

You will tell the truth, for that is why you called me.
 CONOR And what if I don't?
 MONSTER Then I will eat you alive.
(The MONSTER approaches CONOR, threateningly, then recedes.)

8. GRANDMA

(Tuesday morning. CONOR's bedroom.)
(The sound of an alarm clock.)
(CONOR goes to the window and looks out.)
(CONOR changes into his school uniform; in doing so, he finds several yew tree berries in his shoes, which he tips onto the floor. The MONSTER watches him.)
 MUM *(From off)* Con, are you up? Don't want to be late for school.
(CONOR tidies the berries into his rucksack.)
 CONOR Yes, Mum, I'm just getting my bag together.
(Time passes. We hear sounds from CONOR's school day.)
(Tuesday afternoon. CONOR's house. CONOR arrives back from school. GRANDMA and MUM are in the sitting room. GRANDMA has a carrier bag next to her.)
 GRANDMA How was school, young man?
 CONOR Fine.
 GRANDMA You know there's a tremendous independent boys' school not half a mile from me.
 MUM He's happy where he is, Mum. Aren't you, Con?
 GRANDMA The academic standards are quite high, much higher than the comprehensive, I'm sure.

CONOR I'm fine where I am.
(GRANDMA goes to CONOR and pinches his cheeks, hard.)
 GRANDMA Are you being a good boy for your mum, though?
 MUM He's been very good, Mum – so there's no need to inflict quite so much pain.
 GRANDMA Oh, nonsense.
(GRANDMA slaps CONOR on his cheeks, playfully but hard. CONOR stands and takes it.)
 CONOR Grandma?!
 GRANDMA Go and put the kettle on for your mum and me.
(CONOR goes towards the kitchen.)
(Grabbing the carrier bag) Oh Bea ... wigs.
 MUM Conor, Grandma brought me her wigs.
(CONOR turns.)
 Do you want to see?
 GRANDMA Yes, look.
(GRANDMA takes a wig from the carrier bag and inspects it.)
 Now, when was this...? 1968 or something.
(GRANDMA puts on the wig.)
 MUM When you were burning your bra.
 CONOR Mum!
 MUM What? I just said bra.
 GRANDMA *(Presenting herself, wiggled)* Cathy McGowan.
 CONOR Who's Cathy McGowan?
 GRANDMA Cathy McGowan. *(To MUM)* "Ready, Steady, Go"?
 MUM I've no idea.

GRANDMA Oh, you're so young.
(GRANDMA removes her wig, then takes out another wig and hands it to MUM.)
 What about this?

MUM Oh, very glam!
(MUM tries on the wig.)
 When did you wear this?

GRANDMA Never you mind. *(To CONOR)* Marilyn ... Monroe.
(MUM starts singing "I Wanna Be Loved by You" by Herbert Stothart, Harry Ruby and Bert Kalmar.)
(CONOR goes towards the kitchen.)
(Calling after him) Black tea please!
(CONOR goes into the kitchen.)
 With lemon if you have it!

CONOR As if I don't remember.

GRANDMA What was that?

CONOR Nothing.
(MUM stops singing.)
(CONOR prepares cups of tea.)

GRANDMA *(Referring to the wigs)* So, what do you think, darling?

MUM *(Removing the wig)* Mum, don't be ridiculous — I can't wear these.

GRANDMA No.

MUM No.

GRANDMA Oh Bea, darling, what are we going to do with you?
(Beat) Now, we need to have a talk about what's going —

MUM No, we don't need to have a talk —

GRANDMA Yes, we absolutely do. We —

MUM No, we absolutely don't. *(Beat)* Sorry, Mum, I'm going to have to go and lie down.

GRANDMA Right. Of course.
(MUM stands up to leave.)

MUM Thank you for the wigs.

GRANDMA You go on then.
(MUM exits.)
(Calling after her) I'll bring you up a hot-water bottle.
(GRANDMA goes into the kitchen.)
(CONOR hands the cup of tea to GRANDMA, roughly.)
(Taking the cup) Thank you.
(GRANDMA prepares a hot-water bottle, then stands watching CONOR drying crockery with a tea towel.)
 You and I need to have a talk, my boy.

CONOR I've got a name, you know. And it's not "my boy".

GRANDMA That is enough.
(Pause)
 I'm not your enemy, Conor — I'm here to help your mum.

CONOR I know why you're here.

GRANDMA *(Taking the tea towel from CONOR)* I'm here because thirteen-year-old boys shouldn't be doing the washing-up without being asked to first.

CONOR Why, were you going to do it?

GRANDMA Conor —

CONOR Just go. We don't need you here.

(CONOR folds laundry from a washing basket.)

GRANDMA We need to talk about what is going to happen—

CONOR No, we don't. She's always sick after the treatments. She'll be better tomorrow. And then you can go home.

GRANDMA She'll seem better tomorrow, Conor, but she won't be.

CONOR The treatments are making her better – that's why she goes.

GRANDMA You need to talk to her about this. *(To herself)* She needs to talk to you about this.

CONOR About what?

GRANDMA About you coming to live with me.

(Beat)

CONOR I'm not going to live with you.

GRANDMA Conor—

CONOR I'm never going to live with you!

GRANDMA Yes, you are. I'm sorry, but you are. I know your mother's trying to protect you, but it is vitally important for you to know that when ... this is all over, there'll be a home for you, my boy – with someone who'll love you and care for you.

CONOR When this is all over, you'll leave and we'll be fine.

MUM *(From off)* Mum...?

GRANDMA *(Shouting off)* Yes...

MUM *(From off)* Mum...?

GRANDMA *(Shouting off)* Yes, it's OK, darling! I'm coming... I'm coming!

(GRANDMA exits, carrying the hot-water bottle.)

(The sound of MUM retching, off.)

(CONOR angrily stuffs the laundry back into the basket. The MONSTER watches him.)

9.

THE WILDNESS OF STORIES

(Tuesday night.)

(The MONSTER is waiting in the darkness. The clock turns to 12.07.)

ENSEMBLE 12.07.

MONSTER Hello again, Conor. It is time for me to tell you the first tale. Are you listening?

CONOR No!

MONSTER I have been alive as long as this land! You will pay me the respect I am owed!

CONOR What do you know? What do you know about anything?

MONSTER I know about you, Conor O'Malley.

CONOR No you don't. If you did, you'd know I don't have time to listen to stupid, boring stories from some stupid, boring tree that isn't even real.

MONSTER Oh, did you dream the yew tree berries on your bedroom floor?

CONOR Who cares?! They're just stupid berries! Woo-hoo, so scary! Please, please save me from the berries.

MONSTER How strange – the words you say tell me you are scared of the berries, but your actions seem to suggest otherwise.

CONOR You're as old as the land and you've never heard of sarcasm?

MONSTER People usually know better than to speak it to me.