

FOSSIL

Erica Van Horn

# The Green Room

FOSSIL

The Green Room



Maisie's house is gone. Last week I walked by and I saw that the slate roof and all of the windows had been carefully removed. The chimney was gone. A standing chimney means that a house must be retained, even if the house itself is in a ramshackle state. If a chimney is intact, it means that a house, by law, cannot be knocked down. There was nothing at all wrong with the chimney on Maisie's house. Sometimes when people want to knock down an old house they accidentally-on-purpose destroy the chimney to give themselves permission to rebuild. Today, I see that the entire building has been demolished. There is an enormous pile of rubble off to one side. The rubble was the house. Now it is simply rubble.

Maisie Gleason lived in the house for a long time. I do not know exactly how long but it was a long, long time. Maisie spent her adult life working as a live-in housekeeper for Tom Cooney's aunt and uncle. When they became old and frail and they were no longer able to work the farm, their nephew Tom took over the outdoor work while Maisie continued to care for the two old people. Her care meant that they could stay in their home until the end of their lives which everyone agreed was the kindest thing that could be imagined.

When they died, the aunt and uncle left Tom all of the land along with the house and the outbuildings. Because Tom Cooney is an honourable man, he told Maisie that she could remain living in the house for as long as she wanted and needed. He told Maisie she could stay in the house because that house had been her home for as long as anyone could remember.

Maisie was still living in the house when she died at the age of 93. She was almost 94. At the time of her death, she had dozens of cats living indoors with her. The house was a roomy two-storey farmhouse but Maisie and the cats lived mostly in the kitchen. I often spoke to her from outside the kitchen door. The kitchen door was a stable door so Maisie stood inside and I stood outside and we had the half door between us. Some days she was in the yard when I was passing, so I stood out on the road and we chatted over the gate. She called this A Gate Visit.

I was frequently invited in for a cup of tea, but I always made an excuse about being in a hurry even when I was not in a hurry. The smell of cat pee, both old and new, was overwhelming, even from outside the door. It made me gag. I knew that if I walked into the kitchen I would be sick on the floor. When I think about the permeating quality of those odours, maybe it is not such a bad thing that the old house was torn down.

Aidan O'Dwyer delivered a newspaper to the door every day. I do not know if he stepped inside the kitchen. He delivered the newspaper as a way to check up on Maisie without her feeling that anyone was checking up on her. I do not know if she had any interest in reading the newspaper. Her eyesight was poor in her last years. Her eyes had a milky film over them. I do not know if she would have been able to read the paper even if she had wanted to read the paper. If she was not able to read the newspaper, at least it was useful for starting the fire. When I shouted a greeting to Maisie from across the yard, she would call out in return: "Who have I got there?" She could hear me and she could see a shape but she could not distinguish much about any person from a distance.