

BRENDAN. Jack'd know ... the what the, you'd know a few, Jim.

JIM. Ah Jack'd tell you better than me.

FINBAR. (At photograph.) That's the Abbey now.

VALERIE. Oh yeah.

FINBAR. You can see more of it there now. What was there, Brendan? When was that?

BRENDAN. Oh, back in oh, fifteen something, there was a synod of bishops all came and met there for ... eh ... eh, had.

JIM. This townland used to be quite important back a few hundred years ago, Valerie. This was like the capital of the county, it would have been.

VALERIE. Right. (Jack comes back in.)

FINBAR. Oh it's a very interesting place all, eh, Jack, we were just saying about the, what was the story with the fairy road?

JACK. The fairy road? I go into the toilet for two minutes. I can't leave you alone for two minutes ... (They laugh.)

FINBAR. Ah I was telling Valerie about the fort and every thing. What was the story with the fairy road? Where was it? (Short pause.)

JACK. Are you really interested? All the babies.

FINBAR. Ah it's a bit of fun. Tell her. Where was it?

JACK. (To Finbar.) You're going to regret me saying this now, 'cause you know whose house it was?

FINBAR. Whose?

JACK. It was Maura Nealon's house.

FINBAR. (Self-chastising, remembering.) Oh ... Jesus. (They laugh.)

JACK. You see? That's as much cop as you have now.

FINBAR. I fucking forgot it was Maura.

JACK. These are only old stories, Valerie.

VALERIE. No, I'd like to hear it.

JACK. It's only an old cod, like.

FINBAR. You're not going to be scaring the woman.

JACK. Ah it's not scary.

VALERIE. I'm interested in it.

FINBAR. You hear all old shit around here, it doesn't mean anything.

BRENDAN. This is a good little story.

JACK. It's only short. It's just. Maura ... Nealon used to come in here in the evening, sit over there at the fire. How old was she, Jim? When she died?

JIM. Oh Jays, she would have been nearly ninety.

JACK. But she was a grand, you know, spritely kind of a woman 'til the end. And had all her ... She was on the ball, like, you know? And she swore that this happened. When she was only a girl. She lived in that house all her life. And she had older brothers and sisters. She was the youngest. And her mother, eh ...

JIM. Bridie.

JACK. Bridie. She was a well-known woman in the area. A widow woman. She was a bit of a character. Bit of a practical joker and that, you know? And Maura would say that when she was young, she was, Bridie was, always doing things on the older kids hiding their ... clothes and all this, you know? And she'd tell them old fibs about what a certain, prospective boyfriend or girlfriend had said about them out on the road and this about coming courting or that. And she was always shouting from upstairs or this "There's someone at the door." She was always saying there's someone at the back door or there's someone coming up the path. You know. This. And there'd never be, anyone there. And people got used to her. That she liked her joke.

And Maura used to say that one Saturday evening back in about 1910 or 1911, the older ones were getting ready to go out for a dance or whatever was happening. And the mother, Bridie, came down the stairs and said, "Did no one get the door?"

And they were all, "Oh here we go," you know? But — Bridie came down and opened the door, and there was nobody there. And she didn't say anything, and she wasn't making a big thing out of it, you know? And Maura said, she was only young, but she knew there was something wrong. She wasn't cracking the jokes. And later on, when the others were all out, it was just her and her mother sitting at the fire. And her mother was very quiet. Normally she'd send Maura up to bed, early enough, like.

But Maura said she remembered this night because Bridie didn't send her up. She wanted someone with her, you see. And in those days, Valerie, as you know, there was no electricity out here.

And there's no dark like a winter night in the country. And there was a wind like this one: tonight, howling and whistling in off the sea. You hear it under the door and it's like someone singing. Singing in under the door at you. It was this type of night now. Am I setting the scene for you? *(They laugh.)*

Finbar's looking a bit edgy. You want to finish that small one, I think.

FINBAR. Don't mind my small one. You're making very heavy weather of this yarn, Jack.

JACK. Ah now, you have to enjoy it. You have to relish the details of something like this, ha? *(They laugh.)*

So there they were, sitting there, and Bridie was staring into the fire, a bit quiet. And smiling now and again at Maura. But Maura said she could see a bit of wet in her eyes. And then there was a soft knocking at the door. Someone. At the front door. And Bridie never moved. And Maura said, "Will I get the door, Mammy?" And Bridie said, "No, sure, it's only someone playing a joke on us, don't mind them." So they sat there, and there was no more knocking for a while. And, em, in those days, there was no kitchen. Where the extension is, Valerie, that was the back door and only a little latch on it, you know? And that's where the next knocking was. Very soft, Maura said, and very low down the door. Not like where you'd expect a grown man or a woman to be knocking, up here, you know? And again Bridie was saying, ah, it's only someone having a joke, they'll go away. And then it was at the window. Maura couldn't see anything out in the night, and her mother wouldn't let her go over. And then it stopped. But when it was late and the fire went down, Bridie wouldn't get up to get more turf for the fire. Because it was out in the shed. So they just sat there until the others came back, well after midnight.

VALERIE. What was it?

JACK. Well Maura said her mother never told the others, and one day when it was only the two of them there, a priest came

and blessed the doors and the windows. And there was no more knocking then. And it was only years later that Maura heard from one of the older people in the area that the house had been built on what they call a fairy road. Like it wasn't a road, but it was a ...

JIM. It was like a row of things.

JACK. Yeah, like a ... From the fort up in Brendan's top field there, then the old well, and the abbey further down, and into the cove where the little pebbly beach is, there. And the ... legend would be that the fairies would come down that way to bathe, you see. And Maura Nealon's house was built on what you'd call ... that ... road.

VALERIE. And they wanted to come through.

JACK. Well that'd be the idea. But Maura never heard the knocking again except on one time in the fifties when the weir was going up. There was a bit of knocking then she said. And fierce load of dead birds all in the hedge and all this, but that was it. That's the story.

FINBAR. You're not bothered by that, are you Valerie? 'Cause it's only old cod, you know? You hear all these around, up and down the country.

VALERIE. Well. I think there's probably something in them. No, I do.

JACK. Ah, there ... might be all right. But ... it doesn't hurt. A bit of an old story, like. But I'll tell you what, it'd give you a thirst, like. You know? What'll you have? *(They laugh.)* Valerie, top that up.

VALERIE. Em ...

JACK. Go on.

FINBAR. Ah she will. Brendan. *(Brendan puts a clean tumbler on the bar.)*

VALERIE. This glass is fine.

FINBAR. Oh, country ways! Good girl. *(They laugh.)* Brendan pours wine.

JACK. Finbar. Pint?

FINBAR. Ah. Pint. Why not, says you, ha?

JACK. Jim?