

BOY. You're on.

*(She now squats down beside him.)*

MAGGIE. I've new riddles for you.

BOY. Give up.

MAGGIE. What goes round the house and round the house and sits in the corner? *(Pause.)* A broom! Why is a river like a watch?

BOY. You're pathetic.

MAGGIE. Because it never goes far without winding! Hairy out and hairy in, lift your foot and stab it in — what is it? *(Pause.)*

BOY. Give up.

MAGGIE. Think!

BOY. Give up.

MAGGIE. Have you even one brain in your head?

BOY. Give up.

MAGGIE. A sock!

BOY. A what?

MAGGIE. A sock — a sock! You know — lift your foot and stab it —

*(She demonstrates. No response.)*

D'you know what your trouble is, cub? You-are-buck-stupid!

BOY. Look out — there's a rat!

*(She screams and leaps to her feet in terror.)*

MAGGIE. Where? — where? — where? — Jesus, Mary and Joseph, where is it?

BOY. Caught you again, Aunt Maggie.

MAGGIE. You evil wee brat — God forgive you! I'll get you for that, Michael! Don't you worry — I won't forget that!

*(She picks up her bucket and moves off towards the back of the house. Stops.)*

And I had a barley sugar sweet for you.

BOY. Are there bits of cigarette tobacco stuck to it?

MAGGIE. Jesus Christ! Some day you're going to fill some woman's life full of happiness. *(Moving off.)* Tchook-tchook-tchook-tchook ...

*(Again she stops and throws him a sweet.)*

There. I hope it chokes you. *(Exits.)* Tchook-tchook-tchook-

tchook-tchookeeeee ...

MICHAEL. When I saw Uncle Jack for the first time the reason I was so shocked by his appearance was that I expected — well, I suppose, the hero from a schoolboy's book. Once I had seen a photograph of him radiant and splendid in his officer's uniform. It had fallen out of Aunt Kate's prayer book and she snatched it from me before I could study it in detail. It was a picture taken in 1917 when he was a chaplain to the British forces in East Africa and he looked — magnificent. But Aunt Kate had been involved locally in the War of Independence; so Father Jack's brief career in the British army was never referred to in that house. All the same the wonderful Father Jack of that photo was the image of him that lodged in my mind.

But if he was a hero to me, he was a hero and a saint to my mother and to my aunts. They pored over his occasional letters. They prayed every night for him and for his lepers and for the success of his mission. They scraped and saved for him — sixpence here, a shilling there — sacrifices they made willingly, joyously, so that they would have a little money to send to him at Christmas and for his birthday. And every so often when a story would appear in the *Donegal Enquirer* about 'our own leper priest,' as they called him — because Ballybeg was proud of him, the whole of Donegal was proud of him — it was only natural that our family would enjoy a small share of that fame — it gave us that little bit of status in the eyes of the parish. And it must have helped my aunts to bear the shame Mother brought on the household by having me — as it was called then — out of wedlock.

*(KATE enters left, laden with shopping bags. When she sees the BOY working at his kites her face lights up with pleasure. She watches him for a few seconds. Then she goes to him.)*

KATE. Well, that's what I call a busy man. Come here and give your Aunt Kate a big kiss.

*(She catches his head between her hands and kisses the crown of his head.)*

And what's all this? It's a kite, is it?

BOY. It's two kites.