

BRIDGET CLEARY

by
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Bridget Cleary—Story Synopsis

The year is 1895. Ballyvadlea is an isolated rural hamlet in Tipperary, with 31 souls and nine houses. Michael and Bridget Cleary share a modern, slate-roofed cottage with Patrick Boland, Bridget's father.

Bridget becomes sick. The symptoms convince those who believe in the old ways that the creature lying ill in bed is a fairy changeling. They persuade Michael that the real Bridget is a captive of the fairies.

After battling the 'changeling' with herbal concoctions and fire, Michael and his companions believe they have succeeded in bringing Bridget back.

Next day though, Michael has renewed doubts about Bridget's identity. The ensuing exorcism attempt goes horribly wrong. In a frenzy to banish the fairy changeling and recover his wife, Michael ends up burning her to death with paraffin oil. He is convinced the charred remains are not those of his wife, that the real Bridget is still being held captive at the fairy-fort on Kyleneagranah hill.

Bridget Cleary –Character Outlines

PATRICK BOLAND, Bridget Cleary's father, a landless labourer.

JOHANNAH BURKE, cousin to Bridget, resides at Rath Kenney near the Clearys. She has a young daughter, Katty.

KATTY BURKE, Johannah's daughter, ten years old.

BRIDGET CLEARY, a stylish, good-looking woman of 27 with her own successful dressmaking business. She keeps hens and sells their eggs. She does not dress in the traditional countrywomen's costume, but favours more fashionable attire such as gold earrings and hats adorned with feathers. At the age of 18, she married Michael Cleary.

MICHAEL CLEARY, Bridget's husband, is 36 years old and a cooper, a lucrative trade. He can read and write. He likes wearing threepiece tweed suits.

DR CREAN, the doctor who attends Bridget is well-known to have a drinking problem.

JACK DUNNE, a cousin of Bridget's father, a weaksighted, toothless 55 year-old with a severe limp. He is *seanchi*, knowledgeable about fairy tradition.

KATE DUNNE, Jack Dunne's wife.

1. EXT. KYLENAGRANAH HILL. DAWN. 1.

Mist swirls giddily in the darkness just before sunrise.

The 'fairy-fort' is revealed as if seen through the eyes of a bird swooping down for a worm.

An old illustration of a woman abducted on a fairy steed flashes like lightning.

2. EXT. KYLENAGRANAH HILL. EARLY MORNING. 2.

The hill appears bathed in soft early morning sun. There are patches of snow on its summit.

The date, 'Monday 4 March 1895', appears on screen.

From the vantage point of the 'fairy-fort', we see the Dunne's small house.

Jack and Kate Dunne, well wrapped-up against the chill, are working in the garden.

From the Dunne's garden, the road to Ballyvadlea winds down to a bridge, then on up to a crest. From the crest, there is a view across to Ballyvadlea.

The eye comes to rest on the Cleary's modern slate-roofed cottage.

3. EXT. CLEARY'S HOUSE. EARLY MORNING. 3.

In the hen-house, BRIDGET collects eggs in a basket. Under her apron, she wears a fashionable navy-blue flannel dress.

4. INT. CLEARY'S KITCHEN. MORNING. 4.

BRIDGET CLEARY, MICHAEL CLEARY and PATRICK BOLAND eat breakfast. A fire burns in the hearth. Michael is dressed in a threepiece tweed suit. Patrick wears farm labourer's clothes. Badger, the dog snuffles around.

4. Cont'd.

4.

Michael and Patrick finish and push their plates away.

Bridget leaves her half-eaten meal, stands and gathers the plates.

MICHAEL

Finish up your breakfast, why
don't you?

Bridget goes to the kitchen bench and puts the plates down.

BRIDGET

Time's short. I've Bridie
Ahearne's outfit to finish. Then
Kate Dunne'll be wanting her
eggs.

Bridget turns to the stove and puts the kettle on.

5. INT. CLEARY'S BEDROOM. MORNING.

5.

BRIDGET sits at her foot-treadle sewing machine. Dotey, the cat lies on the window ledge. Bridget finishes sewing a traditional countrywoman's dress.

She takes off her apron, puts on golden earrings, dons a black straw hat trimmed with a navy-blue ribbon and a brown feather or two, secures it with a large pin, then puts on a warm coat.

6. EXT. A SMALL COTTAGE. MORNING.

6.

BRIDGET and a dowdily-dressed, middle-aged WOMAN stand on the porch. Bridget's basket of eggs rests on the ground.

Bridget hands the woman the newly-made dress.

The woman pays Bridget.

Bridget picks up her egg basket.

7. EXT. DUNNE'S HOUSE. MORNING. 7.

BRIDGET walks to the Dunne's front door and knocks. The day is sunny, but very cold. Clouds of breath appear as she exhales. She puts down the egg basket and rubs her hands. A few moments pass. She knocks again.

BRIDGET
(Calls out) Kate! Jack! I've
come with the eggs.

Bridget sits on the doorstep. She begins to shiver.

8. INT. CLEARY'S BEDROOM. EVENING. 8.

BRIDGET lies in bed. JACK and KATE DUNNE sit at the bedside. Bridget shivers fitfully.

BRIDGET
Sweet Jesus, my head! All the
devils of hell must be hammering
away there.

KATE
Try not to think about it
Bridgie. You've just caught a
chill. Have some more brandy
now.

Kate holds the brandy to Bridget's lips. Bridget sips.

Jack elbows Kate's arm and the brandy glass away from Bridget's mouth.

JACK
That is not Bridgie! It's a
changeling. One leg is longer
than the other. Look!

Jack pulls the sheets up from the bottom of the bed, exposing Bridget's legs, which are perfectly normal.

8. Cont'd.

8.

JACK (CONT'D)
Bridget Cleary's not here. It's
the fairies, they have her.

9. INT. CLEARY'S BEDROOM. MORNING.

9.

DR CREAN examines BRIDGET in her bed.

The date, 'Wednesday 13 March 1895', appears on screen.

Bridget is nervous and bewildered.

Dr Crean, face slightly flushed, stops during the
examination to get a flask from his bag and take a swig.

10. INT. CLEARY'S KITCHEN. MORNING.

10.

MICHAEL CLEARY and PATRICK BOLAND sit at the table with DR
CREAN. The doctor writes a prescription.

DR CREAN
So, there's nothing too much the
matter. Just slight bronchial
catarrh and nerves. This will be
seeing her right, I'm sure.

DR CREAN hands Michael the prescription.

11. INT. CLEARY'S BEDROOM. EVENING.

11.

BRIDGET lies in bed. JOHANNAH BURKE sits by her.

BRIDGET
(Distressed) Oh Han. My Michael.
Him and Jack Dunne. They're
making a fairy of me.

12. INT. CLEARY'S KITCHEN. EVENING. 12.

JOHANNAH BURKE comes into the kitchen. PATRICK BOLAND sits there with JACK DUNNE.

JOHANNAH

(To Jack) What's all this you're saying about Bridgie being away with the fairies?

JACK

That thing shivering and shaking upstairs. It doesn't fool me.

MICHAEL enters. He has Dr Crean's prescription medicine. Jack wheels round, leaps up, grabs the medicine from Michael and waves it in front of his face.

JACK (CONT'D)

(Vehemently) This stuff, Michael! What would you be thinking now? It's no use to her up there captive at the fort.

Jack flings the medicine to the table.

JACK (CONT'D)

It's only the old ways can deal with what's upstairs. It's not your wife is there. You'll have enough to do to bring her back.

13. INT. CLEARY'S KITCHEN. EVENING. 13.

Milk heats in a saucepan.

The date, 'Thursday 14 March 1895', appears on screen.

MICHAEL CLEARY, exhausted and under strain, picks up a knife.

The knife hacks unforgivingly into the foxglove.

13. Cont'd.

13.

Michael's hands clench around the chopped foxglove and throw them into the saucepan.

A wooden spoon appears and pounds into the herb and milk mixture; it simmers.

14. EXT. CLEARY'S HOUSE. EVENING.

14.

JOHANNAH BURKE and young daughter KATTY approach the Cleary's door.

Sounds of a commotion inside. Johannah tries the handle; the door is locked.

Johannah raps loudly.

JOHANNAH

(Calls) Michael! Patrick! It's Han. Come on. Open up!

MICHAEL (O/S)

(Yells) No. No. You'll have to wait.

Katty tries to peer in through the window. The curtains are drawn.

JACK DUNNE (O/S)

Take it, you witch!

Johannah pulls Katty from the window. MICHAEL opens the door. He holds a saucepan with a wooden spoon protruding out of it.

The two new arrivals stand in front of him.

15. INT. CLEARY'S KITCHEN. EVENING.

15.

JOHANNAH and KATTY BURKE enter.

KATTY'S eyes widen in astonishment.

15. Cont'd.

15.

JACK DUNNE and THREE YOUNGER MEN, all kneeling, pin BRIDGET down on the floor. She is clothed in a nightdress and chemise. Dunne holds her head; a younger man pins both legs, the two others hold her right and left sides. They shake her roughly and slap her hands. MICHAEL CLEARY, PATRICK BOLAND stands close by.

Bridget stares wildly up at Dunne.

Dunne's face is contorted.

DUNNE AND YOUNGER MEN

Away she goes, away she goes!

Distressed and in pain, Bridget screams in protest.

MICHAEL holds the saucepan of herb and milk mixture in both hands; the wooden spoon is in it.

A little fearful, Michael stares down at Bridget.

MICHAEL

Are you Bridget Boland, the wife
of Michael Cleary, in the name
of the Father, Son and Holy
Ghost?

Bridget looks blankly at Michael.

BRIDGET

Yes, I am.

Michael kneels and attempts to force a spoonful of the mixture into her. Bridget tries to keep her mouth closed.

With one hand, Michael prises her mouth open and pours some of the spoonful in. The rest dribbles down her cheek. Michael wipes Bridget's cheek with his handkerchief, pauses and then forces a second dose into his struggling wife.

15. Cont'd.

15.

MICHAEL

Take that in the name of God!
Are you Bridget, wife of Michael
Cleary? Answer!

Bridget attempts to nod. Dunne's hands on her scalp
restrict her head's movements.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Bridget Cleary come back to me
in the name of God!

Michael's hand prises her herbally-stained lips apart.

DUNNE AND YOUNGER MEN (O/S)

(Bellowing) Take it, you bitch,
or we'll kill you!

A third dose covers her tongue.

Bridget, screaming terribly, is shaken and swung back and
forth and her hands slapped.

JACK DUNNE

Hold her over the fire and she
will soon answer.

Jack Dunne, Michael Cleary and one of the younger men lift
the writhing Bridget.

The three men drag her over to the slow-burning kitchen
fire.

The three men hold Bridget above the bars of the grate in a
sitting position.

PATRICK BOLAND

Are you the daughter of Patrick
Boland, wife of Michael Cleary?
Answer in the name of God.

15. Cont'd.

15.

BRIDGET

I am, Dada.

DUNNE

Away with you, you changeling!
Come home Bridget Boland, in the
name of God!

Dunne wildly brandishes a hot poker.

The poker accidentally glances off Bridget's forehead,
slightly burning her.

Bridget becomes wilder and more deranged.

BRIDGET

(Screams) I am Bridget Boland,
the daughter of Pat Boland, in
the name of God.

Bridget looks beseechingly at Johannah.

BRIDGET (CONT'D)

Oh Han, Han!

Michael Cleary and the younger man help Bridget across to a
chair. She sits distraught, burn marks on her nightdress,
streaked with soot, eyes rolling in her head.

MICHAEL

Do you think it is her that is
here?

JACK DUNNE

(Delightedly) Yes. Bridget
Cleary's back with us.

16. INT. CLEARY'S BEDROOM. EVENING.

16.

BRIDGET lies in bed. MICHAEL sits by her.

16. Cont'd.

16.

The date, 'Friday 15 March 1895', appears on screen.

JOHANNAH comes in with some hot milk in a mug.

Bridget sits up. She smiles weakly at Johannah.

Johannah hands the mug to Bridget. Bridget sips some milk.

BRIDGET

(To Michael) You paid Han for
the milk?

JOHANNAH

Yes, he did Bridgie.

Johannah takes out a shilling and shows it to Bridget.

Bridget takes the shilling from Johannah and puts the coin
under the blankets.

She slides the coin up from under the blankets.

Johannah takes the shilling back from Bridget.

17. INT. CLEARY'S KITCHEN. EVENING.

17.

BRIDGET and MICHAEL sit by the fire with PATRICK BOLAND,
JOHANNAH BURKE and KATTY BURKE.

Michael stares into the flames.

He looks at Bridget.

MICHAEL

I'm thinking now. Did not you
rub that shilling on your leg
there under the bedclothes?

A kettle bursts into boil.

BRIDGET

(Angry) I did no such
pishroquery. ...

17. Cont'd.

17.

Johannah goes towards the kettle on the stove.

BRIDGET (CONT'D)

... Why should I charm the luck
from Han's shilling? Your mother
it was she used to go with the
fairies.

MICHAEL

(Incredulous) Did she tell you
that? ...

Johannah's hand accidentally connects with the steam
hissing from the kettle.

Johannah's hand recoils from the steam.

MICHAEL (CONT'D) (O/S)

... Did my mother tell you that?

BRIDGET

She did; that she gave two
nights with them. That's why you
think I'm going with them.

Bridget's eyes pierce the air.

MICHAEL (O/S)

No. My mother ...

Michael jumps up. He rushes to the kitchen bench.

His face swivels back to glare at Bridget.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

... she was never away with the
fairies.

Michael hastily concocts three small bits of bread and jam.

Michael jostles Johannah as she pours hot water from kettle
to teapot.

17. Cont'd.

17.

Water spills around the teapot.

Michael's hands thrust the plate of bread and jam onto Bridget's lap.

MICHAEL

No more *pishroguery*. I won't have it. You hear me? Go on. Eat. Now, damn you.

Bridget's lips tremble.

BRIDGET

Good God, Michael. Will you never stop with this?

Michael grabs one of the pieces of bread and jam. He thrusts at Bridget. She takes it in her hands.

MICHAEL

Are you Bridget Cleary, my wife, in the name of God?

BRIDGET

Yes. Yes. Of course.

Bridget starts to eat the piece of bread and jam.

MICHAEL

Again, tell me, are you Bridget, my wife? Answer in God's name.

Bridget tries to swallow the half-chewed food too hastily.

BRIDGET

(Coughs and splutters out soggy scraps) Dear God. Yes, Michael.

Johannah offers Bridget some tea.

JOHANNAH

Here, swallow some of this, Bridgie.

17. Cont'd.

17.

Bridget's hand takes the cup of tea.

Michael's hand knocks the cup of tea to the floor.

MICHAEL

No. No. No. You'll eat all three
before you take one single sup.

Bridget, coughing, takes the second piece from the plate in her lap and eats.

MICHAEL

For the last time, I'm asking
you in the name of God, ...

Bridget, trying to swallow, stares in rage at Michael.

MICHAEL (CONT'D) (O/S)

... are you Bridget Cleary, wife
of Michael Cleary? Answer!

Michael picks up the remaining piece of bread and jam and holds it close to Bridget's eyes.

Bridget clenches her mouth shut.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

(Angry and impatient) If you
won't take it, down you will go.

With both hands (one still holding the bread and jam), Michael, enraged, seizes Bridget by the throat and flings her down onto the kitchen hearth.

Bridget's head strikes the floor hard; she screams loudly.

The sticky bread and jam peels away from Bridget's neck and falls to the floor.

A red stain of jam residue is on Bridget's neck.

Michael rips away all of Bridget's clothes except for her calico chemise.

17. Cont'd.

17.

Michael's knee crushes Bridget's chest.

Michael's hand wraps round her throat.

Michael's other hand grabs a burning stick out of the fire.

MICHAEL (CONT'D) (O/S)
This goes straight down your
throat ...

The stick's burning end trembles close above Bridget's eyes.

MICHAEL (CONT'D) (O/S)
... if you don't eat this bread.

Michael takes away the hand from her throat, gropes around and picks up the fallen piece of bread and jam.

Bridget's eyes close. Her mouth gapes.

Michael forces the bread and jam down her throat.

MICHAEL
Swallow it. Is it down? Is it
down?

Bridget gestures pleadingly and struggles to swallow.

BRIDGET
(Mouth still half full) Give me
a chance.

JOHANNAH
Mike, let her alone. Don't you
see it is Bridget there?

Michael drops the burning brand and leaps up, turns around from the prone Bridget and rounds squarely on Johannah and the others.

17. Cont'd.

17.

MICHAEL

She's not my wife. She's an old
deceiver sent in place of my
wife. You are a dirty set. ...

The burning brand sets Bridget's chemise alight.

MICHAEL (CONT'D) (O/S)

... You would rather have her
with the fairies in
Kylenagranagh fort than have her
here with me.

Johannah and the others look in horror.

Michael turns and sees Bridget's chemise on fire.

In a frenzy, Michael picks up the table lamp.

He douses Bridget in paraffin oil.

Bridget looks despairingly at Johannah.

Screaming and writhing, Bridget burns on the hearth.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

(Yelling at Bridget) Go up the
chimney! Back to Kylenagranagh
with you.

JOHANNAH

(Incredulous) Bridgie, Bridgie.
Oh sweet Jesus. Bridgie.

MICHAEL

Hold your tongue, Hannah. You
will soon see her go up in the
chimney. It is not Bridget I am
burning.

18. INT. CLEARY'S KITCHEN. EVENING.

18.

BRIDGET'S remains are on the hearth. She lies on her face, her legs turned upwards as if they had contracted in the burning. There are extensive burns on her lower back and left hand. The air is smoky.

MICHAEL stands staring down at Bridget's corpse.

JOHANNAH BURKE enters with a folded sheet.

She unfolds the sheet and spreads it on the floor next to the body.

Michael helps Johannah roll Bridget's corpse onto the sheet. The abdomen is badly burnt.

Michael folds the sheet over to cover the body.

MICHAEL

(Sobbing) She is burned now, but
God knows I did not mean to do
it. I may thank Jack Dunne for
all of it.

Johannah kneels beside the corpse.

She makes a sign of the cross over it.

Hysterical, Michael pulls Johannah away.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Don't you be doing that. She was
not my wife. She was too fine to
be my wife. She was two inches
taller than my wife.

ENDS