

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.

CONOR Can't you just leave me alone?
MONSTER Why are you not afraid of me?
CONOR You're just a tree.
MONSTER And you have worse things to be frightened of.
(Pause)
CONOR I thought... I saw you watching me earlier when I was fighting with my grandma and I thought...
MONSTER What?! What did you think?
CONOR Forget it.
MONSTER You thought I might be here to help you. You thought I might have come to topple your enemies, slay your dragons. When I said that you had called for me - that you were the reason I had come walking - you felt the truth of it, did you not?
CONOR But all you want to do is tell me stories.
MONSTER When you let stories loose, who knows what havoc they may wreak? (Beat) Let me tell you about the end of a wicked queen and how I made sure she was never seen again.
(Pause)
CONOR Go on.

10. THE FIRST TALE

(The ENSEMBLE transform the space.)

MONSTER Long ago, before this was a town with roads, cars and trains, it was a green place.

(The ENSEMBLE present a forest.)

Trees covered every hill, shaded every stream and protected every house, for there were houses here even then, made of stone and earth. This was a kingdom.

(A KING emerges from the ENSEMBLE.)

A kingdom in which the king and his sons fought dragons and giants, ogres and wizards.

(The KING holds a baby.)

CONOR This sounds like a rubbish fairy tale.

(The ENSEMBLE lurch towards CONOR.)

MONSTER Be quiet! And listen. (Beat) War ravaged the king's family until he was left with only his infant grandson. (Beat) What does a man do when he has more sadness than he can bear alone?

(A PRINCESS emerges from the ENSEMBLE.)

A princess from a far-off kingdom took pity on him.

(The PRINCESS approaches the KING, suspiciously.)

They were married quickly, even though no one really knew who this strange woman was.

(The PRINCESS is crowned and becomes the QUEEN.)

Time passed until the prince was within two years of his eighteenth birthday - the age at which he could inherit the throne.

(The PRINCE emerges from the ENSEMBLE and replaces the baby.)

These were happy days for the kingdom. (Beat) But rumour began that the queen had conjured grave magicks. And with still a year left before the prince was old enough to take the throne, the king died.

(The KING dies, dropping his crown. The QUEEN and the PRINCE struggle over the crown. The QUEEN takes the crown and places it on her head.)