth to join him on so unpromising a planet.

He said numbly:

"I'll be wishing you good morning, Moira."

He moved away, his chin sunk on his breast. Moira watched him go. She didn't seem happy. Then, fifty yards from the mansion, a luridly colored something leaped out of a hole. It was a diny some eight inches long, in enough of a hurry to say that something appalling was after it. It landed before the president and took off again for some far horizon. Then something sinuous and black dropped out of a tree upon it and instantly violent action took place in a patch of dust. A small cloud arose. The president watched, with morbid interest, as the sporting event took place.

Moira stared, incredulous. Then, out of the hole from which the diny had leaped, a dark round head appeared. It could have been Timothy. But he saw that this diny was disposed of. That was that. Timothy—if it was Timothy—withdrew to search further among diny tunnels about the presidential mansion.

Half an hour later the president told the solicitor general of Eire about it. He was bitter.

"And when it was over, there was Moira starin' dazed-like from the porch, and the be-damned snake picked up the diny it'd killed and started off to dine on it in private. But I was in the way. So the snake waited, polite, with the diny in its mouth, for me to move on. But it looked exactly like he'd brought over the diny for me to admire, like a cat'll show dead mice to a person she thinks will be interested!"

"Holy St. Patrick!" said the solicitor general, appalled. "What'll happen now?"

"I reason," said the president morbidly, "she'll tell her grandfather, and he'll collar somebody and use those gimlet eyes on him and the poor *omadhoum* will blurt out that on Eire here it's known that St. Patrick brought the snakes and is the more revered for it. And that'll mean there'll be no more ships or food or tools from Earth, and it'll be lucky if we're evacuated before the planet's left abandoned."

The solicitor general's expression became one of pure hopelessness.

"Then the jig's up," he said gloomily. "I'm thinkin', Mr. President, we'd better have a cabinet meeting on it."

"What's the use," demanded the president. "I won't leave! I'll stay here, alone though I may be. There's nothing left in life for me anywhere, but at least, as the only human left on Eire I'll be able to spend the rest of my years knockin' dinies on the head for what they've done!" Then, suddenly, he bellowed. "Who let loose the snakes! I'll have his heart's blood—"

The Chancellor of the Exchequer peered around the edge of the door into the cabinet meeting room. He saw the rest of the cabinet of Eire assembled. Relieved, he entered. Something stirred in his pocket and he pulled out a reproachful snake. He said:

"Don't be indignant, now! You were walkin' on the public street. If Sean O'Donohue had seen you——" He added to the other members of the cabinet: "The other two members of the Dail Committee seem to be good, honest, drinkin' men. One of them now—the shipbuilder I think it was—wanted a change of scenery from lookin' at the bottom of a glass. I took him for a walk. I showed him a bunch of dinies playin' leapfrog tryin' to get one of their number up to a rain spout so he could bite off pieces and drop 'em down to the rest. They were all colors and it was quite somethin' to look at. The committeeman—good man that he is!—staggered a bit and looked again and said grave that whatever of evil might be said of Eire, nobody could deny that its whisky had imagination!"

He looked about the cabinet room. There was a hole in the baseboard underneath the sculptured coat of arms of the colony world. He put the snake down on the floor beside the hole. With an air of offended dignity, the snake slithered into the dark opening.

"Now—what's the meeting for?" he demanded. "I'll tell you immediate that if money's required it's impractical."

President O'Hanrahan said morbidly:

"'Twas called, it seems, to put the curse o' Cromwell on whoever let the black snakes loose. But they'd been cooped up, and they knew they were not keepin' the dinies down, and they got worried over the work they were neglectin'. So they took turns diggin', like prisoners in a penitentiary, and presently they broke out and like the faithful creatures they are they set anxious to work on their backlog of diny-catchin'. Which they're doin'. They've ruined us entirely, but they meant well."

The minister of Information asked apprehensively: "What will O'Donohue do when he finds out they're here?"

"He's not found out—yet," said the president without elation. "Moirra didn't tell him. She's an angel! But he's bound to learn. And then if he doesn't detonate with the rage in him, he'll see to it that all of us are murdered—slowly, for treason to the Erse and blasphemy directed at St. Patrick." Then the president said with a sort of yearning pride: "D'ye know what Moirra offered to do? She said she'd taken biology at college, and she'd try to solve the problem of the dinies. The darlin'!"

"Bein' gathered together," observed the chief justice, "we might as well try again to think of somethin' plausible."

"We need a good shenanigan," agreed the president unhappily. "But what could it be? Has anybody the trace of an idea?"

The cabinet went into session. The trouble was, of course, that the Erse colony on Eire was a bust. The first colonists built houses, broke ground, planted crops—and encountered dinies. Large ones, fifty and sixty feet long, with growing families. They had thick bodies with unlikely bony excrescences, they had long necks which ended in very improbable small heads, and they had long tapering tails which would knock over a man or a fence post or the corner of a house, impartially, if they happened to swing that way. They were not bright.

That they ate the growing crops might be expected, though cursed. But they ate wire fences. The colonists at first waited for them to die of indigestion. But they digested the fences. Then between bales of more normal foodstuffs they browsed on the corrugated-iron roofs of houses. Again the colonists vengefully expected dyspepsia. They digested the roofs, too. Presently the lumbering creatures nibbled at axes—the heads, not the handles. They went on to the plows. When they gathered sluggishly about a ground-car and began to lunch on it, the colonists did not believe. But it was true.

The dinies' teeth weren't mere calcium phosphate, like other beasts. An amateur chemist

found out that they were an organically deposited boron carbide, which is harder than any other substance but crystallized carbon—diamond. In fact, diny teeth, being organic, seemed to be an especially hard form of boron carbide. Dinies could chew iron. They could masticate steel. They could grind up and swallow anything but tool-steel reinforced with diamond chips. The same amateur chemist worked it out that the surface soil of the planet Eire was deficient in iron and ferrous compounds. The dinies needed iron. They got it.

The big dinies were routed by burning torches in the hands of angry colonists. When scorched often enough, their feeble brains gathered the idea that they were unwelcome. They went lumbering away.

They were replaced by lesser dinies, approximately the size of kangaroos. They also ate crops. They also hungered for iron. To them steel cables were the equivalent of celery, and they ate iron pipe as if it were spaghetti. The industrial installations of the colony were their special targets. The colonists unlimbered guns. They shot the dinies. Ultimately they seemed to thin out. But once a month was shoot-a-diny day on Eire, and the populace turned out to clear the environs of their city of Tara.

Then came the little dinies. Some were as small as two inches in length. Some were larger. All were cute. Colonists' children wanted to make pets of them until it was discovered that miniature they might be, but harmless they were not. Tiny diny-teeth, smaller than the heads of pins, were still authentic boron carbide. Dinies kept as pets cheerily gnawed away wood and got at the nails of which their boxes were made. They ate the nails.

Then, being free, they extended their activities. They and their friends tunneled busily through the colonists' houses. They ate nails. They ate screws. They ate bolts, nuts, the nails out of shoes, pocket knives and pants buttons, zippers, wire staples and the tacks out of upholstery. Gnawing even threads and filings of metal away, they made visible gaps in the frames and moving parts of farm tractors.

Moreover, it appeared that their numbers previously had been held down by the paucity of ferrous compounds in their regular diet. The lack led to a low birth rate. Now, supplied with great quantities of iron by their unremitting industry, they were moved to prodigies of multiplication.

The chairman of the Dail Committee on the Condition of the Planet Eire had spoken of them scornfully as equal to mice. They were much worse. The planetary government needed at least a pied piper or two, but it tried other measures. It imported cats. Descendants of the felines of Earth still survived, but one had only to look at their frustrated, neurotic expressions to know that they were failures. The government set traps. The dinies ate their springs and metal parts. It offered bounties for dead dinies. But the supply of dinies was inexhaustible, and the supply of money was not. It had to be stopped.

Then upon the spaceport of Eire a certain Captain Patrick Brannicut, of Boston, Earth, descended. It was his second visit to Eire. On the first he'd learned of the trouble. On his second he brought what still seemed the most probable solution. He landed eighteen hundred adult black snakes, two thousand teen-agers of the same species, and two crates of soft-shelled eggs he guaranteed to hatch into fauna of the same kind. He took away all the cash on the planet. The government was desperate.

But the snakes chased dinies with enthusiasm. They pounced upon dinies while the public watched. They lay in wait for dinies, they publicly digested dinies, and they went pouring down into any small hole in the ground from which a diny had appeared or into which one vanished. They were superior to traps. They did not have to be set or emptied. They did not need bait. They were self-maintaining and even self-reproducing—except that snakes when overfed tend to be less romantic than when hungry. In ten years a story began—encouraged by the Ministry of Information—to the effect that St. Patrick had brought the snakes to Eire, and it was certain that if they didn't wipe out the dinies, they assuredly kept the dinies from wiping out the colony. And the one hope of making Eire into a splendid new center of Erse culture and tradition—including a reverence for St. Patrick—lay in the belief that some day the snakes would gain a permanent upper hand.

Out near the spaceport there was an imported monument to St. Patrick. It showed him pointing somewhere with his bishop's staff, while looking down at a group of snakes near his feet. The sculptor intended to portray St. Patrick telling the snakes to get the hell out of Eire. But on Eire it was sentimentally regarded as St. Patrick telling the snakes to go increase and multiply.

But nobody dared tell that to Sean O'Donohue! It was past history, in a way, but also it was present fact. On the day of the emergency cabinet meeting it was appalling fact. Without snakes the planet Eire could not continue to be inhabited, because of the little

dinies. But the Republic of Eire on Earth would indignantly disown any colony that had snakes in it. And the colony wasn't ready yet to be self-supporting. The cabinet discussed the matter gloomily. They were too dispirited to do more. But Moira—the darlin'—did research.

It was strictly college-freshman-biology-lab research. It didn't promise much, even to her. But it gave her an excuse to talk anxiously and hopefully to the president when he took the Dail Committee to McGillicuddy Island to look at the big dinies there, while the populace tried to get the snakes out of sight again.

Most of the island lay two miles off the continent named for County Kerry back on Earth. At one point a promontory lessened the distance greatly, and at one time there'd been a causeway there. It had been built with great pains, and with pains destroyed.

The president explained as the boat bearing the committee neared the island.

"The big dinies," he said sadly, "trampled the fences and houses and ate up the roofs and tractors. It could not be borne. They could be driven away with torches, but they came back. They could be killed, but the people could only dispose of so many tons of carcasses. Remember, the big males run sixty feet long, and the most girlish females run forty. You wouldn't believe the new-hatched babies! They were a great trial, in the early days!"



Sean O'Donohue snorted. He bristled. He and the other two of the committee had been dragged away from the city of Tara. He suspected shenanigans going on behind his back. They did. His associates looked bleary-eyed. They'd been treated cordially, and they were not impassioned leaders of the Erse people, like the O'Donohue. One of them was a ship builder and the other a manufacturer of precision machinery, elected to the Dail for no special reason. They'd come on this junket partly to get away from their troubles and their wives. The shortage of high-precision tools was a trouble to both of them, but they were forgetting it fully.

"So the causeway was built," explained President O'Hanrahan. "We drove the big beasts over, and rounded up all we could find—drivin' them with torches—and then we broke down the causeway. So there they are on McGillicuddy Island. They don't swim."

The boat touched ground—a rocky, uninviting shore. The solicitor general and the Chancellor of the Exchequer hopped ashore. They assisted the committee members to land. They moved on. The president started to follow but Moira said anxiously:

"Wait a bit. I've something to tell you. I ... said I'd experiment with the dinies. I did. I learned something."

"Did you now?" asked the president. His tone was at once admiration and despair. "It's a darlin' you are, Moira, but—"

"I ... wondered how they knew where iron was," said Moira hopefully, "and I found out. They smell it."

"Ah, they do, do they!" said the president with tender reverence. "But I have to tell you,

Moira, that——"

"And I proved it!" said Moira, searching his face with her eyes. "If you change a stimulus and a specimen reacts, then its reaction is to the change. So I made the metal smell stronger."

President O'Hanrahan blinked at her.

"I ... heated it," said Moira. "You know how hot metal smells. I heated a steel hairpin and the dinies came out of holes in the wall, right away! The smell drew them. It was astonishing!"

The president looked at her with a strange expression.

"That's ... that's all I had time to try," said Moira. "It was yesterday afternoon. There was an official dinner. I had to go. You remember! So I locked up the dinies——"

"Moira darlin'," said President O'Hanrahan gently, "you don't lock up dinies. They gnaw through steel safes. They make tunnels and nests in electric dynamos. You don't lock up dinies, darlin'!"

"But I did!" she insisted. "They're still locked up. I looked just before we started for here!"

The president looked at her very unhappily.

"There's no need for shenanigans between us, Moira!" Then he said: "Couldn't ye be mistaken? Keepin' dinies locked up is like bottlin' moonlight or writin' down the color of Moira O'Donohue's eyes or——" He stopped. "How did ye do it?"

"The way you keep specimens," she told him. "When I was in college we did experiments on frogs. They're cold-blooded just like dinies. If you let them stay lively, they'll wear themselves out trying to get away. So you put them in a refrigerator. In the vegetable container. They don't freeze there, but they do ... get torpid. They just lay still till you let them warm up again. To room temperature."

The president of the planet Eire stared. His mouth dropped open. He blinked and blinked and blinked. Then he whooped. He reached forward and took Moira into his arms. He kissed her thoroughly.

"Darlin'!" he said in a broken voice. "Sit still while I drive this boat back to the mainland! I've to get back to Tara immediate! You've done it, my darlin', you've done it, and it's a great day for the Irish! It's even a great day for the Erse! It's your birthday will be a planetary holiday long after we're married and our grandchildren think I'm as big a nuisance as your grandfather Sean O'Donohue! It's a fine grand marriage we'll be havin'——"

He kissed her again and whirled the boat about and sent it streaking for the mainland. From time to time he whooped. Rather more frequently, he hugged Moira exuberantly. And she tended to look puzzled, but she definitely looked pleased.

Behind them, of course, the Committee of the Dail on the Condition of the Planet Eire explored McGillicuddy Island. They saw the big dinies—sixty-footers and fifty-footers and lesser ones. The dinies ambled aimlessly about the island. Now and again they reached up on elongated, tapering necks with incongruously small heads on them, to snap off foliage that looked a great deal like palm leaves. Now and again, without enthusiasm, one of them stirred the contents of various green-scummed pools and apparently extracted some sort of nourishment from it. They seemed to have no intellectual diversions. They were not interested in the visitors, but one of the committee members—not Moira's grandfather—shivered a little.

"I've dreamed about them," he said plaintively, "but even when I was dreamin' I didn't believe it!"

Two youthful dinies—they would weigh no more than a couple of tons apiece—engaged in languid conflict. They whacked each other with blows which would have destroyed elephants. But they weren't really interested. One of them sat down and looked bored. The other sat down. Presently, reflectively, he gnawed at a piece of whitish rock. The gnawing made an excruciating sound. It made one's flesh crawl. The diny dozed off. His teeth had cut distinct, curved grooves in the stone. The manufacturer of precision machinery—back on Earth—turned pale.

"L-let's get out of here!"

The committee and the two members of the cabinet returned to the shore. There was no boat. It was far away, headed for the mainland.

"Shenanigans!" said Sean O'Donohue in a voice that would have curdled sulphuric acid. "I warned him no shenanigans! The dirty young bog-trotter's left us here to be eaten up by the beasts!"

The solicitor general said hastily: "Divvil a bit of it, sir. We're his friends and he left us in the same boat—no, he left us out of the same boat. It must've been that something important occurred to him——"

But it was not convincing. It seemed highly unconvincing, later, because some long-delayed perception produced a reaction in the dinies' minuscule brains. They became aware of their visitors. They appeared, in a slow-motion fashion, to become interested in them. Slowly, heavily, numbly, they congregated about them—the equivalent of a herd of several hundred elephants of all the colors of the rainbow, with small heads wearing plaintive but persistent expressions. Long necks reached out hopefully.

"The devil!" said the Chancellor of the Exchequer, fretfully. "I'm just thinkin'. You've iron in your shoes and mainsprings in your watches and maybe pocket knives in your pockets. The dinies have a longin' for iron, and they go after it. They'll eat anything in the world that's got the barest bit of a taste of iron in it! Oh, it's perfectly all right, of course, but ye'll have to throw stones at them till the boat comes back. Better, find a good stout stick to whack them with. Only don't let 'em get behind ye!"

"Ye will?" roared the solicitor general, vengefully. "Take that!" *Whack!* "Tryin' to take somethin' out of the gentleman's hip pocket an' aimin' to grab the rump beyond it just to make sure!"

Whack! A large head moved plaintively away. But another reached hopefully forward, and another. The dinies were not bright. The three committeemen and two members of the cabinet were thigh-deep in water when the boat came back. They still whacked valorously if wearily at intrusive diny heads. They still had made no progress in implanting the idea that the dinies should go away.

The men from the mainland hauled them into the boat. They admitted that the president had returned to Tara. Sean O'Donohue concluded that he had gone back to supervise some shenanigans. He had. On the way to the mainland Sean O'Donohue ground his teeth. On arrival he learned that the president had taken Moira with him. He ground his teeth. "Shenanigans!" he cried hoarsely. "After him!" He stamped his feet. His fury was awe-inspiring. When the ground-car drivers started back to Tara, Sean O'Donohue was a small, rigid embodiment of raging death and destruction held only temporarily in leash.

On the way, even his companions of the committee were uneasy. But one of them, now and again, brought out a small piece of whitish rock and regarded it incredulously. It was not an unusual kind of rock. It was ordinary milky quartz. But it had tooth marks on it. Some diny, at some time, had gnawed casually upon it as if it were soft as cheese.

Faint cheering could be heard in the distance as the ground-cars carrying the committee neared the city of Tara. To those in the vehicles, it seemed incredible that anybody should dare to rejoice within at least two light-years of Sean O'Donohue as he was at this moment. But the cheering continued. It grew louder as the cars entered a street where houses stood side by side. But there came a change in the chairman of the Dail Committee, too.

The cars slowed because the pavement was bad to nonexistent. Trees lined the way. An overhanging branch passed within two yards of Moira's grandfather. Something hung on it in a sort of graceful drapery. It was a black snake. On Eire! Sean O'Donohue saw it. It took no notice of him. It hung comfortably in the tree and looked with great interest toward the sounds of enthusiasm.

The deathly pallor of Sean O'Donohue changed to pale lavender. He saw another black snake. It was climbing down a tree trunk with a purposeful air, as if intending to look into the distant uproar. The ground-cars went on, and the driver of the lead car swerved automatically to avoid two black snakes moving companionably along together toward the cheering. One of them politely gave the ground-car extra room, but paid no other attention to it. Sean O'Donohue turned purple.

Yet another burst of cheering. The chairman of the Dail Committee almost, but not quite, detonated like a fission bomb. The way ahead was blocked by people lining the way on a cross street. The cars beeped, and nobody heard them. With stiff, jerky motions Sean O'Donohue got out of the enforcedly stopped car. It had seemed that he could be no more incensed, but he was. Within ten feet of him a matronly black snake moved along the sidewalk with a manner of such assurance and such impeccable respectability that it would have seemed natural for her to be carrying a purse.

Sean O'Donohue gasped once. His face was then a dark purple. He marched blindly into

the mob of people before him. Somehow, the people of Tara gave way. But the sides of this cross street were crowded. Not only was all the population out and waiting to cheer, but the trees were occupied. By black snakes. They hung in tasteful draperies among the branches, sometimes two or three together. They gazed with intense interest at the scene below them. The solicitor general, following Sean O'Donohue, saw a black snake wriggling deftly between the legs of the packed populace—packed as if to observe a parade—to get a view from the very edge of the curb. The Chancellor of the Exchequer came apprehensively behind the solicitor general.

Sean O'Donohue burst through the ranks of onlookers. He stalked out onto the empty center of the street. He looked neither to right nor left. He was headed for the presidential mansion, there to strangle President O'Hanrahan in the most lingering possible manner.

But there came a roar of rejoicing which penetrated even his single-tracked, murder-obsessed brain. He turned, purple-face and explosive, to see what the obscene sound could mean.

He saw. The lean and lanky figure of the chief justice of the supreme court of the Planet Eire came running down the street toward him. He bore a large slab of sheet-iron.

As he ran, he played upon it the blue flame of a welding torch. The smell of hot metal diffused behind him. The chief justice ran like a deer. But he wasn't leaving anything behind but the smell. Everything else was close on his heels.

A multicolored, multitudinous, swarming tide of dinies filled the highway from gutter to gutter. From the two-inch dwarfs to the purple-striped variety which grew to eight inches and sometimes fought cats, the dinies were in motion. They ran in the wake of the chief justice, enthralled and entranced by the smell of hot sheet iron. They were fascinated. They were bemused. They were aware of nothing but that ineffable fragrance. They hopped, ran, leaped, trotted and galloped in full cry after the head of the planet's supreme court.

He almost bumped into the stunned Sean O'Donohue. As he passed, he cried: "Duck, man! The dinies are comin' tra-la, tra-la!"

But Sean O'Donohue did not duck. He was fixed, stuck, paralyzed in his tracks. And the dinies arrived. They ran into him. He was an obstacle. They played leapfrog over each other to surmount him. He went down and was merely a bump in the flowing river of prismatic colorings which swarmed after the racing chief justice.

But there was a limit to things. This was not the first such event in Tara, this day. The dinies, this time, filled no more than a block of the street. They swarmed past him, they raced on into the distance, and Sean O'Donohue struggled to a sitting position.

His shoes were shreds. Dinies had torn them swiftly apart for the nails in them. His garters were gone. Dinies had operated on his pants to get at the metal parts. His pockets were ripped. The bright metal buttons of his coat were gone. His zippers had vanished. His suspenders dangled without any metal parts to hold them together, nor were there any pants buttons for them to hold onto. He opened his mouth, and closed it, and opened it again and closed it. His expression was that of a man in delirium.

And, even before the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the solicitor general could lift him gently and bear him away, there came a final catastrophe, for the O'Donohue. The snakes who had watched events from the curbs, as well as those which had gazed interestedly from aloft, now began to realize that this was an affair which affected them. They came out and began to follow the vanishing procession, very much as small dogs and little boys pursue a circus parade. But they seemed to talk uneasily to each other as they flowed past Sean O'Donohue, sitting in the dust of the street, all his illusions vanished and all his hopes destroyed.

But the people of Tara did not notice. They cheered themselves hoarse.

President O'Hanrahan held himself with some dignity in the tumble-down reception hall of the presidential mansion. Moira gazed proudly at him. The two still-active members of the Dail Committee looked uncomfortably around them. The cabinet of Eire was assembled.

"It's sorry I am," said the President of Eire, "to have to issue a defiance to the Eire on Earth we owe so much to. But it can't be helped. We had to have the black creatures to keep the dinies from eating us out of house and home altogether. We've been fightin' a rear-guard battle, and we needed them. In time we'd have won with their help, but time we did not have. So this mornin' Moira told me what she'd done yesterday. The darlin' had used the brains God gave her, and maybe holy St. Patrick put a flea in her ear. She figured out that dinies must find metal by its smell, and if its smell was made stronger by

simple heatin' they'd be unable to resist it. And it was so. Ye saw the chief justice runnin' down the street with all the dinies after him."

The two members of the committee nodded.

"He was headin'," said the president, "for the cold-storage plant that Sean O'Donohue had twitted me was empty of the provisions we'd had to eat up because of the dinies. It's no matter that it's empty now though. We can grow victuals in the fields from now on, because now the cold rooms are packed solid with dinies that ran heedless into a climate they are not used to an' fell—what was the word, Moira darlin'?"

"Torpid," said Moira, gazing at him.

"Torpid," agreed the president. "From now on when there's too many dinies we can send somebody runnin' through the streets with a hot plate to call them into cold storage. We've pried pipers at will, to help out the black creatures that've done so much for us. If we've offended Eire on Earth, by havin' the black creatures to help us, we're sorry. But we had to—till Moira and doubtless St. Patrick gave us the answer ye saw today. If we're disowned, bedamned if we don't hang on! We can feed ourselves now. We can feed some extra mouths. There'll be a ship droppin' by out of curiosity now and then, and we'll trade with 'em. If we're disowned—we'll be poor. But when were the Irish ever rich?"

The committeeman who was a manufacturer of precision machinery mopped his forehead.

"We're rich now," he said resignedly. "You'd be bound to learn it. D'you know what the dinies' teeth are made of?"

"It's been said," said President O'Hanrahan, "that it's bor ... boron carbide in organic form. What that means I wouldn't know, but we've got a fine crop of it!"

"It's the next hardest substance to diamond," said the committeeman dourly. "It's even been guessed that an organic type might be harder. It's used for the tools for lathes and precision machinery, and it sells at close to the price of diamonds of industrial quality—and I'll make a deal to handle all we've got. What Earth don't need, other planets will. You're rich."

The president stared. Then he gazed at Moira.

"It's a pity we're bein' disowned," he said mournfully. "It would be a fine thing to be able to tell the grandfather Eire's rich and can feed more colonists and even maybe pay back what it's cost to keep us here so long. It would be a fine thing to hire colonists to build the houses they'll be given free when they're finished. But since Sean O'Donohue is a stern man——"

The ship owner scratched his head. He'd paused on the way to the presidential mansion. He'd had restoratives for his distress. He'd looked at the bottom of a bottle and seen the facts.

"I'll tell yea," he said warmly. "It's the O'Donohue's been battlin' to keep the colony goin' against the politicians that wanted to economize. He's made a career of believin' in this world. He's ruined if he stops. So it might be that a little bit of blarneyin'—with him desperate to find reason to stay friends, black creature or no black creatures——"

The president took Moira's hand.

"Come, my darlin'," he said sadly. "We'll reason with him."

Long, long minutes later he shook his head as Sean O'Donohue stormed at him.

"The back o' my hand to you!" said Sean O'Donohue in the very quintessence of bitterness. "And to Moira, too, if she has more to do with you! I'll have naught to do with shenanigannin' renegades and blasphemers that actually import snakes into a world St. Patrick had set off for the Erse from ancient days!"

It was dark in the old man's room. He was a small and pathetic figure under the covers. He was utterly defiant. He was irreconcilable, to all seeming.

"Renegades!" he said indignantly. "Snakes, yea say? The devil a snake there is on Eire! I'll admit that we've some good black creatures that in a bad light and with prejudice yea might mistake. But snakes? Ye might as well call the dinies lizards—those same dinies that are native Erin porcupines—bad luck to them!"

There was an astounded silence from the bed.

"It's a matter of terminology," said the president sternly. "And it's not the name that

makes a thing, but what it does! *Actio sequitur esse*, as the sayin' goes. You'll not be denyin' that! Now, a diny hangs around a man's house and it eats his food and his tools and it's no sort of good to anybody while it's alive. Is that the action of a lizard? It is not! But it's notorious that porcupines hang around men's houses and eat the handles of their tools for the salt in them, ignoring' the poor man whose sweat had the salt in it when he was laborin' to earn a livin' for his family. And when a thing acts like a porcupine, a porcupine it is and nothing else! So a diny is a Eirean porcupine, native to the planet, and no man can deny it!

"And what, then, is a snake?" demanded President O'Hanrahan oratorically. "It's a creature that sneaks about upon the ground and poisons by its bite when it's not blarneyin' unwise females into tasting' apples. Do the black creatures here do anything of that sort? They do not! They go about their business plain and open, givin' a half of the road and a how'd'y-do to those they meet. They're sober and they're industrious. They mind their own business, which is killin' the Eirean porcupines we inaccurate call by the name of dinies. It's their profession! Did yea ever hear of a snake with a profession? I'll not have it said that there's snakes on Eire! And I'll denounce yea as a conscienceless politician if yea dare to put such a name on the honest, friendly, industrious Eirean porcupine eaters that up to this moment have been the savin' of the colony! I'll not have it!"

There was a long silence. Then Sean O'Donohue spoke dryly: "Porcupine eaters, you say? Not snakes?"

"Not snakes!" repeated the president defiantly. "Porcupine eaters!"

"Hm-m-m," said Sean O'Donohue. "That's better. The Dail's not immune to blarney when it's needful to accept it—and Eire back on Earth is hard put for breathin' room you say can be had from now on. What would be the reason for Moira standin' so close to you?"

"She's marryin' me," said President O'Hanrahan firmly.

Sean O'Donohue's voice was waspish.

"But I forbid it!" it said sharply. "Until I'm up and about and able to be givin' her in marriage as her grandfather ought to be doin'! Ye'll wait the few days till I'm able! Understand?"

"Yes, sir," said the president. Meekness seemed called for.

"Then begone!" snapped Sean O'Donohue. Then he added sternly: "Remember—no shenanigans!"

The solicitor general watched them depart on a wedding journey to a cottage in Ballyhanninch, which was on Donegal Peninsular, fronting on the Emmett Sea. He waved, like the assembled populace. But when they were out of sight he said darkly to the chief justice and the Chancellor of the Exchequer:

"I didn't have the heart to bring it up before, but there's the devil of a problem buildin' up against the time he comes back."

"Which problem?" asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer, warily.

"It's the sn ... the porcupine killers," said the solicitor general. "Things look bad for them. They're out of work. Even Timothy. There's no dinies to speak of for them to earn a livin' by killin'. It's technological unemployment. They earned their way faithful, doin' work they knew an' loved. Now they're jobless. There's no work for them. What's to be done? Put 'em on re [remainder of text is missing]"

There was a pause. The solicitor general said firmly:

"I mean it! They've a claim on us! A claim of the highest order! They can't starve, it's sure! But would you have them have to hold mass meetin's and set up picket lines and the like, to get justice done them?"

"Ah," said the chief justice. "Some way will turn up to handle the matter. Like Sean O'Donohue was sayin' to me yesterday, at the very bottom of a bottle, we Erse can always depend on St. Patrick to take care of things!"

THE END

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