



# *Fairies or No Fairies*

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Irish

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*Intermediate*

*10 min read*

John Mulligan was as fine an old fellow as ever threw a Carlow spur into the sides of a horse. He was, besides, as jolly a boon companion over a jug of punch as you would meet from Carnsore Point to Bloody Farland. And a good horse he used to ride; and a stiffer jug of punch than his was not in nineteen baronies. May be he stuck more to it than he ought to have done-but that is nothing whatever to the story I am going to tell.

John believed devoutly in fairies; and an angry man was he if you doubted them. He had more fairy stories than would make, if properly printed in a rivulet of print running down a meadow of margin, two thick quartos for Mr. Murray, of Albemarle street; all of which he used to tell on all occasions that he could find listeners. Many believed his stories – many more did not believe them – but nobody, in process of time, used to contradict the old gentleman, for it was a pity to vex him. But he had a couple of young neighbours who were just come down from their first vacation in Trinity College to spend the summer months with an uncle of theirs, Mr. Whaley, an old Cromwellian, who lived at Ballybegmullinahone, and they were too full of logic to let the old man have his own way undisputed.

Every story he told they laughed at, and said that it was impossible – that it was merely old woman’s gabble, and other such things. When he would insist that all his stories were derived from the most credible sources – nay, that some of them had been told him by his own grandmother, a very respectable old lady, but slightly affected in her faculties, as things that came under her own knowledge – they cut the matter short by declaring that she was in her dotage, and at the best of times had a strong propensity to pulling a long bow.

“But,” said they, “Jack Mulligan, did you ever see a fairy yourself?”

“Never,” was the reply. – Never, as I am a man of honour and credit.”

“Well, then,” they answered, “until you do, do not be bothering us with any more tales of my grandmother.”

Jack was particularly nettled at this, and took up the cudgels for his grandmother; but the youngers were too sharp for him, and finally he got into a passion, as people generally do who have the worst of an argument. This evening – it was at their uncle’s, an old crony of his with whom he had dined – he had taken a large portion of his usual beverage, and was quite riotous. He at last got up in a passion, ordered his horse, and, in spite of his host’s entreaties, galloped off, although he had intended to have slept there, declaring that he would not have any thing more to do with a pair of jackanapes puppies, who, because they had learned how to read good-for-nothing hooks in cramp writing, and were taught by a parcel of wiggy, red-snouted, prating prigs, (“not,” added he, “however, that I say a man may not be a good man and have a red nose,”) they imagined they knew more than a man who had held buckle and tongue together facing the wind of the world for five dozen years.

He rode off in a fret, and galloped as hard as his horse Shaunbuie could powder away over the limestone. “Damn it!” hiccupped he, “Lord pardon me for swearing! the brats had me in one thing – I never did see a fairy; and I would give up five as good acres as ever grew apple-potatoes to get a glimpse of one – and, by the powers! what is that?”

He looked, and saw a gallant spectacle. His road lay by a noble demesne, gracefully sprinkled with trees, not thickly planted as in a dark forest, but disposed, now in clumps of five or six, now standing singly, towering over the plain of verdure around them, as a beautiful promontory arising out of the sea. He had come right opposite the glory of the wood. It was an oak, which in the oldest title-deeds of the county, and they were at least five hundred years old, was called the old oak of Ballinghassig. Age had hollowed its centre, but its massy

boughs still waved with their dark serrated foliage. The moon was shining on it bright. If I were a poet, like Mr. Wordsworth, I should tell you how the beautiful light was broken into a thousand different fragments – and how it filled the entire tree with a glorious flood, bathing every particular leaf, and showing forth every particular bough; but, as I am not a poet, I shall go on with my story. By this light Jack saw a brilliant company of lovely little forms dancing under the oak with an unsteady and rolling motion. The company was large. Some spread out far beyond the furthest boundary of the shadow of the oak's branches – some were seen glancing through the flashes of light shining through its leaves – some were barely visible, nestling under the trunk – some no doubt were entirely concealed from his eyes. Never did man see any thing more beautiful. They were not three inches in height, but they were white as the driven snow, and beyond number numberless. Jack threw the bridle over his horse's neck, and drew up to the low wall which bounded the demesne, and leaning over it, surveyed, with infinite delight, their diversified gambols. By looking long at them, he soon saw objects which had not struck him at first; in particular that in the middle was a chief of superior stature, round whom the group appeared to move. He gazed so long that he was quite overcome with joy, and could not help shouting out, "Bravo! little fellow," said he, well kicked and strong." But the instant he uttered the words the night was darkened, and the fairies vanished with the speed of lightning.

"I wish," said Jack, "I had held my tongue; but no matter now. I shall just turn bridle about and go back to Ballybegmullinahone Castle, and beat the young Master Whaleys, fine reasoners as they think themselves, out of the field clean."

No sooner said than done; and Jack was back again as if upon the wings of the wind. He rapped fiercely at the door, and called aloud for the two collegians.

"Hallo!" said he, "young Flatcaps, come down now, if you dare. Come down, if you dare, and I shall give you oc-ocular demonstration of the truth of what I was saying."

Old Whaley put his head out of the window, and said, "Jack Mulligan, what brings you back so soon?"

"The fairies," shouted Jack; "the fairies!"

I am afraid," muttered the Lord of Ballybegmullinahone, "the last glass you took was too little watered: but, no matter – come in and cool yourself over a tumbler of punch."

He came in and sat down again at table. In great spirits he told his story; – how he had seen thousands and

tens of thousands of fairies dancing about the old oak of Ballinghassig; he described their beautiful dresses of shining silver; their flat-crowned hats, glittering in the moonbeams; the princely stature and demeanour of the central figure. He added, that he heard them singing, and playing the most enchanting music; but this was merely imagination. The young men laughed, but Jack held his ground. "Suppose, said one of the lads, " we join company with you on the road, and ride along to the place, where you saw that fine company of fairies?"

"Done!" cried Jack; "but I will not promise that you will find them there, for I saw them scudding up in the sky like a flight of bees, and heard their wings whizzing through the air." This, you know, was a bounce, for Jack had heard no such thing.

Off rode the three, and came to the demesne of Oakwood. They arrived at the wall flanking the field where stood the great oak; and the moon, by this time, having again emerged from the clouds, shone bright as when Jack had passed. "Look there," he cried, exultingly; for the same spectacle again caught his eyes, and he pointed to it with his horsewhip; "look, and deny if you can. "

"Why," said one of the lads, pausing, " true it is that we do see a company of white creatures; but were they fairies ten time~ over, I shall go among them;" and he dismounted to climb over the wall.

"Ah, Tom Tom;" cried Jack, " stop, man, stop! what are you doing? The fairies – the good people, I mean – hate to be meddled with. You will be pinched or blinded; or your horse will cast its shoe; or – look! a wilful man will have his way. Oh! oh! he is almost at the oak – God help him! for he is past the help of man."

By this time Tom was under the tree and burst out laughing. "Jack," said he, "keep your prayers to yourself. Your fairies are not bad at all. I believe they will make tolerably good catsup."

Catsup," said Jack, who when he found that the two lads (for the second had followed his brother) were both laughing in the middle of the fairies, had dismounted and advanced slowly -What do you mean by catsup?"

"Nothing," replied Tom, " but that they are mushrooms (as indeed they were); and your Oberon is merely this overgrown puff-ball."

Poor Mulligan gave a long whistle of amazement, staggered back to his horse without saying a word, and rode home in a hard gallop, never looking behind him. Many a long day was it before he ventured to face the laughers at Ballybegmullinahone; and to the day of his death the people of the parish, aye, and five parishes round, called him nothing but Musharoon Jack, such being their pronunciation of mushroom.

I should be sorry if all my fairy stories ended with so little dignity; but –

*“These our actors,*

*As I foretold you, were all spirits, and*

*Are melted into air – into thin air.”*

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