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Kevin O'Hara: A rogue tinker at Fenway Park



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By Kevin O'Hara

In 1979, Pittsfield native Kevin O'Hara circled Ireland with his donkey, Missie. The following shenanigans took place on the high, hilly roads of County Wicklow.

PITTSFIELD — As Missie and I approached the sleepy village of Glencree, two bleary-eyed young Yanks came running toward us with cameras flashing. "Okay to take your picture?" sneered the driver, a lank-haired leathery tyrant wearing a soiled Red Sox cap.

"Shoot away!" I replied, putting on an accent that no Irish county would claim as its own. "Sure, as long as it's not gamma rays you're firing into me."

"Wow, a real tinker and his donkey!" squealed his rotund companion, whose short-spiked hair gave him the look of a happy hedgehog. "I thought your kind could only be viewed under glass at the National Museum."

"Nar'a, no," I bowed in thanksgiving. "There's a few of us still knocking about the island, thanks be to God."

Now over these long months, I'd often been mistaken as a bonafide Irish itinerant by my American peers, and had harbored a desire to see if I could actually pass off as one. So finding myself in the company of such a deserving pair, I set off on this masquerade with all the cunning I could muster.

After the duo clicked off a dozen shots of the smiling couple, I asked how they liked "the little country."

"It rains a lot," said the spiky-haired one. "And your B&B's are like chapels, with holy pictures hanging off the four walls. Last night, at St. Brendan the Navigator's, I caught myself genuflecting before crawling into bed."

"So you're just like a gypsy?" inquired the bully, appraising me with a cold eye. "Are you going around the country stealing I mean, selling things?"

"Aye, I am," I lilted proudly. "Why, I'm just after selling a hape of pigs in Roundwood. And now I'm off to Armagh to work the apple harvest there."

He spat hotly into the hedge. "Ever meet any women, besides your bucktoothed mare here?"

"Bushels of `em," I blustered. "Pratie pickers, too. Pretty lasses, those, as long as you don't mind the clogs of clay beneath their nails. Now, where do ye fellas hail, if I'm not too bold in asking?"

"Massachusetts."

"Oh, Kennedy country. Boston, is it?"

"No, Somerville. Just outside."

"I've been to Boston," I said to their surprise. "Aye, four years ago I visited my brother, Mickey, who shoes the horses for your park police. I even saw a baseball match while there." I tweaked the peak of the hooligan's Red Sox cap.

"What? You actually saw a game at Fenway Park! Do you remember who they played?"

"Oh, I do, the Cincinnati Ohio Redlegs."

The Somerville sluggers jumped clear off the road, startling my long-eared companion.

"Holy Moly! That was the `75 World Series! D-do you remember which game?"

I settled my beast with a gentle rub to her withers.

"The sixth game."

"The Sixth Game! You can't possibly realize it, but that was one of the greatest games in the history of baseball! Do you remember much about it?"

I swung my hazel stick toward the Wicklow Hills, imagining the Green Monster in the distance. "Oh, I do now. Wasn't it the clever pitcher, El Tiente, jerking about the little raised hillock like a drunkard from Drumnacart doing the jigs. And his faithful mate, Pudgy Fisk, wearing a canary cage atop his head, and fitted with a mitten the size of a kittiwake's nest."

"Hot dang!" The duo exchanged high-fives. "Anything else?"

"Wasn't it Freddie Lynn who hit a three-goal banger in the first frame, and the pinch-me-up-batter, Bernie Carbo, clocking another longbow in the eighth frame to knot it at six all. Then, bedad, the carbine arm of Dewey Evans in the right meadow, the fiery sparkplug, The Rooster, at longstop "

"Rick Burleson at short," they corrected eagerly.

"Such a pity their mighty clean-me-up-batter, Jimmy Rice, was sidelined that night with an injury. Sure, wouldn't the turf-cutters in these parts enjoy him swinging a slane for a day. And, Pudgy, sure as certain, wearing the mystical Number 27 on his jersey — thrice that of our sacred Celtic number 9 — who went knocking the red-stitched egg out of the green barn in the 12th bracket to win it all."

"You're a genius!" gasped the hedgehog. "I mean, baseball is so complicated, unless you grow up with it."

"That's the truth you're speaking there," I granted him. "And, sure, as I tramp these endless roads to this very day, amn't I still bedeviled by such things as balks, delayed steals and, begob, those confounded infield fly rules."

With that, I bade the pair "Good Day," leaving them standing like wide-eyed hares in the middle of the road. And, may God forgive me, but if a lorry came hurtling over the rise, I don't believe either could get out of its way.

Kevin O'Hara writes an annual St. Patrick's Day column for The Eagle.

PHOTO CAPTION: Sally Gap, Co. Wicklow, September, 1979

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