

Driving Out the Snakes - An Excerpt from My Upcoming Novel

Michael Downey
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*This is an excerpt from my upcoming novel, *Between Heaven and Earth*. Guy is explaining to Jeong Sook about the cultural significance of St. Patrick's Day.*

"Who is this guy and why he always wear green? It like Santa and his red suit?" she wanted to know.

Guy had to catch himself to keep from laughing. It was a serious question and deserved a serious answer. He understood immediately the connection between the two iconic characters.

"Yeah maybe it's something like that," he started out. "They were both real people in the long development of western Christian history. The legend of Santa Clause came out of Asia Minor which today we call Turkey. He was a much beloved Bishop in the church and was known for his love for his flock, especially children. The red suit came a whole lot later; something to do with a Coca Cola ad campaign."

"Later?" Jeong Sook wanted to be clear. She really liked Santa Grandfather as he was known in South Korea.

"Much, much, much later. Nicholas, his real name, was born around the third century A.D. He didn't start going around in red until the twentieth century when the Coca Cola Company used his image to promote their product. Red was their color."

"So he American now?" Jeong Sook was a little skeptical.

"You could say that, at least the image is."

"How about the other guy? He American too?"

"No, he's definitely Irish. I should say he was Roman-British and became Irish. Sometimes it works like that."

Jeong Sook was bemused, confused, and more than a little interested. Although she had graduated from prestigious middle and high schools, and had matriculated at the Fine Arts University of Pyongyang, she was almost entirely ignorant of the culture and history of the west. If it hadn't been portrayed in a Hollywood or a Disney film, it wasn't part of her world view.

Guy continued, "Christianity had newly come to Britain in those days through the Romans. When Rome pulled up stakes in Britain around 400 A.D., lots of Roman-British families remained behind. They were for the most part Christian. Patrick was born into one of those families. Patrick was kidnapped by Irish pirates and sold as a slave in Ireland. It was a common occurrence at that time."

"That how he become Irish?" Jeong Sook liked such stories and wanted to get it straight in her head.

"That's right. He was put to work as a shepherd boy in the wild countryside. He spent a lot of time alone and had a deep conversion experience. He saw visions and dreamed dreams. He talked to God maybe," Guy wasn't sure of all the details but he related it as he remembered from his parochial grade school days.

"Wow! Talked to God?" Jeong Sook was impressed and a little jealous. "What they talk about?"

"The usual stuff I suppose," Guy informed her. "In one dream he was told he should escape and was led to a ship that was heading for France. He snuck on board and was free. Apparently God had called him to return and convert like my story."

"Did he go back?"

"He sure did. He converted Ireland and drove out all the snakes!"

"Snakes," she thought for a moment and said, "Somebody need to drive the snakes out of North Korea."

"They got snakes in North Korea?"

"They sure do and they mostly named Kim!"

At the last moment Guy had invited Jeong Sook to join the meet up with Kyle. It was about time and he figured she would be an asset to the evening's program. As they sat at a table in Geckos waiting for the family guy to show up, Jeong Sook continued to quiz Guy for more stories about the patron saint whose feast day everyone was enthusiastically celebrating.

"So why everybody want to get drunk on this saint's day?" She was perplexed. She loved Patrick talking with God, his calling, and his driving out the snakes but couldn't make the connection to imbibing copious amounts of alcohol.

"It is all a part of his legend that Patrick was a holy man who converted the whole nation in the span of his lifetime. In order to do that he had to do battle with the Druid priests for the hearts and minds of the people," while explaining such things Guy was in his element.

Jeong Sook was an adept student and soaked up all that she could. "Druid, what that?"

"The Druids were powerful priests and magicians. They controlled the inner lives of both the kings and the people."

"Were they bad guys? Sounds like the moodangs in Korea."

"You got that right. They were like the shamans. They had a well-developed oral tradition and exercised a great deal of power as well as influence over the land."

"But were they bad guys?"

"I don't think so but they were an obstacle to the new faith that required believe in and obedience to one God."

"How did Patrick beat the Druids?" Jeong Sook was fascinated and made comparisons in her mind to what she knew about her own country.

"Not sure, maybe the people were just ready for a god of love and forgiveness rather than the ones of nature, power, and magic."

"Why the heavy drinking?" For some reason this was important to her.

"The Irish like to drink. They like to fight, tell stories, sing, and of course drink."

"Sounds like Korean people," she observed.

"Yes, you're not the first to mention that. I've heard folks say that the Koreans are the Irish of Asia. The Irish are Celts, a people that migrated across Europe and settled in the British Isles. In pre Christian times they were fierce fighters that loved nothing better than drinking until they were roaring drunk and entertain themselves with stories of their heroic exploits. The Irish have stories that go back to pre-writing times about battles, cattle raids, and love making that would make a whore blush. A few of the most bodacious heroes were women. The church tried its best to squash such unholy traditions throughout Europe. The Roman church and the Celtic church developed differently. The holy fathers in Ireland seemed to wink at the old traditions. In the early days, many of the Irish saints and leaders, even priests, were women."

"Women, really?" She was surprised. "Not possible in Korea. Womens better act like women here."

Next, Jeong Sook wanted to know why the people of such a small backward country and it's holy man are celebrated in America, around the world, and even in Korea. Over gin and tonics that the staff had somehow managed to turn a shade of green and a plate of cheese sticks, Guy explained the potato famine and the great Irish diaspora of the 19th century.

"The Irish have the gift of gab. When they arrived in America along with waves of immigrants from other countries they already spoke a dialect of English. This was a leg up for them and they first became laborers, soldiers, and shopkeepers. Often they got into politics which led to them getting jobs as firemen and policemen. Even today the ranks and culture of big city police departments are heavily Irish." Guy thought of his own great grandparents who had played their part in this story as he related it to the lady.

As he continued to lecture Jeong Sook on the cultural, political, and literary impact of the Irish in America and the world, she got tipsy and lost her ability to make sense out of the English. Just then Kyle made his entrance.