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Some People Say

by Rosalyn Hurst

Bridget was happy to be living with her daughter and a household of young people, though the noisy mornings were a mixed blessing. So around ten o'clock she would get up to a silent and empty house, just the old kitchen clock she had brought with her, ticking loudly.

It was lonely getting old when so many of her family, even distant cousins were long dead, friends too. But on this bright morning, Maggie walked in. Maggie was Bridget's best friend, they had known each other for almost seventy years.

"Now Bridget isn't it great to see you," said Maggie, "I came into town for the market and to bring news and isn't a dreadful thing over, that poor man dead and lying bleeding in the arms of his wife? Lord have mercy on him. They do say it was the Russians, god help us."

Bridget had already heard the news about President Kennedy and for some time they both reflected on the madness of the modern world. But Bridget knew her old friend very well and waited to be told much more important news.

"You know," Maggie began, "that they do be saying that the Yanks are very strange people altogether."

"So I have heard," agreed Bridget, "but you would know better than me."

"To think back all those years, I ran away with my two brothers to New York. 1898 it was," recalled Maggie, "we had great plans for us all to work and to buy a farm back here. Don't you remember my brother Bob, God rest his soul, was determined never to be a tenant. Don't you recall the stories told by our parents of the famine and the babies dying on the side of the road?"

“I do,” Bridget replied, ‘but you got the money and you all came back.”

Maggie threw back her head and laughed, “you know we took out bags of dirt from home, the priests said that if we should die there it should be buried with us, you know to keep a bit of Ireland forever with us.”

After a short while, she continued, ‘I don’t know how we survived. The boys had heard there was great money to be had building the skyscrapers. Bob was nearly killed the first day and Jim had no head for heights. I got a job in a hotel, very nice it was too.”

Bridget knew the story so far, and knew that Maggie an old country woman had, ever since, lambasted unfortunate hotel staff throughout Ireland if service was poor, if food was tasteless or heaven help them if dirt was found.

“People told us to buy a grave, in America, just in case. The brothers didn’t want to land up in some rail-side dump, and we did just that.”

Bridget was astonished, “Maggie in all these years I never knew that. I do recall you said you brought the dirt home. Wasn’t it wonderful that you had the money for the farm and a house each for you and the boys?”

“It was, it was, said Maggie slowly and thoughtfully, ‘though years for farming have always been hard.”

Maggie lent forward again and said, “but the people do be saying the yanks are very strange altogether.”

“What is it Maggie?” asked Bridget with some concern, was her old friend ill?

“We had a letter yesterday, all formal, big paper, lots names and god knows what, from New York, from Brooklyn!”

“Are you in trouble Maggie?” she asked.

“Not at all, didn’t they want to buy the three graves we bought in 1900 and have offered us a million dollars.”

“A million dollars,” gasped Bridget.

“No, a million dollars for each one,” and the two old women fell about laughing and thinking that those who do be saying the yanks are very strange people got it absolutely right.

