

## SIDES FOR NTC

### KATE MONOLOGUE #1

Anyhow I'm in the chemist's shop and this you girl – a wee slip of a thing, can't even remember her name -- her mother's the knitting agent that buys your gloves, Agnes –

. Miss Sophia, who must be all of fifteen; she comes up to me and she says, 'I hope you're not going to miss the harvest dance, Miss Mundy. It's going to be just supreme this year.' And honest to God, if you'd seen the delight in hereyes, you'd think it was heaven she was talking about. I'm telling you – off its head – like a fever in the place. That's thequinine. The doctor says it won't cure the malaria but it might help to contain it. Is he in his room?

I told the doctor you thought him very quiet, Agnes. Well, didn't you? And the doctor says we must remember how strange everything here must be to him after so Long. And on top of that Swahili has been his language for twenty five years; so that it's not that his mind is confused – it's just that he has difficult finding the English words for what he wants to say.... (*Taking off her shoe.*) I think I'm getting corns in this foot. I hope to God I don't end up crippled like poor mother, may she rest in peace.

### KATE AS MONOLOGUE #2 OR WTH MAGGIE

KATE. You work hard at your job. You try to keep thehome together. You perform your duties as best you can – because you believe in responsibilities and obligations and good order. And then suddenly, suddenly you realize that hair cracks are appearing everywhere; that control is slipping away; that the whole thing is so fragile that it can't be held together much longer. It's all about to collapse, Maggie.

MAGGIE. (*Wearily.*) Nothing's about to collapse, Kate.

KATE. That young Sweeney boy from the back hills – theboy who was anointed – his trousers didn't catch fire, as Rose said. They were doing some devilish thing with a goat – some sort of sacrifice for the Lughnasa Festival; and Sweeney was so drunk he toppled over into the middle of the bonfire. Don't know why that came into my head...

MAGGIE. Kate... (*MAGGIE goes to her and sits beside her.*)

KATE. And Mr. Evans is off again for another twelve months and next week or the week after Christina'll collapse into one of her depressions. Remember last winter? – all that sobbing and lamenting in the middle of the night. I don't think I

could go through that again. And the doctor says he doesn't think Father Jack's mind is confused but that his superiors probably had no choice but send him home. Whatever he means by that, Maggie. And the parish priest did talk to me today. He said the

numbers in the school are falling and that there may not be a job for me after the summer. But the numbers aren't falling, Maggie. Why is he telling me lies? Why does he want rid of me? And why has he never come out to visit Father Jack? *(She tries to laugh.)* If he gives me the push, all five of us will be at home together all day long – we can spend the day dancing to Marconi.

*(Now she cries. MAGGIE puts her arm around her. MICHAEL enters L.)*

But what worries me most of all is Rose. If I died – if I lost my job – if this house were broken up – what would become of our Rosie?

MAGGIE. Shhh.

KATE. I must put my trust in God, Maggie, must'nt I? He'll look after her, won't be? You believe that, Maggie, don't you?

MAGGIE. Kate ... Kate ... Kate, I love ... KATE. I believe that, too ... I believe that ... I do believe that... *(MAGGIE holds her and rocks her.)*

## **MAGGIE**

MAGGIE. When I was sixteen I remember slipping out one Sunday night – it was this time of year, the beginning of August – and Bernie and I met at the gate of the workhouse and the pair of us off to a dance in Ardstraw. I was being pestered by a fellow called Tim Carlin at the time but it was really Brian McGuinness that I was – that I was keen on. Remember Brian with the white hands and the longest eye-lashes you ever saw? But of course he was crazy about Bernie. Anyhow the two boys took us on the bar of their bikes and off the four of us headed to Ardstraw, fifteen miles each way. If Daddy had known, may he rest in peace...

And at the end of the night there was a competition for the Best Military Two-step. And it was down to three couples: the local pair from Ardstraw; wee Timmy and myself – he was up to there on me; and Brian and Bernie.. And they were just so beautiful together, so stylish; you couldn't take your eyes off them. People just stopped dancing and gazed at them...

And when the judges announced the winners – they were probably blind drunk – naturally the local couple came first; and Timmy and myself came second; and Brian and Bernie came third. Poor Bernie was stunned. She couldn't believe it. Couldn't talk. Wouldn't speak to any of us for the rest of the night. Wouldn't even cycle home with us. She was right, too: they should have won; they were just so beautiful together... And that's the last time I saw Brian McGuinness – remember Brian with the...? And the next thing I heard he had left for Australia... She was right to be angry, Bernie. I know it wasn't fair -- it wasn't fair at all. I mean they must have been blind drunk, those judges, whoever they were ...

## ROSE

ROSE. I had arranged to meet Danny Bradley there, Kate. He brought me out in his father's blue boat. *(To MAGGIE.)* I don't want anything to eat, Maggie. I brought a bottle of milk and a packet of chocolate biscuits with me and we had a picnic on the lake. *(To AGNES.)* Then the two of us went up through the back hills. He showed me what was left of the Lughnasa fires. A few of them are still burning away up there. *(To KATE.)* We passed young Sweeney's house – you know, the boy who got burned, the boy you said was dying. Well, he's on the mend, Danny says. His legs will be scarred but he'll be all right. *(To all.)* It's a very peaceful place up there. There was nobody there but Danny and me. *(To AGNES.)* He calls me his Rosebud, Aggie. I told you that before, didn't I? *(To all.)* Then he walked me down as far as the workhouse gate and I came home by myself. *(To KATE.)* And that's all I'm going to tell you. *(To all.)* That's all any of you are going to hear.

## AGNES AS MONOLOGUE

AGNES. Nothing 'happened' – nothing at all. We left here together -- when was it? – just after one o'clock –

We walked together to the quarry. She was chatting away as usual. I had my two buckets and she had –

And just after we got there she said she wasn't feeling well. I told her not to bother about the bilberries -- just to sit in the sun. And that's what she did. I don't know how long – five – ten minutes. And then I fell into the bush. And that was when she laughed. And then she said – she said – I've forgotten what she said – something about a headache and her stomach being sick and she'd go home and sleep for a while. *(To MAGGIE.)* You're sure she's not in her bed?

*(MAGGIE shakes head.)*

*(AGNES begins to cry.)*

Where is she? What's happened to our Rosie?

I think she went towards home... yes ... I don't know ...

She was wearing her good shoes. Yes; and her blue cardigan and her good skirt. I said to her – I said, 'You're some lady to go picking bilberries with.' And she just laughed and said, 'I'm some toff, Aggie, amn't I some toff?'

She had half-a-crown. That's all she has.

## GERRY AND CHRISTINE #1

GERRY. Givin' dancing lessons. Strictly ballroom. You're the one should have been Giving them – you were always far better than me. Don't you Remember? (*He does a quick step and a pirouette.*) Oh, that was Fun while it lasted. I enjoyed that.

CHRIS. And people came to you to be taught?

GERRY. Don't look so surprised! Everybody wants to dance. I had thousands of pupils – millions!

CHRIS. Gerry –

GERRY. Fifty-three. I'm a liar. Fifty-one. And when the good Weather came, they all drifted away. Shame, really. Yes, I enjoyed That. But I've just started a completely new career, as a Matter of interest. Never been busier. Gramophone salesman. Agent for the whole country, if you don't mind. 'Minerva Gramophones – The Wise Buy.'

CHRIS. Sounds good, Gerry.

GERRY. Fabulous. All I have to do is get the orders and Pass them on to Dublin. A big enterprise, Chrissie; oh, one very big enterprise.

CHRIS. And it's going all right for you?

GERRY. Unbelievable. The wholesaler can't keep up with me. Do you see this country? This country is gramophone crazy. Give you an example. Day before yesterday; just west of Oughterard; spots this small house up on the side of a hill. Something seemed just right about it – you know? Off the Bike; up the lane; knocks. Out comes this enormous chappie With red hair – what are you laughing at?

CHRIS. Gerry –

GERRY. I promise you. I show him the brochures; we talk About them for ten minutes; and just like that he takes four --one for himself and three for the married daughters.

CHRIS. He took four gramophones. GERRY. Four brochures. (*They both laugh.*) But he'll buy. I promise you he'll buy. Tell you this, Chrissie: people thought gramophones would be a thing of the past when radios came in. But they were wrong. In my experience...Don't turn round; but he's watching us from behind that bush.

## GERRY AND CHRISTENE #2

CHRIS. So you'll be a dispatch rider? And you leave on Saturday?

GERRY. First tide.

CHRIS. How long will you be away?

GERRY. As long as it takes to sort the place out.

CHRIS. Seriously, Gerry.

GERRY. Maybe a couple of months. Everybody says it will be over by Christmas.

CHRIS. They always say it will be over by Christmas. I still don't know why you're going.

GERRY. Not so sure I know either. Who wants salesmen that can't sell? And there's bound to be *something* right about the cause, isn't there? And it's somewhere to go – isn't it? Maybe that's the important thing for a man: a *named* destination – democracy, Ballybeg, heaven. Women's illusions aren't so easily satisfied – they make better drifters. *(Laughs.)* Anyhow he

held out a pen to sign on the dotted line and it was only when I was writing my name that I glanced over the lectern and saw the box.

CHRIS. What box?

GERRY. He was standing on a box. The chappie was a midget!

CHRIS. Gerry!GERRY. No bigger than three feet. CHRIS. Gerry, I –

GERRY. Promise you! And when we were having a drink afterwards he told me he was invaluable to the Brigade -- because he was a master at disguising himself!

CHRIS. Gerry Evans, you are – GERRY. Let's go down to the old well.

CHRIS. We're going nowhere. Come inside and take a look at this wireless. It stops and starts whenever it feels like it.

GERRY. I told you: I know nothing about radios.

CHRIS. I've said you're a genius at them.

GERRY. Chrissie, I don't even know how to –

CHRIS. You can try, can't you? Come on. Michael misses it badly.

## JACK

JACK. That's what we do in Ryanga when we want to please the spirits – or to appease them: we kill a rooster or a young goat. It's a very exciting exhibition – that's not the word, is it? -- demonstration? – no – show? No, no; what's the word I'm looking for? Spectacle? That's not it. The word to describe a sacred and mysterious...? (*Slowly, deliberately.*) You have a ritual killing. You offer up sacrifice. You have dancing

and incantations. What is the name for that whole – for that -- ? Gone. Lost it. My vocabulary has deserted me. Never mind. Doesn't matter ... I think perhaps I should put one more clothes...

I spoke Swahili All the time. Yes. To the people. Swahili. When Europeans call, we speak English. Or if we have a – a visitor?-- a visitation! – from the district commissioner. The present commissioner knows Swahili but he won't speak it. He's a stubborn man. He and I fight a lot but I like him. The Irish Outcast, he calls me. He is always inviting me to spend a weekend with him in Kampala -- to keep me from 'going native,' as he calls it. Perhaps when I go back. If you cooperate with the English they give you lots of money for churches and schools and hospitals. And he gets so angry with me because I won't take his money. Reported me to my superiors in Head House last year; and they were very cross – oh, very cross. But I like him. When I was saying goodbye to him he thought this was very funny! -- he gave me a present of the last governor's ceremonial hat to take home with – Ceremony! That's the word! How could I have forgotten that? The offering, the ritual, the dancing – a ceremony! Such a simple word

## MICHAEL

But she was wrong about my father. I suppose their natures were so out of tune that she could always be wrong about my father. Because he did come back in a couple of weeks as he said he would. And although my mother and he didn't go through a conventional form of marriage, once more they danced together, witnessed by the unseen sisters. And this time it was a dance without music; just there, in ritual circles round and round that square and then down the lane and back up again; slowly, formally, with easy deliberation. My mother with her head thrown back, her eyes closed, her mouth slightly open. My father holding her just that little distance away from him so that he could regard her upturned face. No singing, no melody, no words. Only the swish and whisper of their feet across the grass.

I watched the ceremony from behind that bush. But this time they were conscious only of themselves and of their dancing. And when he went off to fight with the International Brigade, my mother grieved as any bride would grieve. But this time there was no sobbing, no lamenting, no collapse into a depression.

## **COLD READ SCENES IF TIME ALLOWS**

### **AGNES, KATE, MAGGIE AND CHRIS**

AGNES. That clown of a man is up on top of the sycamore. Go out and tell him to come down, Chrissie.

MAGGIE. He's fixing the aerial.

AGNES. He's going to break his neck – I'm telling you!

MAGGIE. As long as he fixes the wireless first.

KATE. How are the bilberries, Agnes?

AGNES. Just that bit too ripe. We should have picked them a week ago.

CHRIS. Is that a purple stain on your gansey?

AGNES. I know. I'd only begun when I fell into a bush. And look at my hands – all scabbed with briars. For all the sympathy I got from Rosie. Nearly died laughing at me. How is she now? (*Pause.*) Is she still in bed?

CHRIS. Bed?

AGNES. She wasn't feeling well. She left me and went home to lie down. (*Pause.*) She's here, isn't she?

(MAGGIE rushes off to the bedroom)

KATE. I haven't seen her. (*To CHRIS.*) Have you?

CHRIS. No.

KATE. When did she leave you?

AGNES. Hours ago – I don't know – almost immediately after we got to the old quarry. She said she felt out of sorts.

CHRIS. And she went off by herself?

AGNES. Yes.

KATE. To come home?

AGNES. That's what she said.

*(MAGGIE enters.)*

MAGGIE. She's not in her bed.

AGNES. Oh God! Where could she –

KATE. Start at the beginning, Agnes. What exactly happened?

AGNES. Nothing 'happened' – nothing at all. We left here together -- when was it? – just after one o'clock –

CHRIS. That means she's missing for over three hours.

ANES. We walked together to the quarry. She was chatting away as usual. I had my two buckets and she had –

KATE. Goon–goon!

AGNES. And just after we got there she said she wasn't feeling well. I told her not to bother about the bilberries -- just to sit in the sun. And that's what she did.

KATE. For how long?

AGNES. I don't know – five – ten minutes. And then I fell into the bush. And that was when she laughed. And then she said – she said – I've forgotten what she said – something about a headache and her stomach being sick and she'd go home and sleep for a while. *(To MAGGIE.)* You're sure she's

not in her bed?

*(MAGGIE shakes head.)*

KATE. Then what?

*(AGNES begins to cry.)*

AGNES. Where is she? What's happened to our Rosie?

KATE. What direction did she go when she left you?

AGNES. Direction?

KATE. Stop sniveling, Agnes! Did she go towards home?

AGNES. I think so ... yes ... I don't know ... Maggie – MAGGIE. She may have gone into the town.

CHRIS. She wouldn't have gone into town in her Wellingtons.

AGNES. She was wearing her good shoes.

KATE. Are you sure?

AGNES. Yes; and her blue cardigan and her good skirt. I said to her – I said, ‘ You’re some lady to go picking bilberries with.’ And she just laughed and said, ‘ I’m some toff, Aggie, amn’t I some toff?’

MAGGIE. Had she a bottle of milk with her?

AGNES. I think so – yes – in one of her cans.

MAGGIE. Had she any money with her?

AGNES. She had half-a-crown. That’s all she has.

### **ROSE AND KATE**

ROSE (*Quietly, resolutely.*) It was last Sunday week, the first night of the Festival of Lughansa; and they were doing what they do every year up there in the back hills.

KATE. Festival of Lughnasa! What sort of –

ROSE. First they light a bonfire beside a spring well. Then they dance round it. Then they drive their cattle through the flames to banish the devil out of them.

KATE. Banish the --! You don’t know the first thing about what ---

ROSE. And this year there was an extra big crowd of boys and girls. And they were off their heads with drink. And young Sweeney’s trousers caught fire and he went up like a torch. That’s what happened.

KATE. Who filled your head with that nonsense? ROSE. They do it every Lughnasa. I’m telling you. That’s what happened.

KATE. (*Very angry, almost shouting.*) And they’re savages! I know those people from the back hills! I’ve taught them! Savages – that’s what they are! And what pagan practices they have are no concern of our s—none whatever! It’s a sorry

day to hear talk like that in a Christian home, a Catholic home! All I can say is that I’m shocked and disappointed to hear your repeating rubbish like that, Rose!

ROSE (*Quietly, resolutely.*) That’s what happened. I’m telling you. (*Pause.*)