

The Actor's Self Serving Bias:
An Exploration of Various Acting Techniques in the Creation of the Role of Kate in *Dancing at Lughnasa*

A Thesis

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“The creation of something new is not accomplished by the intellect but by the play instinct acting from inner necessity. The creative mind plays with the objects it loves.”

Carl Jung

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Abstract

In psychology, the self-serving bias refers to a person's tendency to claim responsibility for his or her successes rather than failures. In acting, it takes on new meaning. The study of acting requires that the student use any source that will lead to his or her growth. The bias refers to this tendency towards self-betterment in the artistic process. This study is an attempt to document this process in my creation of the role of Kate in *Dancing at Lughnasa*. Included in the experiment are outlines of my basic process and the techniques I used to supplement it, how the creation of Kate fit into that process and an assessment of my performance and the usefulness of the various techniques in strengthening my abilities as an actor.

Introduction

Creating a role in a play is something of an experiment. An actor sets out with a hypothesis—that following a technique will lead to a dynamic, honest interesting portrayal of human life. This hypothesis is tested in rehearsal and, ultimately, performance based on a set of procedures—the actor’s method functions in tandem with the play itself. The actor then sees the results of these trials in the reactions of the audience, the critics and, in the case of educational theatre, the professors. Then, based on these reactions, the events in rehearsal or performance that might have confounded the creation and the actor’s personal level of satisfaction, a conclusion is drawn regarding the effectiveness of the actor’s method. If the methods were successful, the actor keeps most or all of what she used. If the methods were unsuccessful, the actor rethinks the choices she made the next time the actor is faced with the challenge of creation. Thus, an actor hones her craft.

The study of acting is different for every individual who pursues it, because that study is linked directly to the individual. We are our own instruments and one of the beautiful things about people is that there are as many nuances and intricacies as there are people. No two are alike. Learning how to play on your own intricacies and nuances to create a person entirely different from you while at the same time maintaining some of your life is very complicated and every person tells a different story on how one might accomplish this gargantuan task. My goal in this study was to test the combination of acting techniques that would best fit my personal approach to the art.

The program at the University of New Orleans (UNO) associates itself with the approach of Sanford Meisner—a noted acting teacher and one of the original members of the Group Theatre. While UNO does not really align itself completely with any text, the closest thing to a

main text is *A Practical Handbook for the Actor*. Following its analysis structure led to a thorough analysis of the moment to moment reality of the play, the given circumstances, the objectives, actions and obstacles of the character as well as the characters through line in the script. The approach is very simple and effective and served as my basis for analysis in this study.

For *Dancing at Lughnasa*, I added to the basis *Practical Handbook* provided with the work of Stella Adler, Michael Chekhov and Uta Hagen. To improve my voice I used the Fitzmaurice technique as well as the Alexander technique. For dialect study, I used David Stern's dialect tapes, "Accents for Actors." I was very briefly tutored by a former voice teacher of mine, and I used resources suggested by Ginny Kopf in *The Dialect Handbook*. For my body I used what I learned in movement class, which I had concurrently with rehearsals for *Dancing at Lughnasa*. I also used the Fitzmaurice voice technique, and a regular exercise routine. All of the actor work was enhanced by research regarding the play, the playwright, the time period, the area of the world and its culture, focusing mainly on religion, and any bits of information within the text of the play I felt would inform my choices as an actor.

Dancing at Lughnasa was produced at the University of New Orleans in the fall of 2006. I was faced with the process of creating the role of Kate as the culmination of my educational career. In *Dancing at Lughnasa*, Brian Friel explores how the Mundy family falls apart. The play takes place in the Mundy's home in the summer of 1936, located two miles outside of a small village in rural County Donegal in Northern Ireland. Friel has written this portrait of this family in the form of a memory play, from the point of view of the youngest sister's illegitimate son.

Kate is the oldest of the five sisters and supports the entire family financially. She does not really get along well with her sisters, though she loves them dearly. She has taken on a

matronly role where one is not necessarily needed and has forsaken much of the enjoyment in life. She finds solace most often in her bible. The complex nature of her person and her relationships with those around her provided delicious meat for any actress to sink her teeth into. My challenges were heightened further because I was one of the youngest members of the cast playing the eldest sister—a woman 17 years my senior. The play takes place in Ireland and the words are written to fit a very specific dialect. This dialect must also fit with the rest of the actors' dialects to make the familial relationship believable. Furthermore, *Dancing at Lughnasa* is an ensemble piece; all of the characters fit together equally to tell the story. It was necessary that I thoroughly understand the complicated relationships I had with my sisters, my brother, my nephew and his father and how this informed any action I played with them as I, as Kate, struggled to hold my world together though failure was imminent.

I hypothesize that by mixing aspects of the various acting and voice techniques I explored, I created a dynamic, layered, effective character with whom the audience was able to sympathize. The performance was not perfect—there were several confounding factors influencing the results, but, as a whole, it was a successful and satisfying project that accomplished the intended goals of entertaining the audience and providing a vehicle for my growth as an artist.

Subject: Plot Summary/ Score Breakdown

Dancing at Lughnasa is a play about a three week period in the life of the Mundy family in which the family finds a harmony which ultimately leads to its dissolution. The entire play is a memory of the family's youngest member Michael. At the time of the play Michael is seven, but he recounts the story as an adult. The play takes place in August of 1936 in the Mundy's house,

located several miles outside the fictional Northern Irish town of “Ballybeg,” which translates to “small town” in Gaelic.

The action of the play is set into motion before the play even begins by two separate events. First, the Mundy sisters’ older brother Jack comes home from Uganda for the first time in twenty five years. Jack had, unbeknownst to him, served as the source of pride and status for the Mundy sisters while he was working as a missionary. His return home dissolves the small amount of status to which the five sisters have clung. While in Uganda, it seems, Jack had lost his mind. He can barely speak English and, when he does manage to recapture the language, he speaks not about missionary work, but about sacrifices made in tribal rituals and falling out with his superiors and other subject matter bewildering to his sisters.

Secondly, the Mundy house purchases a wireless radio. This would seemingly be a harmless or even enjoyable occurrence, but it causes problems because it lets the outside world into their secluded home. Hearing dance music only deepens the tension the women feel towards their lives because it reminds them of the times that have passed; times when they were happy. It reminds them of how unhappy they really are. It’s also a symbol of the changing times, though they don’t realize it, foreshadowing the effect that industrialization and technology will ultimately have on their lives. Plus, the machine is worthless. It breaks all the time. In an effort to fix it, Kate wastes money on ineffective, new batteries thereby adding to an already heavy financial burden.

From here, the sisters’ lives go in a downward spiral. While the rest of the sisters are at home knitting and taking care of the house, Kate is in town experiencing the descent in status first hand. She learns that she may lose her job at the school and, though she is told it is caused by a change in the need for teachers, she knows it is actually linked to Father Jack. She is

bombarded by the preparations for the upcoming harvest dance—another opportunity to have to face the stress that going out in public brings the family. While in town, Kate visits the doctor to try and better Jack’s condition only to be affronted by the doctor’s opinion that Jack’s mind is fine, which, to Kate and to the town’s opinions about the Mundy family, only makes things worse. To add to this, Kate hears a horrifying story about a boy in the “back hills” of town who, in a pagan celebration, got ridiculously drunk and nearly burned himself to death in a bonfire. One of the only redeeming portions of her trip was a visit to the man she is secretly in love with, Austin Morgan, only to be teased about it almost as soon as she walks in the door, and to hear that he is probably going to marry some young girl from a neighboring town. The only real bit of good news she carries with her is a visit from an old friend, Bernie O’Donnell, who was once very close to the family, specifically Maggie, but who the family has not seen in twenty years.

In dealing with this information, we see Kate’s tragic flaw, which, much like Oedipus, is hubris. Rather than going back to her family and sharing all this bad news and stress with them so that they, as a family, might function as a unit to try and solve the problems, Kate tries to protect them, keeps all the information to herself and then lies to her sisters about nearly everything that happened in town. While her behavior seems to be coming out of an urge to protect her sisters rather than an overwhelming need to be right, I identify the flaw as hubris because she is too proud to ask for help and let others have any control over the well-being of the family.

While she tries to hold the weight herself and protect her sisters, she still, in her own way, seeks solace from her family. She does not lie about every bit of information she shares. At one point, she shares a story about an annoying pupil going on and on about the harvest dance. She expects her sisters to share in her woe, but finds something quite different. Her dishonesty has

already caused an inherent tension, but upon mention of the harvest dance Agnes, the sensitive sister who might usually comfort her sister, rather than addressing Kate's obvious annoyance suggests that they actually go to the dance, which, of course, in Kate's mind, would lead to more torture than enjoyment.

Her sisters know her weaknesses, however, and momentarily convince her that she might actually be able to enjoy herself. As an immediate byproduct of her relenting, Rose goes into an "abandoned, joyous" dance which speaks immediately to Kate's fear of the stress that would come from the dance rather than the fun. She freaks out and forbids anyone from going, assuming she has that right.

After a brief period of tense silence, Maggie, with whom Kate feels the least amount of tension, comes in. Kate tries to smooth things over by going back to telling her lies about town. Much to her dismay, as soon as she begins to tell about the mishap in the hills with the boy, Rose jumps in with what seems to be insider information about the specific rituals the pagans of the back hills practice during Lughnasa—not exactly the kind of information one wants to learn from their mentally challenged sister who, in her eyes, should not be dealing with any of the sort of people who would know such things. Of course, in an effort to protect her sister, she chides and belittles her knowledge and then, ultimately, snaps and shrieks at her.

As if cued by the universe, Jack then comes in, utterly confused and talking about nonsense. Kate tries to sit him down and orient him to no avail. He complains of being tired and cold and, when Agnes suggests he go lie down, he tries to go outside. After Kate sets him on the right track, all of the sisters look to Kate, as if she has an answer. She waves this off, telling them he'll be fine.

She's been acting like a bitch all afternoon, everyone is mad at her and now her crazy brother has just made things worse, so Kate tries to pull her trump card to make everything better. She regales her family with the story about seeing Bernie O'Donnell in town. She knows everyone will be amazed by it and savors the storytelling, giving just the right emphasis to the children, joking with Agnes and Chrissy about the name choices. It seems she has finally won when Maggie comes out with her depressing story about how terrible her life has turned out all because Kate told this story about Bernie.

So, how can Kate fix this one? She asks Chrissy to turn on the radio, because she knows Maggie loves music. Well, about ten seconds in, Maggie smears flour all over her face and starts to dance in the middle of the kitchen. Of course, everyone joins in. But Kate is not made of stone and, as soon as her sisters are all outside, she joins in, jumping up on the table and dancing with the rest.

The music stops. One would think the dance brought about a little relief from the tension, because she let go for a bit and came together with her sisters, but it had the opposite effect. Once the music turned off, the door that was wrenched open a crack is slammed shut and the situation is even tenser than before. Kate doesn't know how to deal with it and criticizes everyone around her, resulting in a fight with Agnes about her contributions to the household, even though Kate knows and appreciates all of the work Agnes puts in. Now everyone is even angrier with her.

Then, Gerry Evans shows up—Kate is a devout Christian woman, so she would never say she hated anyone, but if she could, she would say she hated this man. He has caused nothing but strife for the family. He played with the hearts of two of the Mundy sisters and, after choosing one (while still overtly flirting with the other), ruined her reputation by getting her pregnant and

then leaving. To make matters worse, every time he shows up, he sends poor Chrissy into what seems to be a nervous breakdown all without any remorse, it seems. The only redeeming factor to come out of the union of Chrissy and Gerry is Michael, whom all the sisters adore. While usually one might encourage a father/son relationship, having Gerry around Michael would probably only have adverse effects on him. Gerry and Michael do share genes, after all, and the last thing Kate wants is to see the apple of her eye turn out to be anything like this man. It's probably better if he never sees the man. Besides which, Gerry doesn't seem to care at all about Michael anyway, so why subject the precious child to the pain that a neglectful father would bring?

At the news that Gerry Evans is coming, Chrissy panics. Kate tries to calm her down and instill in her the courage to do what she needs to do... send him packing. The sisters get Chrissy outside to meet him and then have to wait. At first the plan works, but then, slowly, everyone, including Kate, fall under the spell of Gerry's charm. Chrissy and Gerry dance off down the lane together without any music. As soon as he is gone, Kate snaps back to reality and rants about the man, ashamed for having been drawn in.

Surely, if her sisters were to agree with her on any subject, it would be that of Gerry Evans. He is obviously a pox on the house. Wrong again. Agnes, who is in love with Gerry, attacks Kate for criticizing Gerry, calling her a "damned righteous bitch" and storming out of the house. This leaves Kate alone with Maggie. Maggie, the clown of the family, tries to cut the tension by singing a song. Kate snaps at her, only to realize she is attacking an innocent person. She realizes that what Agnes said might be true and looks to Maggie for comfort. Because Agnes is right, Maggie, of course, can not provide what Kate needs. This is too much for poor Kate, and she breaks down.

She unloads every bit of stress she has been carrying all day on Maggie—telling her the truth about everything she learned in town, etc. She wallows for a second in a pit of despair. This is her turning point. She lets her guard down, she lets Maggie in. Maggie comes to her rescue, offering her the loving comfort she needs just at the right time. Kate lets it out and with Maggie's help, pulls herself up with her faith, which is usually her only friend.

The other sisters then come back in to find a much more relaxed yet sullen Kate and the usual Maggie, making everyone else happy. The women then have a rare moment of togetherness—Kate relaxed by her unloading, Chrissy high from her dance with Gerry, Maggie touched by seeing the truth behind her sister's mask, and Agnes humbled by her shame at her outburst and the silent reconciliation with Kate. They set about cooking dinner when Jack comes back in and, miraculously, has a moment of lucidity. He recognizes everyone! It seems he is on the road to recovery when, in this lucid moment, he starts to recount his stories about Uganda, and, in doing so, reveals the real reason he is back in Ireland, and it's just as the doctor said. Kate jumps right back in to her old pattern of behavior and tries to fix Jack, giving a long prescription plan for recovery. Just before she is about to crack again, she runs off to get her jacket. She comes back to find her once worshipped big brother doing a crazy pagan dance with little Michael's kite sticks. All the other sisters stand motionless, not knowing what to do. Kate braces herself, steps up, and begins to usher Jack down the road to recovery one step at a time—the first step is a walk.

Three weeks later, it seems Kate's plan is working. Jack is much healthier—he is lively and communicative. He has a personality again. Kate nags at him to keep him going but is pleased with the progress. Her ultimate goal is to get him preaching again, to get him to remember the faith with which he started. While his physical health has shown vast

improvements, the healthier he becomes physically, the more he comes out with his crazy tribal talk. All of Kate's efforts have the exact opposite effect. Kate gets Jack to say he will say mass again, only to send him into a long story about some ritual where everyone got stinking drunk, painted their faces and danced in a big circle of fire. He then ended the conversation by telling Kate she needed to get a huge gong to alert everyone in town that there was to be a service. Jack leaves to go on another walk and Kate confides in Maggie, as she is now able to do, about her concern for Jack's behavior.

Maggie calms her down with a joke and gets her acting human again when Gerry and Chrissy arrive and get Kate all worked up again. Once she sees them coming, Kate insists that Maggie deal with Jack's behavior as Kate deals with all her problems—hide it.

Then, another first: Gerry comes in the house. Here, Kate shows another glimpse that she is changing. She not only allows the entry, but she even tries to turn the other cheek with Gerry. She gives him a chance. Gerry begins to talk about Jack, an obviously sensitive subject, and, in doing so, shows understanding, openness and concern towards him, which Kate picks up on. Also, he is obviously very uncomfortable inside the house but was willing to face the imminent danger of all of Chrissy's sisters for her sake, which is also endearing. Finally, he takes on the task of attempting to fix the wireless set, which is always so problematic, and offers a bit of help the Mundy women so rarely get to experience. In this moment, he wins Kate over just a little.

Kate recognizes this in herself and then makes an attempt, in her own round about way, to share this with Chrissy. Her attempt fails. Rather than simply saying, "I'm sorry I've been such a bitch, maybe Gerry isn't all that bad," she walks up to Chrissy and criticizes Gerry's choice to join the international brigade, giving him an extremely shrouded compliment by saying that, in going, Ireland would be losing something in his going. Her attempt at reconciliation goes

completely over Chrissy's head. Chrissy takes it as just another chiding session from Kate and responds defensively. Even when Kate is trying to make peace, however pathetically, she is met with animosity. She retreats to the corner.

She is pulled back into the room when Chrissy begins to share what is obviously big news. It turns out that Agnes and Rose, who have been out picking bilberries, have lost their knitting jobs because a factory has opened that can do the work much more quickly and inexpensively. This is bittersweet news at first, because there is still the possibility that Agnes, at least, and maybe even Kate herself could work at the factory. Chrissy goes on to reveal that Vera, the woman who employed Rose and Agnes, tried to get a job at the factory and couldn't because she was "too old," and she is only a year older than Kate.

At this moment, Agnes comes home and the sisters scramble to make sure that she can relax a bit before bombarding her and Rose with this terrible news. Agnes makes some small talk and then asks how Rose is feeling. Of course, no one has seen Rose, but Maggie checks to see if she is there anyway. When it turns out she's missing, the sisters set into action to try to find her, Kate being at the forefront, questioning Agnes for every detail she can think of to help figure out the mystery. Agnes is quite upset by the news that her dear Rose is missing, and getting any information out of her is difficult because she starts to bounce all over the place. They are able to eek the story out of her piece by piece and Maggie puts the puzzle together—she's with Danny Bradley in the back hills. A relationship between Rose and Danny Bradley is completely new to Kate, so Maggie and Chrissy fill her in. This sets Kate on the war path, and Agnes is in her scope. Agnes takes care of Rose and the fact that any sort of relationship has evolved is obviously her fault and she must know more than what she's saying. Kate tries to force information from her and nearly reaches the point of physical violence when Maggie has to jump

in and stop her. Once this happens, Kate realizes what she was about to do and shuts up. This is another important moment for Kate. All along, her only goal was to protect and take care of her sisters. She abandoned the role of sister and tried to take on, single handedly, the role of parent. She has been struggling with the load for a long time and she has just found herself, for the sake of her sisters' well being, nearly compromising the very thing she has worked so hard for by attacking one of those dearest to her-- Agnes. This changes Kate's perspective.

Maggie then takes the situation over and comes up with a plan to find Rose when Rose shows up. She approaches the house languidly, while her sisters watch her like hawks from the window trying to make sure she has not been hurt in any way. She comes in to the house and Kate retreats, she does not want to hurt anyone anymore. The others usher Rose in and talk to her, avoiding the subject of where she was, satisfied by the fact that she is home and she is safe. Maggie closes the matter by stating this fact and sets the family in motion again with preparations for dinner. She gives everyone a task. Meanwhile, Kate has been keeping her mouth shut, but the avoidance of the facts is too much for her. Rose is on her way upstairs to change so she can get turf for the fire when Kate cuts her off. Kate approaches this confrontation very differently from the others. Rather than scolding, belittling or demanding anything from Rose, she simply asks, as calmly as she can muster, where Rose has been. Rose is stunned and doesn't answer, so Kate persists and opens Pandora's Box. Rose reveals that she was on a date with Danny Bradley and that she was in the back hills with all of the pagans taking part in some of the practices. The worst part of the story Rose reveals through her silence on the matter. She works her story up to a certain point, making it very obvious that she and Danny Bradley were in an environment and a frame of mind that would very easily lead to intimacy and she cuts her story off. Rose lost her innocence.

Kate collapses, stunned, and spends a little time being numb. She has been broken. Maggie pulls her back into the real world by offering her a cigarette—Kate accepts, showing her true side to all of her sisters for the first time in a long time. Jack then comes in and begins to play with Maggie about moving to Uganda. Maggie teases Kate to include her in the conversation and to cheer her up, but maybe also to get her to loosen up a little. Kate, of course, will not let go of her faith, and, as a result of this joking conversation, tries one last time to convert Jack. She shows her change in her approach. Rather than acting as a dictator, she acknowledges his beliefs and tries to convince him to come back to Christianity. She has allowed other perspectives to make their way in. Jack refuses and Kate retreats up to the window having made some sort of peace with Jack, responding to his attempt to convince her to come with a very sisterly, “I’m not listening to a word you’re saying.” She has taken back the role of sister.

Then, the wireless comes on. Gerry has fixed it. He has brought cheer into the house. He comes in and convinces Agnes to dance with him, making the atmosphere lively. Kate silently joins in the fun, watching as a wallflower from the back of the room, but still enjoying the change in atmosphere. As Gerry and Agnes dance outside, she notices Chris is tense and goes to her to try to soothe her. When Agnes and Gerry come back in, Kate retreats again, preferring to stay out of the action, but stays a little closer this time, slowly working her way into the group. The lively atmosphere continues and Gerry asks Chrissy to dance. She, jealous, refuses, so Maggie jumps in, trying to save the fun, which Kate, for once, is enjoying. This time, Chrissy changes the mood, shutting off the radio. The sudden change shakes everyone in the room, including Kate, who is unhappy with Gerry’s overt flirtation with Agnes. Instead of taking it out on Gerry, however, she takes it out on the radio—another new move. Chrissy, in her angered state, then begins to tell Agnes about her meeting with Vera. With her last ounce of energy, Kate

teams up with Maggie to distract Agnes before Chrissy can get the bad news out. Kate makes up a story about Vera's daughter getting married which Maggie plays in to. They then create a subtextual dialogue with Chrissy, telling her she is being a "wee brat." Chrissy relents. Gerry tries to begin a private conversation with Chrissy about her anger. Maggie makes the effort to get everyone outside for dinner so the couple can have some privacy. Kate stays out of it and simply follows Maggie's well made plan, happy at the thought of eating outside in the beautiful weather.

As if enough hadn't already happened, as soon as Kate, Maggie and Agnes settle outside Rose walks on with her dead pet rooster. Upon seeing it, Kate knows Jack slaughtered it but allows Rose and whoever so chooses to believe it was a fox. She says nothing, but shares in the attempt to soothe the bereaved Rose and, no longer taking everything too seriously, laughs when Maggie makes a joke about it. Then, Jack comes out in his ugly, crumpled up, stained uniform in order to have a hat exchanging ceremony with Gerry. Kate makes a meager attempt to get him to change, simply suggesting that the outfit is not suitable, but gives the argument up quickly. Jack and Gerry continue in their ritual. Kate allows herself to appreciate it and joins in the mirth of the moment. Kate then relaxes in everyone's presence—she teases Chrissy, shares a brag with Gerry about Michael and rolls her eyes at Maggie. She is literally soaking up the last bit of sun of the summer and figuratively soaking up the last bit of sun with her family. The action ends here and adult Michael recounts the dissolution of the family that was soon to follow.

Methods

A Practical Handbook for the Actor

In the late 1800's in Moscow, Konstantin Stanislavski asked the question, "what makes acting good?" He then set out to find an answer and, in doing so, revolutionized the study of acting. From his first explorations, numerous acting teachers and theories have sprouted from

this first seedling. The first Americans to utilize this line of acting thought were the members of the Group Theatre, the most notable being Sanford Meisner, Lee Strasberg and Stella Adler. Schools have sprouted from their pupils as well, each taking what they learned and translating it to something usable for them. The playwright David Mamet was a student of Sandy Meisner and taught his own acting class, one of which he taught with William H Macy, a very respectable actor. It is from this class that *A Practical Handbook for the Actor* was born. A group of students came together in the hopes of defining a simple, repeatable method that would result in acting of a consistently high quality and which, through regular practice, would become habitual. There were high demands for a technique, so making it as simple and effective as possible was necessary. In my own practice, I've found that these students have come very close to achieving their initial goal. *Practical Handbook* gives two main definitions for the job of an actor.

“...to find a way to live truthfully under the imaginary circumstances of the play. Thus the actors must be able to decide what is going on in the text in simple, actable terms. If the actor gives himself something physically doable that he has a personal investment in for every scene, he will always have something more important to put his attention on than the success or failure of his own performance.”

Bruder et al., 1986

From this definition, they created their method for analyzing a scene. The second requirement of an actor is not as tangible. It deals with the regular, rigorous practice necessary to make one available to act. An actor “...should realize that all he can do is bring himself to the theatre in optimum condition to participate in the play at hand” (Bruder et al. 1986). This translates into regular vocal work, regular physical work and regular self-assessments. They prescribe that an actor focus only on what he or she can control about his or her own shortcomings and make sure to incorporate disciplined work in these areas on a regular basis. They later insist that these

practices are understood to be the job of an actor and are not dealt with any more in the text. These two definitions fit very closely with my own practice.

The basis of my textual analysis of Kate in *Dancing at Lughnasa*, the analysis that composes my score, was derived from the steps for analyzing a scene in *A Practical Handbook for the Actor*, which consists of three major questions for each scene:

1. What is the character literally doing?
2. What is the essential action of what the character is doing in this scene?
3. What is the action like to me? It's as if...

Bruder, et al., 1986

This list was too simplified for me, however, and when I tried to analyze a scene answering only these questions I found myself getting stuck more than I found myself coming to realizations about any moment in the play. Though it deals with the overall action of the scene, it never really answered the question of what the character wanted. I added a question to my list. My second question became, "What does the character want?" Secondly, *Handbook's* analysis identifies one overlying action to be played throughout an entire scene. This gives an effective through line, but does not identify the nuances of each small change that occurs as I work towards my objective. I have no way of measuring if I am achieving my goal and how I tweak my action to fight against the obstacles standing in my way. As a fifth item in my analysis of each scene, rather than developing a list of potential "tools" to work with the essential action, I developed an action list and applied it to the specific moments of the play in the form of an infinitive verb. This played into the Meisnerian concept of moment-to-moment reality. Naturally, the action list is not set in stone, as it must allow for changes on each night of the performance or the truth of the moment, but the list provides an adequate blueprint for the overall shape of the scene. Finally, my score was not really broken down into "scenes," because the action of the play is ongoing. The only

specific break is the act break. Friel was influenced heavily by Chekhov, especially in the structure of the play. It is very difficult to use any standard method to break a scene down, such as entrances or exits. Therefore, I broke the play down into “beats” or units of action. Act I has 22 different beats and Act II has 17.

The difference in my own analysis and *Handbook's* may seem to be an issue of semantics. What I identify as an objective, *Handbook* might lump into its “essential action.” *Handbook* defines an action as “a physical pursuance of a specific goal” (Bruder et al., 1986). The objective is implied here in that the action is derived from knowing the objective. It never requires the crystallization of that objective, however. It is just as helpful to articulate that goal as it is to articulate what I am doing to reach that goal. All of my objectives were phrased in the sentence “I want...” I added this step because, without it, I struggled to find my list of actions for each scene because I had nothing on which to base my different tactics/ actions. Also, while the action focused on the other, the objective helped me maintain the character’s point of view.

In what I identified as the 10th beat of the play, Jack enters for the first time and Kate cuddles him to try and orient him. My objective was, “I want my big brother back.” My essential action was “to nurse a sick person back to health.” In this case the objective made it personal to me and to the character. It gave me the reason to nurse this sick person back to health and articulating this idea helped crystallize the moment for me. In identifying the objective the actions in my list—to compliment, to inspire, to reassure—would have run the risk of being general.

This method also served me well in Act II. In the 11th beat, Jack comes in and begins joking with Maggie about Ryanga. Kate stays out of it—a marked change in her regular behavior. My objective for this scene was to be harmonious with my family. To achieve this

harmony, I chose the essential action “to pick my battles with the ones I love most.” This conjunction was helpful in making the preaching that is a patterned behavior for Kate into something specific for the moment. At this point, she is preaching only out of love and only because she was pushed to the point of doing so. The preaching was not as pointed. Through the course of the play it grew into something softer.

The difference between the objective and the essential action also served me in the 11th beat of Act I. In this portion of the play, Kate tells the story about seeing Bernie O’Donnell in town. I gave myself that, after all the tension had been building all afternoon, I wanted to redeem myself as a sister. In order to do so, I wanted to regale my audience. This shows the necessity to articulate both the essential action and the objective. The two work in tandem to create the moment on stage. Using only the point of view of the action, Kate could be entertaining anyone. Adding the specific relationship to the essential action would have made it muddy. However, the relationship fit in nicely with the objective and made the action more specific. An audience of sisters is quite different from an audience of strangers. You know which buttons to press and how. You know which bits of information are the juicy ones and who needs to hear them. In some situations, regaling your sisters might be easier than a group of strangers. In this case, it’s an obstacle because of Kate’s need to control the situation and act as the teacher/leader at home that creates tension between her and her sisters. She has to cover extra ground to win them over.

There were also times when my essential action and my objective were too similar to provide a dynamic difference with which to work. In this case, articulating these two similar concepts made the moment muddled. In the 8th beat of the first act, in which Kate goes about putting the groceries away and filling her sisters in on the things she learned in town, all the while telling lies. I defined my objective as release. The articulation of this was too general—I

can fight for release in too many ways. I needed to boil down the situation more. The action I chose to gain this release was “to fish for relief,” which was exactly the same as my articulated objective. To define them both as the same thing leaves the moment bland and without a dynamic. My analysis of this moment was weak from the beginning, however. Rather than going through and putting what the character was literally doing into definite terms, I glossed it over by saying “Kate tries to tell everyone about town.” I made this portion of the analysis general, so the analysis for the entire beat became general. The lesson in this weakness of analysis is that skimping on one portion has a domino effect on every other portion. If it’s a beat that needs clarification, the effort to clarify must not be sacrificed. I do not feel that this moment was as weak on stage as it appears to be on paper. I think that, in rehearsal, after having written this portion of the score, the moment became clear to me and I changed my performance without changing my score. In that portion of the scene I was fishing, but not for relief, for recognition. I was testing my sisters to see if they had any information themselves on the subjects I was talking about, to ensure that my lies were successful. Another lesson, more in documentation, is to always remember to double check the score.

In the 12th beat of Act I, in which Maggie tells of her lost love, I defined my objective as wanting to comfort my sister, the action I chose was to soothe a loved one’s pain. I think both of these were useful to the moment, but too similar to work together to create more depth in the moment. I never felt that this moment was false on stage, nor that it was lacking clarity. It’s a rather simple moment, but there is always room for improvement. Articulating more differentiated versions of the essential action and the objective might have made an otherwise simple moment more interesting and complex.

In the 17th beat of Act I, in which Kate and the rest of the sisters sit inside while Chrissy meets Gerry outside, I was never able to articulate a strong objective. I have three listed and none of them are particularly useful. I said that “I wanted to send Gerry packing,” I wanted to “maintain my dignity,” and I wanted to “let Chrissy take care of her own problems.” I think the first two are definitely true in the scene, but that they are not specifically what I was working for in the action. I do not think the third one is true at all. Throughout the course of the play, Kate learns to give up control—letting others take care of their own problems. The appearance of Gerry is one of the intrusions that lead to this change. To incorporate such a behavior too soon undercuts the transformation of the character. I think the strongest of the three objectives was “to maintain my dignity,” but it was still not quite right. A closer possibility might have been “to maintain my control.” The action I would have taken with the adjusted objective would have been passive because Kate does not have control in this situation. The dichotomy between the action and the objective would then help create the tension inherent in the moment. My “as if” (I am an angry caged ape and Gerry is a snotty kid throwing stones) helped define this moment, but, thinking back, I don’t think it ever quite got where it needed to be. I was forcing it a little.

The process of articulating this goal was very similar to the process of choosing the actions, except that, perhaps, its “test was not always in the other person” as the objective deals more with the character it belongs to than the others the character interacts with. The articulation of the objective was not entirely consistent. I did an initial score for Act II before I began to incorporate the objective into my analysis. When I went back to tweak my score, much of my initial work was still useful to me, so I kept it. This stands as an example of how all of these steps to analysis are simply tools designed to help in the creation. None of them are hard and fast rules.

The idea of the questions being simply a tool was most evident when I was defining my “as ifs.” Many times, I felt connected enough to the text itself, that I did not need to define an “as if” to make a personal investment in the scene. Also, because the actual documenting of my score took me so long, by the time I reached the end of it, I had made the moments real to me already in rehearsal, but not through any articulated terms. At this point, searching for an “as if” became fruitless.

One example of a moment in which I didn’t need this tool was in the 12th beat of Act II. Agnes and Gerry are dancing outside as Chrissy watches through the door. I gave myself the goal of protecting Chrissy using the action of guarding like a mother hen. Protecting younger siblings is something I have plenty of experience with because I am the middle child of five siblings. I did not need to imagine anything to make this moment real for me.

The same is true for the 13th beat. In this piece, Chrissy tries to tell Agnes that Vera no longer needs her services. Kate and Maggie make up a story to stop her and Chrissy relents to their will. My objective was “to wait for the right time to tell Agnes the bad news” and my essential action was “to create a diversion to allow a dear one to escape.” In this instance, the clarity of the moment came more from the work of the ensemble than my own personal experience. While every moment on stage is a team effort, this moment is not really driven by one particular character. The characters work together. My guess would be that, in rehearsal, at least one actor provided an “as if” that made the moment real for them and that I picked up on this specificity in the course of playing out the scene. This was sufficient to make the moment real, interesting and repeatable.

I did not need an “as if” for one of my favorite moments of the play—the 20th beat of Act I: Kate’s breakdown with Maggie. Kate came home from town with a lot of bad news she did not

share with her sisters, in an effort to protect them. This caused conflict with everyone around her and built to a moment that was a key turning point for Kate in the play: she let someone else in. The break down comes after Agnes explodes at Kate for bitching about Gerry. Kate has only the best intentions in berating this man who has brought mainly strife and scandal to her family and instead of finding the support of her sisters in her rally she is attacked for her views. Her frustration at this caused her to attack the one sister who is the most tolerant of her behavior which makes her realize that Agnes's assessment of her character was right. She is a "righteous bitch." This launches Kate into a long monologue where she unloads all of the bad news she has heard and everything she has been struggling with to her sister and ends in a tearful release. This moment was very easy for me to analyze because I was connected to it from the very first read. I pumped out a list of four or five potential objectives for this beat but I decided on using "to find peace," which I tried to accomplish by unloading my burdens on a confidante. I don't think that this is the best action ever defined because it is very similar to the literal activity of the scene, but I do not think it mattered in the end because the moment already made sense to me. The analytical tool that served me best in this instance was my list of action, because it helped to create a build in the moment and differentiate each bit of information I was unloading.

For a majority of the score, the "as ifs" were very useful. I found that this part of the process was best done outside of rehearsal and was probably one of the most enjoyable parts to the analysis—it is the most creative of the questions and allows you to get to know and search within yourself. The form of my hypothetical situation's varied. For many of the moments involving my "sisters," I used my relationships with my actual family to make the moments real for me. In the 14th beat of Act II, when Kate makes a final, more passive attempt to convert Jack, I gave myself an "as if" to help define the atmosphere of the situation: "It's as if my siblings are

teasing me about a sensitive subject.” Looking back at this “as if,” it appears weak. It seems too similar to the situation at hand, but in execution it served the purpose it was intended to serve, which, once again, reiterates that all of these methods are simply tools that an actor has at his or her disposal. They are not hard and fast rules.

Still, many of my “as ifs” did provide me with stronger images. In the 9th beat of Act I, when Rose begins to talk about Lughnasa for the first time, I made the moment particular to me by imagining that my youngest sister wanted to join a gang. Again, looking back, this image has become benign because I don’t feel there is any threat of this actually happening, but it served me at the time. It gave me something to personally fight for. In the first beat of Act II, when Jack seems to be making a recovery, I imagined that my boyfriend at the time was starting to put in the effort he needed to go back to school, as that is something I really wanted to see happen. Other “as ifs” were not related to anyone in particular. In the 14th beat of Act I, which occurs directly after the dancing stops and the sisters begin to bicker, I gave myself the image that everyone around me was whispering, pointing their fingers at me and laughing. This was a very general image, but worked for me in creating the specificity of the moment’s atmosphere. For the 18th beat of Act I, in which Kate is sitting inside waiting for Chrissy to get rid of Gerry, I gave myself that I was an angry ape in a cage and some snotty kid was throwing rocks at me. This helped clarify my attitude toward Gerry and add to the sense of helplessness in the situation. One of the most potent images I chose was for the 23rd and final beat of Act I. In this beat Jack, for the first time lucid, comes out with all of his Ryanga stories. I gave myself that I was trying to re-route a river, which charged my energy because of the gargantuan task, but also added a sense of futility. Adding the futility was a dangerous line to walk with an as if, because giving myself a situation to imagine in which I could not succeed may have knocked the wind out of my sails. In

this case, however, when used in conjunction with the text of the play and the truth of the moments onstage, it gave me a moment I loved to live in night after night. It was still imperfect, however, in that, though it defined the moment, it did not necessarily bring it any closer to my personal life. I can't say I've ever re-routed a river.

While developing my list of actions for each beat, I tried to adhere to the “requirements of a good action” as defined in *Practical Handbook*. The checklist is very demanding, understandably so, and I did my best to make each action fit each of these demands. I can not say that each action fit exactly into these criteria, but it was a useful guide. I can definitely say that my ability to determine and utilize a physical action was greatly improved and that, my attempt to adhere to the following checklist alone caused me to grow greatly as an actor. *Handbook* gives nine essential requirements for an effective physical action:

1. be physically capable of being done
2. be fun to do
3. be specific
4. have its test in the other person
5. not be an errand
6. not presuppose any physical or emotional state
7. not be manipulative
8. have a “cap”
9. be in line with the intentions of the playwright.

Bruder, et al., 1986

These requirements are deceptively simple in appearance. Finding actions that fit into the analytical part of these guidelines and were still fun to do was quite a challenge for me. I tend to be very analytical by nature which gets me stuck in my head and leads to boring moments on stage. I used the level of interest in the action as my final determination of its usefulness. Once I found something that was interesting, I tried to play with the other aspects of it to make it usable and appropriate.

In looking over my action list I found a few actions that I still find interesting and playable months later. In the 16th beat of Act II Jack comes out in his uniform and Kate follows her regular pattern of behavior and tries to get him to change. This is a moment the audience sees the change in Kate because she is trying only to influence rather than control those around her. Ultimately, the others have the power to make their own decisions, which is a lesson Kate learns throughout the course of the play. My action for this moment played nicely into this change. From Kate's point of view, Jack's behavior is sending him straight to hell. Since she loves her brother, she does not want this to happen, but she has come to realize that she cannot change him. Her attempts to get her brother into heaven, her objective, take the form of "back seat driving a friend's decision." I like this action because even now it gives a clear sense of the dynamic of the interaction. It is specific, fun to do and physically capable of being done. It is fitting with the moment onstage because it speaks to the passive nature of Kate's behavior. It is in line with the intentions of the playwright. It naturally has its test in the other person because her ultimate goal in this action is to change another person's behavior, which also disqualifies it from being an errand. Nor is it manipulative. While Kate is trying to change what Jack is doing, he can very easily refuse to do so, and does. A manipulative action assumes that the other person has no power in the situation. The cap of this action is Jack's denial of Kate's back seat driving.

In the 15th beat of Act I, Kate tells Agnes off. I chose the action "to put a judgmental bitch in her place." This action was fun to do because it was so charged and easy to connect to. Even now, I get a fire in my belly thinking of that action. It is physically capable of being done because I'm always ready to jump up and fight someone who is being judgmental. The specificity comes, to me, from the idea of judgment. Putting someone in their place has a certain level of specificity, but still begs the question, "why, what has this person done?" Who has not

experienced a person running their mouth off about something they really do not know anything about? I think it is in line with the intentions of the playwright because it applies only to Kate's point of view and Kate's behavior. As an objective observer, I don't see Agnes as a judgmental bitch at all. I see the fight coming from the tensions inherent in the situation. Kate would not have the perspective to view it that way, especially in the heat of the moment. It's not an errand because it can't be completed instantly, and this "putting" is directly testable in the other person. Has she shut up yet? She must need more pounding. While the moment usually came out of anger, putting someone in their place does not require any emotion, nor is it manipulative. She could very well not shut up, or put me in my place, which ends up happening. The cap in a situation where Kate wins would be that Agnes shuts up. Kate does not win, however, and Agnes shuts *her* up, providing the actual cap to the beat.

The fourth beat in Act II has an effective essential action that came directly out of a directorial note in rehearsal. Gerry comes in with Chrissy and Kate does not berate him. I was originally playing the moment as though I wanted to make him really uncomfortable. In rehearsal, David suggested I try to turn the other cheek. I used this for my objective, which was very fitting considering the Christian connotations of the phrase and the deeply religious nature of the character. The action I chose to reach this end was "to extend an olive branch to an enemy." This meets the criteria of a good action because making peace is always an option. It is able to be done at any moment, or at least attempted at any moment. The wording, extending an olive branch, was something I connected with and brings a very specific image and tone to my mind. The person can either accept or deny the offer, so its test is in the other person. The character has to overcome an obstacle—the other person's willingness, most likely—in order to achieve the goal, so it is not an errand. The impulse to extend an olive branch could extend from

many mental states—none are presupposed. The power to accept or refuse lies in the hands of the other person, so the character is not manipulating and that acceptance or refusal is the cap. In this case, he accepts, though awkwardly, by making conversation. Finally, it fits with the intention of the playwright because it is in line with the arc of Kate's character. Extending the branch is one of the ways she begins to give control over to others.

My analysis did not always serve me perfectly. There were several moments that never came to fruition. One of these, for me, was the second beat of the first act. In this beat, I chose the action that Kate is trying to put on a happy face to protect her sisters. This is an action that fit in with many of the requirements of a good action, but it was not fun to do. It did not get me going. It lacked the inner fire the moment needed to begin to drive the action of the play. "To put on a happy face" implies that the family knows of the problems that Kate is facing but that Kate is trying to be strong for them. This is out of line with the intentions of the playwright. Kate does not let anyone in and is consciously hiding all of the bad news she got in town from her sisters. This action is very different from putting on a happy face. As a result, I never felt quite comfortable in this moment, often worried too much about the props, perhaps to make up for my lack of analysis, and ended up delivering a textually required snap that came from nowhere.

This first weak link bled into the rest of the sequence leading up to Kate's breakdown. Because the snap was usually unjustified, I had difficulty defining the next action. The score for the third beat of Act I is actually incomplete. It has an objective but no action written down. I was playing an action. I knew I was making up for the moment before somehow, but it was unspecific. Had the first beat been instilled with the proper tension, the action of garnering sympathy from my sisters, which I think is what Kate is actually doing, might have been clearer to me and might have been more readily defined.

The beat directly after this also had a weak action. In this beat, Kate invents lies about what the doctor said in town. I did not name an objective and I gave myself the action “to gloss over a serious problem,” which was completely boring and not nearly weighty enough for the requirements of the play. This problem is one that ultimately leads to Kate’s change, but my action implies that it is something more akin to a bad case of athlete’s foot. Luckily in this beat, my “as if” made up for it. I gave myself that I had just come out of a huge fight with my then boyfriend and then had to go deal with strangers and act as though nothing was wrong. This helped move the act back into an energy befitting the circumstance.

The first Act got back on track when the subject of the dance came up. The weak links in analysis for the very early stages of the first act could have been improved by articulating another element of the situation: the obstacle. I believe if I had made clear for myself what it was I was fighting against, the fight itself would have been much easier to shape. In hindsight, the lack of a defined obstacle is the major weakness of my score and another element missing from the steps for analysis provided by *Practical Handbook*. While looking at the list of requirements for a good action, again, the obstacle is implied. When the authors say that the action must not be an errand, they expand the thought to say that:

An errand is an action that has no test in the other person. “Delivering a message” is not a good action because you do not have to look at your partner to see if you have accomplished it. Also, it can be accomplished in one line, leaving you with nothing to do for the rest of the scene... Too quickly and easily accomplished, an errand is boring both for you to perform and for the audience to watch. The action must be something it is possible for you to fail at; you cannot fail at an errand.

Bruder et al., 1986

In referring to the ease at accomplishing an action, the authors have, seemingly unwittingly, added in the necessity of the obstacle. The obstacle is what the character is working against to get to the goal. It is like the current of a river. In the course of dramatic action, it is necessary that

the characters try to paddle upstream for at least a little while before either succeeding in reaching their destination or learning the lesson that they really should have been going with the flow. It would be helpful for an actor to define this obstacle in terms similar to those used for the essential action and the objective in order to make that obstacle specific and real for the actor and, therefore, communicable to the audience. Again, I think articulating the obstacle is another semantic mind game. If I could go back, I would work on finding an obstacle I wanted to fight against, that posed a definite threat to me and/or my objective and that fit in with the intentions of the playwright.

The list of requirements for a good action applied mainly to the essential action of the scene. In most UNO theses I read, I noticed that the actor provided only an action list. However, I found articulating the essential action in a sentence like “I am trying to talk a crazed person off a cliff” to be more useful than the infinitive form of the verb “to talk down.” This part of the method is really a mind game. If the action is boiled down too much it becomes inaccessible. I can say I’m trying “to plead” all I want, but if I don’t know to whom or why I am pleading, all the pleading is pointless. This level of specificity was really only necessary for me in the essential action, though. Once I established that, I could use the condensed infinitive verb form of the action for my action list, which covered all the smaller moments within each beat. The actions I defined above are all fitting examples of how something as simple as sentence structure helped serve my process.

The action list was at times quite helpful, at others, quite tedious. Identifying the action I’m playing at every single moment of the play gives great insight into the many layers of the character and leads to a performance with depth and interest. That is as long as the verbs used are never set in stone and the exploration of the verbs comes out of the trial and error play of

rehearsal. Finding my list of verbs for each beat was a tremendous challenge at first, because I thought I could do it while sitting down and looking at my script, outside of rehearsal. I spent hours and hours staring at my script ready to tear my hair out because I couldn't figure it out. This is where *Practical Handbook* came in very handy. Whenever I would get stuck, I would just go through and answer the questions. Once I had them answered I had a different perspective on the scene and I was able to create a verb list. Then, when I went to rehearsal, I would play off what I worked on in my analysis outside—keeping some things and changing others. I realize this is exactly what we are taught to do from the very beginning of our actor training, but, in this production, the process finally clicked. When I first started the process, I wanted to have the entire script scored in the first week. I have the tendency to want results rather than focusing on the process as I am always told to do. My struggle with scoring the script and eventual discovery that my struggle was actually just the process taking its course was one of the most important and useful lessons I learned in the entire process.

Once analysis is finished, it must be translated into performance. One of the beauties of the art, though, is that no matter how much preparation you have done, there is always going to be something unexpected that pops up when you are actually on stage in front of an audience. One of the marks of a good actor is the ability to use and incorporate these new occurrences and discoveries and act on them accordingly. Both Meisner and *Handbook* assert that the ability to work off of one's impulses is necessary for an actor. In *Handbook* this is defined as “the truth of the moment, or that which is actually happening in the scene as you are playing it” (Bruder et al. 1986). One specific instance that made this aspect of performance a harsh reality occurred during the second performance of the show. I entered every night laden with grocery bags. I had become lackadaisical in checking my props and several essential props—props required by the text—

were missing from my bag. We all had to work as a team to cover these missing items, some of which moved the plot along, while still trying to maintain the same structure of the scene.

Unfortunately for me, this mishap happened in the midst of the most poorly analyzed portion of the play. My performance suffered as a result. I, personally, was very proud of us as a team because I think we did a decent job dealing with the mishap and maintaining the scene, but, later, while going through student papers on the show, I came across the harshest feedback from this particular performance.

Acting on the truth of the moment was essential for me in the dance sequence. I have the first steps for the dance beat, the 13th beat of Act I, and if I had continued in the analytic vein of this moment, I might have added two or three more beats in that moment alone. However, I did not find the analytical tools useful in this very physical moment. Instead, I decided to use the impulses inherent in each performance to move me into and throughout the dance while still keeping our choreography. I know what I wanted in the scene: the release that came from letting myself go, and I think that the dance foreshadowed the change Kate was in the process of undergoing, but I don't think it was necessary to articulate every piece of the analysis for the dance. To keep this portion spontaneous each night helped maintain the spontaneity needed for the dance within the play. I think by leaving this portion up to the truth of the moment, I was more in line with the intentions of the playwright than I would have been with a thorough analysis.

I learned a valuable lesson about the truth of the moment in my final performance of the show. I went in wanting to relish each of the moments and found myself struggling through act I. I would guess that I began to indulge in my favorite moments onstage rather than keeping my circle of attention focused outward on my fellow actors and what I needed from them. As a result

I felt forced. In act II I sat back and watched everyone around me and found myself swept up in the very moments I was indulgently trying to enjoy in Act I. I was trying to manufacture the first act. *Handbook* suggests that, “the difficulty of executing an action lies in dealing with that which is actually happening in the other person” (Bruder et al. 1986). In acting, it seems, the focus must always be on the other.

The final level of analysis provided to me by *Practical Handbook* dealt with the concept of externals. “An external is a physical adjustment made by the actor that either aids in the telling of the story or illustrates an imaginary circumstance of the play” (Bruder et al., 1986). In other words, they are extraneous in regards to the analysis but necessary in the telling of the story. They give the example of paying a king, while the actual physical crown will not influence how you choose your action; it is a simple, automatic way to communicate to the audience the status of the character. According to *Handbook*:

There are three basic types of externals:

1. Bodily adjustments—for example, posture, voice or speech alterations, and physical handicaps.
2. Ornaments—costumes and make- up
3. Physical states—for example, drunkenness, exhaustion, feeling hot or cold, or illness

Bruder et al., 1986

The book then goes into detail on each of these three categories, giving advice for how an actor might incorporate each part into performance. For Bodily Adjustments they suggest regular practice separate from analysis in order to make them second nature and, therefore, easily incorporated into performance. Ornaments and make up are mentioned because they could influence movement or help give the effect of a state required by the play that must be physically manifested—such as drunkenness or, in my case, age. For the final category, physical states, the authors suggest thinking about how these states manifest themselves physically and warn against

having any of these adjustments interfere with the action. The way one handles props can actually assist in achieving the action you are playing, as it make it visible and readable both to your partner and to the audience. They then go on to suggest that the actor consider physical activities to assist in communicating such states to the audience. Choosing these activities revolve around the two following questions: “Does the activity specifically aid the action you have chosen for the scene,” and “does it violate the given circumstances of the play?” (Bruder, et al., 1986).

I had several externals to deal with in *Dancing at Lughnasa*. First of all, the play takes place in Ireland and the director chose to perform it using the dialect of the region, so I had an adjustment in speech. This falls into the first category. I can definitely say I did what they prescribed—I practiced it until it became second nature. I also had another vocal adjustment. As an actor, I have been struggling with volume for quite some time, which my director (also my professor) was well aware of. I had to take extra effort to make sure my voice was strong enough to fill the space while dealing with the intimate material of the play. My behavior to accomplish this goal was also in line with their prescription.

In terms of ornaments, I had two that influenced my work: the first were the shoes. Any pair of shoes is going to influence the way one moves, so I worked in mine for as long as I could. The second was make-up. Every night I had to age myself so that I, one of the youngest members of the cast, looked older than everyone else. I have a little experience doing make up and I tried my best to make myself look believably old for the deceptive space we were in. I couldn't make the make-up too heavy, because the space was too intimate. Heavy age makeup is what I learned to do, when I first attempted it. However, in acting and make-up application, I always like what I do to be as natural as possible. Sometimes my makeup was too light and was

lost in the space under the lights. I don't think my technique ever quite reached perfection. When my family saw the show on the second weekend, they thought that Maggie was the eldest sister. I think my make up application could have been aided with a little research or some tutoring. I relied on the knowledge that I already had and on the eyes of my fellow cast members in the dressing rooms to get by, but I don't think my expertise was strong enough to really get the point across. Some nights, though, I did receive positive comments on the makeup, so I can conclude that this external was inconsistently effective.

I had several physical states to deal with in the course of the play. The first was exhaustion, which was required in my first entrance. It is the end of the day; Kate has presumably walked two miles to town, walked around town all day and then walked two miles back laden with groceries. This state was supported by several lines in the play. On page 19, in Kate's 3rd beat of the play, she says "The road to town gets longer every day" (Friel, 1993), implying that the road was quite difficult. Later on page 21, in Kate's 4th beat, she says, "I think I'm getting corns on this foot. I hope to God I don't end up crippled like poor mother, may she rest in peace" (Friel, 1993), which give a specific body part the exhaustion manifests itself in and gives reference to the second physical state: age. Again, the steps I took to incorporate these elements were similar to those suggested by *Practical Handbook*. I considered the physical manifestations of exhaustion and tried to incorporate them. Luckily I was given a specific physicality in the text—my feet. The adjustments for age were difficult. The age of forty is not really old by today's standards. Most people around that age I know do not generally move any differently than I perceive my own movements most of the time. The adjustments are subtle and deal mainly with movement after long periods of being stationary. However, I think time has taken more of a toll on Kate than it has on the 40 year-olds I know. She walks all the time, which

is stressful on the knees and other joints. Her life is full of stress, so her aging process was probably accelerated by her hard life. Choosing the adjustments for age were tricky. I attempted to incorporate stiffness in movement, kept my own movements slower than I would normally execute them, and kept my joints in mind when dealing with activities such as getting up and sitting down.

The final physical state required came after the dance. The dance was to have worn us out. I exercise regularly, so 2 minutes of dancing is usually not enough to get me winded. Again, I focused on the physical manifestations and simply adjusted my breathing and the pace of my movement.

While the adjustments I made do fit with the advice given in *A Practical Handbook for the Actor*, I did not actually use it for this purpose. The advice was helpful, but I found that other sources gave a lot more insight into the process of creating truthful physical adjustments and incorporating them seamlessly into performance. I take the time to mention externals in regards to *Practical Handbook* because I did have externals and I did work to incorporate them. However, my reasoning for my choices came more from the suggestions in the other books I read to fill in my character, namely the work of Uta Hagen, Stella Adler and Michael Chekhov. The Meisner based work does well with questions of scene analysis and living in moment-to-moment reality, but I find that it glosses over many of the technical aspects involved in acting. It mentions them in passing, just expecting the actor to intuitively know them. They are not entirely off base in that assumption, either. Many of the technical aspects of theatre do come intuitively or through one's own practice, but it is still helpful to have specific practices to improve these parts of performance and to learn from wiser minds the methods one might use to improve these technical skills. For these reasons, I sought advice from other teachers to supplement the work I

based on *Practical Handbook*, so that I was sure all the technical aspects were up to par with my textual analysis.

The Art of Acting by Stella Adler

As was mentioned before, the first Americans to work closely with a Stanislavski based system in the United States were from The Group Theatre. Three major teachers of acting came from this group—Sanford Meisner, from whose work *Handbook* came; Lee Strasberg, of Actor's Studio fame; and Stella Adler. The story of The Group Theatre and these acting methods is an interesting one, and, like any theatrical story, wrought with drama. Harold Clurman, one of the founders of The Group Theatre, and Lee Strasberg first learned about Stanislavski's system from Richard Boleslavsky and Maria Ouspenskaya, two members of the Moscow Art Theatre who were actually the first people to bring the system from Russia. Strasberg developed his own system based on what he learned in these lessons with the Russians at the American Laboratory Theatre in New York. He used this system in the early years of The Group Theatre to direct the actors. Strasberg was very temperamental and, eventually, formed negative relationships with many of the members of the theatre, one of whom was Stella Adler. On top of the negative relationship, Adler came from a theatrical family and had been on stage all her life, most of the time professionally. While many of the other actors who started in the group theatre were green and struggling to find work, both Stella and her brother Luther, another member of the company, were already well established but joined the company because they shared its ideals. This gave Stella a different perspective when it came to Strasberg's teachings, which had a large focus on inwardly based exercises, such as emotional recall. She did not always see eye to eye with Strasberg's views, but she, just as everyone else, was amazed by the results of even the little bits of the Stanislavski system that were being employed in the Group's work. Eventually, the

tensions overcame the awe in the work and Strasberg had a falling out with the theatre and with Adler. Adler began to lose faith in the group and, while in Europe with Clurman, her lover, she came across the opportunity to meet with Stanislavski himself, who worked to refine his technique until the day he died. She took the opportunity, at first reluctantly, and expressed her dissatisfaction with the technique as she had come to understand it. Stanislavski told her her perspective was all wrong. Emotional recall was just a tool, not the main focus and went on to teach her what he had distilled to be the main focus of acting—physical action. After spending a little time with the legend, Adler ran back to the states with this revelation. It was Adler that first introduced this concept to the group. The basics of action Sanford Meisner first learned, he learned from Adler.

Of course, actions are a very difficult concept to master and can really only be mastered in a way that applies directly to the person using them, so the fact that Meisner first learned of the concept from Adler does not discount Meisner’s understanding of them or ability to teach the concept to others. Meisner may have been the better teacher. The point is that much of her book focuses on the idea of playing a physical action in a scene, just as *Practical Handbook* does. So much of what I read did not really change any of the work I would have been doing, but the terms she uses helped clarify the idea simply because it gave a different perspective. For example, in describing action, Adler says,

An action has to go somewhere. It has to have an end. It can’t just hang. Now if I said to you, “Count,” it would work, would it? But if I say, “Count the blue blouses in the room,” it works immediately. Every action has an end, an object. An action is weak unless you finish it.

Adler, 2000

This statement reiterates many of the points made in the list of requirements for a good action.

The end of the action is the cap. The fact that she suggests counting the blue blouses in the room

speaks to the need for specificity in choosing an action. Adler mentions immediacy, which is equivalent to the idea that an action must be physically capable of being done. The example she uses is not a playable theatrical action, nor does she suggest that it is. It is simply an example used to clarify the larger concept and it works, or it did for me, at least.

This example is very much in tune with the way she teaches actions. She starts simply and progresses toward strong usable actions that fit the list of requirements. In the chapter on “learning actions” in her book, she starts out with the action “to discuss,” and goes on to differentiate between this action and “to talk,” “to chat,” and “to converse.” She makes the point in this chapter that “the modern, naturalistic theatre is a theatre of ideas, a theatre whose purpose is to make an audience think and learn about the larger questions of life” (Adler, 2000). This, she says, is why the action “to discuss” is important. When I first read this, I thought she was full of it. It sounded way too simple and “to discuss” is a very weak action. What are you fighting for? But, this is only how she introduces the concept. From there she gradually builds on the basics and adds concepts like “making actions doable,” “building a vocabulary of actions,” “complicating actions,” and “giving actions size,” until, finally, the student reading her book can articulate an action of the same usefulness and clarity that a student modeling actions on *Handbook*’s list of requirements would articulate. Had I not already had an understanding of actions, I might have found this approach confusing. Luckily for me, I already found actions to be confusing and very intimidating. Her simple manner of building to the concept and her clear, down to earth articulation helped strip my fear away, which made me more open once it came time to score my script.

Aside from action, Adler touches on many other interesting and useful concepts. The first of these is language. *Handbook* states that an actor should have control over his or her use of the

English language for the purposes of self-manipulation, but Adler adds to it with clear examples and exercises that I, the reader, could repeat. This was very helpful. She had her students observe the world around them and articulate it in a specific, interesting way.

Here's an exercise we can do together. Let's look at the sky. Take your time. Do you see it? What color is it? Is it blue? Blue mixed with what? Is it all the same shade of blue? Is the shade different closer to the buildings across the street than it is up higher? What shape are the clouds? Not the scientific name of the clouds. What shape do you say they are? Do you see that you could spend the rest of the class looking at the clouds and trying to describe them?

Adler, 2000

She forces her students to be specific, personal and observant. She hones the skills necessary to choose a strong action as well as the technique of choosing itself. Later in this particular chapter, her students share their observations and she critiques them. She makes sure they are coming from the gut, that the actor is connected to them and that they are not bullshitting. It is my opinion that insisting on truth from yourself in life translates to the ability to demand truth from yourself on stage. Stella's views play in to this. The goal of these exercises is to get the actor in touch with his or her impulses.

The descriptive exercise also feeds into the idea of given circumstance. Another assignment the students had was to go out into their own lives, find and describe three different kinds of red, white and blue. They were to bring the descriptions back to class and share them. It was a test of specificity and of recognizing the world around you.

Every action takes place in a world. When I asked you to describe the reds, whites, and blues in extended circumstances, it was a way of placing them in their world. Every time we perform an action we have to be aware of the world in which the action takes place. The more carefully we can see that world, the easier it will be to perform the action.

Adler, 2000

This translates directly to imagining the world in which the play takes place. Actually, imagination is another aspect of the mind she seeks to develop.

I read this book while I rode on various modes of public transportation to and from my summer job. While reading it, I would take time to try miniature versions of the exercises she described, but I never got to try any of them in their full capacity. Still, I think just bringing the awareness of the ability to be so very specific and articulate in viewing the world around me and imagining the world of the play was helpful to me. I did not document any of my imagining, but I spent a lot of time putting pictures together in my mind of the Irish countryside, the little secluded house tucked into the hills, the long, lonely road to and from town. I imagined the discomfort of the bugs that might hide in grass that might have plagued Kate on her walks. Time did not allow me to extend these exercises to every aspect of my analysis of the play, but they at least helped clarify the circumstances prior to my entrance.

Adler moves from describing objects to describing other people. She tells a family story in which she, her brother and her father, who was basically the king of Jewish theatre in New York in his prime, would go on walks together on the weekend. Her father would grill the children on the people they saw around them and then make them mimic the other people, thus giving them an excellent basis to pull any physical external that might later serve them. I liked this concept and, again, while I was not able to dive fully into the exercise, I did use some aspects of it in creating my own character. Kate's role in the family reminded me very much of my mother's role in her family, so I tried to base some of my gestures on her movements. Observation served me very well in terms of age. Because her age was so close to Kate's and I saw her frequently, I watched Angie Joachim's, who played Maggie, movements as a basis for the age adjustments I needed to make. However, I did not rely solely on these. Angie is a dancer,

so her movement is going to be easier and far more graceful than the average person. Also, Kate's nickname at school is "the gander," which I supposed was in part because of her overly controlling behavior, but I thought could also translate in to movement choices. I watched people I saw at the gym and on the street and tried to create an amalgamation of these observations.

I think I could have spent a little more time on my movement choices. I never fully explored the idea that "the gander" might influence the way Kate moves. I tried to incorporate such movement into rehearsal and once or twice practiced it outside on my own. It never fully came to fruition. I think most of my movement on stage came from my natural patterns of movement as Kat, not Kate. If I had had more time, I would have focused more energy on this.

Adler's insistence on observation led naturally to outward focus. She speaks a great deal about the audience in teaching acting. She, and ideally, her pupils always have it in mind. In class four she makes many astute points about this.

That platform, that goddamn platform, holds you up. It gives everything you do a weight, an importance. If I walk around down here, I'm just walking around. If I walk on the stage, on that platform, everyone who watches knows my walking must have some meaning, some significance.

One of the first questions you must ask yourself is, How do you want to be seen on that platform? Would you like to be seen at your best? When you speak, would you like to speak your best?

Adler, 2000

Again, this is such a simple concept and one perhaps most people intuitively understand, but seeing it in such simple terms made a light bulb go off over my head. It just made sense. Later, in the same "class" she says

Talking goes *out*, doesn't it? You cannot talk *in*. Only demented people talk inward. You talk to be heard, to be understood. What does your hand do when you say, "Hello?" What do you do? You go *out*. Whenever you talk, you reach out OUT. OUT. It's a madness to talk in. It makes no sense.

Adler, 2000

It seems that much of her insistence might still be stemming from the frustrations she had with Strasberg, but perhaps that is because she is right. I quote her so frequently because I like the language she uses to convey these points. It made things clear to me and I found it very useful. While rehearsing *Dancing at Lughnasa*, I noticed a shift in my own awareness. I felt that I was more aware of the audience, not in a way that influenced my concentration within a scene, but in a way that influenced my performance to be sure to include them in the circle. By reading this book, I grew as an actor.

One of the most interesting and useful concepts I learned from Stella Adler influenced my acting only passively: “Actors are Aristocrats.” She insists that acting is a noble profession and that the actor must transcend to this. The actor must take pride in the self and cultivate the self to rise to the status and tradition of the art. She insists that an actor is strong and independent. She hopes that, upon leaving, her students no longer need her, because they can grow on their own. In speaking of these concepts she states that she feels an actor should never bottle his or her emotion, but rather deal with it as it comes up. The actor must give him or herself the status to believe that they have the right to express themselves freely. She does not speak of having status in the sense of having an entitlement to something grander, but in the sense that being of a higher class demands a higher level of self-cultivation. I hypothesize that Adler might have been a bit of a diva, but I appreciate these thoughts quite a bit. There are some positives to a diva attitude, because it often comes from the demand for high standards. I was so intrigued with this idea because it fed directly into my biggest weakness: my insecurities. It is true that no one is ever going to tell me that I’m a good actor, and, even if they do, I’m never going to believe it from someone else unless I believe it from myself. Whenever I began to struggle with my own confidence in this show, I would play with this aristocratic concept and it

really did make me feel more confident. It helped me stay away from as much of that off stage theatrics as I could. It saved me a lot of strife. I still have a lot more room to develop my confidence, but I can thank Stella for pointing me in the right direction.

To the Actor by Michael Chekhov

I was first introduced to the work of Michael Chekhov during my “Katrina Semester,” which I spent at Temple University. The man who taught the graduate actors studied with Chekhov himself. I joined the graduate acting class for their final unit of the semester—Eugene O’Neill. The semester in Philadelphia was very difficult for me because of the extremely stressful circumstances and the fact that I was often very intimidated by my surroundings. While rehearsing the O’Neill scene I was working on, I was having a lot of trouble breaking through my fear so that I could be available on stage. The professor guided my acting partner and me through some exercises he learned from Chekhov. He had us find a private place and imagine a single moment in the play. We were then to assign a movement to it that fit the moment. It did not have to be a realistic movement, just something that came organically from imagining the moment. After the movement was set, he had us vocalize. The exercise worked for me. I was able to connect again and, while I was still afraid, I was able to work through it.

This made me very curious about Michael Chekhov’s work, so I picked up his book. Michael Chekhov is actually Anton Chekhov’s nephew and was one of Stanislavski’s star pupils. He was a very successful actor in the Moscow Art Theatre himself. It seems he was also a very eccentric person. His acting technique reflects this. He is a very imaginative person. He speaks a lot about imagining the circumstances or the “atmosphere” of the scene. His most famous concept is the psychological gesture, which is the exercise my professor at Temple had me do. The psychological gesture is a physical manifestation of an action or a moment onstage. The

actor creates a statue with his or her body to exemplify a moment abstractly. It is a useful tool to take what an actor has in his mind and translate it to the body.

I did not use Chekhov's book very extensively in my work on *Lughnasa*. The concepts I described above were all I really employed. I tried to imagine a psychological gesture that would fit Kate's state at the beginning of the play. The image I used was Atlas holding up the world. In the hours I devoted to working on my thesis, I tried this gesture a couple of times, and while waiting in the opening tableaux, while listening to Michael, I would focus on this image to get myself in the right frame of mind.

I also used a psychological gesture at the end of the play. In *Lughnasa* Kate learns to let go. She hands control over to those around her. At the end of the play, the family gathers together in the garden for the most harmonious moment of the play. I used psychological gesture here in the pose I took onstage. I let my body relax; my arms open and at my sides and my head hung back. Manipulating my body language in this way helped me connect to the moment onstage.

I also tried to use the concept of atmosphere. I often tried to imagine the atmosphere, or the general feeling, of the space in the Mundy sisters' home. The concept of atmosphere is very abstract, but useful. There is a certain feel to a room that is filled with laughter that is distinctly different from the feel of a room in which someone just revealed very painful information. It is a question of energy and energy isn't tangible. Chekhov gives the actor a tool to try and harness his or her own energy. I found it useful when trying to understand the very tense scenes of the play as well as the harmonious final scene.

Imagining the atmosphere was also very helpful when trying to break down the various beats of the play and in trying to discern all the more logical steps to the analysis of the scene, as

is dealt with in *Handbook*. There comes a point in analysis when words no longer do the trick. One can read a scene over and over but after a while the words don't mean anything. Imagining the atmosphere and energy of a scene, rather than simply looking at the words, gives the actor a new perspective from which analysis can come.

Respect for Acting by Uta Hagen

Of all the acting teachers covered thus far, Uta is the only one not connected with Stanislavski, and yet she uses the same principles. She gives a list of questions to analyze a scene that covers the same basis the rest of the teachers cover—action, objective, obstacle and given circumstance. Uta's work served me in three ways, and gave me a fourth to consider: firstly, she was very helpful in my imaginary filling of the space. She provides exercises that are very helpful in creating a fourth wall for yourself that is helpful in terms of focus. Secondly, she places a lot of emphasis on the physical activities within a scene and pulling the behavior from one's actual behavior. The third deals with making the physical states *Handbook* talks about and making them usable onstage. The final piece of advice I tried to use dealt with entrances. In the end, I didn't use it, though, as I will explain.

When Hagen speaks about the fourth wall, she has her students imagine it in detail. They must imagine the pictures hanging on the wall, the color and texture of the wallpaper, if any. Once the space is defined, the actor stops looking at it directly. The idea is that, the more specific an actor is with his or her definition of the space, the easier it will be to "live" in this space onstage as though it were actually a house, for example, rather than a wood floor jutting out diagonally on a thrust. I completed this exercise just to see if it would benefit me. I imagined the Mundy sisters had bare white walls and windows with a dark brown trim. The lighting inside was not dim, however, but bright. There were a few objects hanging from the walls here and

there, but they were mostly practical objects, such as kitchen supplies and perhaps a cross, but they were hung in a way that made them as decorative as possible. The house was clean and lived in. The area outside was at times idyllic and at times bleak. The hills that I imagined surrounded the small white cottage could, depending on the weather and the person's state of mind, feel menacing and restrictive, or comforting and protective. In certain times of year, they would look lush, while at other times they might seem barren. *Lughnasa* takes place in August—the time of the harvest, so the grass was probably very green. Since the grass is not manicured, though, tall brown grass might be the only visible grass from a distance, which makes a fertile hill look dead. I found the exercise helpful. As rehearsals progressed, I felt more and more at home in the little set. It really began to feel as though I lived there. It helped me find a sense of ease and familiarity in the space.

One of Hagen's primary exercises is the Object Exercise. In this exercise, the actor observes his or her own behavior for two minutes in minute detail. The actor then rehearses what he or she noticed him or herself doing and then performs it for an audience. The goal is to assure that the actor has an awareness of his or her own body in space, an awareness of the space itself and for the actor to have a way to practice living truthfully under imaginary circumstances that is usable even when the actor does not have a partner to work with. This last aspect of the exercise is what makes it so interesting to me. Other than working on a monologue, how can an actor practice acting without a partner? I think this is an exercise I am going to try when I have more time. Again, time restraints prevented me from going into the full depth of the exercise, but I found that thinking about it served me well enough for my purposes. There were many times in *Dancing at Lughnasa* in which I had to find something to do onstage. I was just there. I usually turned to reading as a way of keeping myself busy, but after observing my own behavior for a

while, I realized that it was okay if I didn't always have something specific to do—sometimes people don't. Of course, this method of filling my time on stage was secondary to figuring out what I wanted in the scene and how I was working to get it. The Object Exercise is really an exercise in externals—what outward means can I use to express what is going on inwardly? This exercise gave me a specific way to fill in what *Handbook* suggests for physical activities on stage.

Another external Hagen deals with well is physical states. Her suggestion for faking states such as drunkenness and exhaustion start the same way *Handbook* does. First, the actor must identify how these states manifest themselves physically. Once this task is accomplished, Hagen brings up a very good point. Trying to focus on too many physical manifestations of the physical state is confusing and can take away from the actual acting in the scene. She suggests picking one or two aspects of the state and using those to communicate the state to the audience. I found this to be very useful advice. For the state of exhaustion required at the opening of the play, I focused on the pains it caused in my feet and the tired feeling my muscles would have after such a long and stressful day. For the moment after the dance, I focused on the head-spinning feeling of dizziness and an inability to catch my breath. This slowed my movement down. In terms of age, I focused on my joints, specifically my knees, and how they might behave after 17 more years of strenuous use.

The final bit of information Hagen discusses that I found intriguing dealt with entrances and exits. She says an actor must always give the impression that he is coming directly from someplace, rather than simply walking on. This concept does not have to be literal, but she speaks of entering backwards and provides other tricks that can give this impression. I liked the idea and created a bit for myself in which I entered in the middle of dropping a bag. I liked the

energy it gave. I ended up dropping it, though. I entered in the middle of a monologue and I thought it was too distracting. Also, I had many props to deal with and if I dropped them it would muddy my first moment on stage. Finally, the text required that I watch the imaginary boy character before speaking to him, and having a noisy entrance would have made the moment unclear. Still, I tried to keep the same energy and let that inform my entrance.

Vocal Work

Fitzmaurice and the Alexander Technique: strengthening the voice

One of the biggest obstacles I've encountered in my growth as an actor during graduate school is my voice. I have trouble filling a space, so I knew I would need to work hard to get my voice into shape for this show because the show had challenging vocal requirements. We performed the show using a dialect, which can make it difficult to understand, and the material of the play is intimate, which meant I needed to work even harder to project because my instinct would be to speak in a voice befitting that intimacy. To get my voice into shape, I used two methods I studied in the course of my graduate career: Fitzmaurice voice work and the Alexander technique.

I learned both of these techniques in a classroom setting, where the practice of the work was the focus. I do not have the same background on either of these techniques that I have on the various acting techniques I employed. One might ask why I didn't go on to research them. Honestly, I ran out of time and I already knew they worked so rather than spending the hours to look up the history of Fitzmaurice, I spent the time actually employing the practice. Fitzmaurice voice work is broken into two main parts. The first is destructuring, in which the actor works out all bodily tension and warms up the voice. The second is structuring, where the body is energized and the voice is warmed up from a fully supported, unblocked place. I like to describe

Fitzmaurice destructuring as “yoga with moaning.” Basically, the actor goes through a yoga routine and, while stretching, vocalizes from a fully supported place. The yoga warms the body up and releases any tension that might be held. In a traditional yoga practice, the breath alone supports the release of tension. In acting, we demand more of our voices than the regular student of yoga needs. Adding the voice into the routine sends vibrations through the body that deepens the impact of the stretch. Because the body is twisted into challenging positions, the breath and the voice are forced to support themselves from the deepest possible place. In order to really get anything out of it, the routine must be performed on a regular basis. A Fitzmaurice destructuring can last for hours if the actors wished it to. For my own practice, I destructured about once a week over the summer for about half an hour. Once school started, I moved it to two times a week for about half an hour. When rehearsals started, I altered it to fit with rehearsal. In the early stages, I stuck with the twice a week routine. When rehearsals got to be more strenuous, I warmed up for ten to twenty minutes before rehearsal. When the show opened, I spent at least 15 minutes destructuring before performance. For the structuring portion of the practice, I would run monologues or tongue twisters while in one of the poses. In this portion of the routine, I would incorporate dialect work. When I would begin warming up my face and mouth, I would only do so in my dialect to make sure it was sharp for performance.

The Alexander technique is much more passive than Fitzmaurice. It operates on the same basic principle: get rid of tension in your body and your voice will be freer. The method to release tension in Alexander is to simply relax. Ask your body to let it go and try to do as little as you can for each movement you are required to do. It is really a very wonderfully lazy practice. The technique is centered on alignment. The body is built to support itself and, if properly aligned, will support itself without any effort. It takes awareness to keep oneself properly

aligned, however, and this is where we find the rigor of Alexander. It requires constant awareness—on and offstage. We have to retrain ourselves to use our bodies the way they were meant to be used. One way to align the spine and release tension is in what is called a “lie down.” In a “lie down,” the individual lies on a mat or other soft surface (but not so soft that you sink in to it) and places a book between half an inch to three quarters of an inch thick under the head. The individual then adjusts the spine so that it is as flat as possible. The crown of the head moves towards the wall behind the body and the chin moves towards the chest. Meanwhile, the knees are bent and the lower back is flat against the floor. Hands lie either at your sides or on your belly. Once the spine is in a flat, neutral position, the person “checks in.” Where is the body holding tension? Checking in involves moving through each body part to make sure it is relaxed. If not, simply breathe and ask the body to relax. Don’t force anything. Once the body is relaxed, you just lie there, doing nothing. Once in this state, it’s helpful to lie there for at least ten minutes. After the body is in a relaxed state, it takes awareness to maintain it. An Alexander “lie down” is useless if the alignment is dropped once the person stands up. Alexander gives the advice “lengthen and widen,” and to imagine that the spine is a string and that the body is dangling from it.

A perfectly aligned spine is a neutral position—a starting point. From there, the actor has the choice of how the body can be adjusted for the purposes of the character. Because the adjustments are coming from a place of neutrality they can be made in the simplest way possible, so that the voice and the body are not compromised. For example, in order to play a character who is very tense and yells a lot, the actor only has to give the appearance of tension by making bodily adjustments. Giving the appearance of a tense neck does not require me to hold any tension in any part of my lower body. It actually does not even require me to hold tension in all

of my neck. I simply have to explore what it looks like to have a tense neck and figure out a way to hold myself there as easily as possible. This protects the body and the voice. To actually hold all the tension and yell and scream would injure the actor's instrument, and nothing sounds or looks as good coming out of a damaged piano.

I added an Alexander "lie down" to the end of each deconstructing, which fit in perfectly because most yoga routines end in a relaxation pose. I would maintain the lie down for about ten minutes. I have been practicing awareness of my spine ever since I learned correct alignment in class, so I was able to apply it directly to rehearsal. It was useful, because Kate is a character who holds a great deal of tension. Making conscious adjustments served me very well. For one thing, I think it made my emotions more available to me. Playing an action in a scene operates under the assumption that if you go after your objective with everything you've got, the emotion will simply come. Alexander operates the same way. You make yourself the lightning rod instead of trying to be the lightning. Because I let go and allowed the material to work for me, I was, for the first time, able to really come to tears on stage. This was amazing for me, and, in addition to that, because I had learned how to use my body more efficiently, I could cry every night without injuring myself in any way.

Was it effective? It both was and was not. I can not expect to strengthen all my vocal weaknesses through the course of one show. There were still times I became too soft, especially when I had to work against the music that was so instrumental to the story. I do think I improved. We were well into rehearsal before I got any notes on volume and when I did, I had specific ways of dealing with the problem. I struggle so much with volume because I'm unwilling to sacrifice my own honesty, which I have experienced happening in myself and witnessed in others if simply told to be louder. Regular voice practice teaches me that both the volume and the

honesty come from the same place—a supported voice unblocked by tension. I still have a long way to go in this practice, just as I have a long way to go in developing as an actor, but I think the tools I have served me well in this experience and will continue to serve me as long as I continue to practice them.

Dialect work: northern Irish

In any of the acting books I've read and any of the acting experiences I've had, only one thing is said about dialects: practice it until it is second nature. Before *Lughnasa*, I could not do an Irish accent. I began my dialect work over the summer. I first consulted with a former voice teacher of mine, my Alexander teacher from Temple, Diane Gaary. She mentioned to me she had worked as a dialect coach for the show before. She shared with me some of the influences of the Northern Irish dialect—it sounds much closer to Scottish than the typical Irish brogue one might hear on TV. She then gave me a little tutoring session, which was very challenging, and left me with a few references and a single phrase to work on, “Northern Irish is in the back of the mouth,” which was, naturally, in the dialect. She suggested a book called *The Dialect Handbook* by Ginny Kopf, which has small chapters on a number of dialects and a list of resources detailing where one might find examples of legitimate regional dialects. Many of these sources were movies. I rented several and watched them with a voice recorder. I focused on one adjustment at a time—pausing the movie and recording my adjustment. This only got me so far, so I asked David for suggestions on dialect resources. He suggested David Stern. I found a tape from a series called *Accents for Actors: Ireland, Wales, Scotland and England*, which focused on specific regions of Ireland, so I could get the specificity I wanted. The tape consisted of a poem and a Shakespearean sonnet read in the dialect. The text of the poems was included in a booklet accompanying the tape. I focused on the accent from County Derry, because it was the closest to

Donegal available. I began to learn the poems line by line, recording my voice each time and comparing it to what I heard from the tape. Eventually, I would move to the whole poem and then both the poem and the sonnet. Then I walked around and tried to read as much as I could using the adjustments I'd learned while at the same time trying to make sure my voice was supported. When I first started the dialect work, I would often accompany it with a vocal warm-up to get myself used to speaking the dialect with a supported voice. Then I started to simply talk listen with my brogue to anyone who would listen. My entire family has a Celtic background, either Scottish or Irish—my great grandmother is actually from County Donegal—and both my grandfathers are quite proud of their own brogues, so I had lots of practice. By the end of the summer I was becoming rather proficient.

I continued the same kind of practice at least twice a week once the rehearsal process started, making sure, when I felt myself getting off track to go back to my phrase, “Northern Irish is in the back of the mouth,” or my tape. I also was lucky enough to have another consultant—Trish Vitrano—who is from Northern Ireland. When I struggled with a certain word, I would turn to her for help. Adding in other actors who are also trying to work in dialect took my own dialect back a couple of steps at first. It didn't help that they were actually working with a different regional dialect. Mine would go in and out when I heard the other adjustments. One of my favorite parts in the early stages of rehearsal was the way we all worked with specific words. In almost every blocking rehearsal, at least once, the action would stop and every actor on the stage would be repeating the same word over and over again to one another. We looked like some kind of crazy group of birds. In the end, this was helpful, because everyone's efforts meshed together to form one relatively uniform brogue.

Movement Work

Fortunately for me, the movement class was offered concurrently with the rehearsal of *Dancing at Lughansa*. In class, we covered laban movement patterns, such as press, punch, swing, etc. which I often used to inform my action list if I ever got stuck. It's also helpful as a rehearsal tool, because if I felt I was getting stuck in a line reading, I would practice the line trying to employ the pattern opposite to the one most closely resembling the action I was playing in order to break myself from the habit. Having movement class directly before rehearsal also made me more aware of my body, and therefore better able to use it.

The biggest impact on my movement choices actually came from a personal lifestyle change—a regular exercise routine. This served me greatly throughout the entire process. First, it helped with memorization. I learned early on that I had more luck remembering my lines if I learned them while I was moving rather than sitting because I learned them in a state more closely resembling how I would be using them. It helped tie the words in with my muscle memory. I memorized my lines while on the elliptical trainer. It also helped with stress. The stress of researching and performing a thesis can be huge, but I was able to work that out on a daily basis because I exercised. It helped with the voice routine I was employing because it made my instrument stronger. It gave me the energy I needed to get through an entire day of work, class and rehearsal and gave me the confidence to forget my insecurities and enjoy the work. In short, it tied all the work I was doing together. My family came in the second week of the run, and, for a week, I skipped my regular exercise routine. My performance and my outlook on my performance suffered as a result. While it did not directly influence my acting choices, my exercise routine was instrumental in making the process as rewarding as it was for me.

Research

An undergraduate professor of mine used to say that plays are not written in a vacuum. In order to understand them, one must understand the world that surrounds them, not only within the play, but also in the world of the writer and the time the play was written. All of these factors contribute to creating the world of the play and are, therefore, important to understand in order to understand the play itself. In researching *Dancing at Lughnasa*, I focused on three major areas of research: The playwright, the culture of the area where the play takes place and the religious practices discussed in the text.

Brian Friel was born on one of two dates: January 9th or January 10th of 1929 in a small town called Killyclogher outside of Omagh in Tyrone County, Northern Ireland. He has two different birthdays because, at the time he was born, there was a movement started by an influential group of Protestants that discouraged the use of Gaelic names, so Bernard Patrick Friel, has two birth certificates: one dated the 9th and the other dated the 10th. Even at birth, Friel's life was haunted by themes of identity and conflicts with religion. He lived outside of Omagh with his father, a schoolmaster, his mother, a postmistress and his two sisters. His family's entire history takes place in Northern Ireland: his father's side of the family originated in Derry, while his mother's side hailed from the small town of Glenties in County Donegal. At the age of ten, his family moved from their rural home to Derry City because his father got a job at the Long Tower School, which Friel then attended. After graduating he attended St. Columb's College in the same town.

Through the course of his education, Friel came to believe that he had a calling to be a priest so he spent two years after finishing secondary school at Maynooth College, the national seminary. In the course of those two years he learned more about the conflicts he personally had

with the Catholic faith than anything else. He then decided to follow in his father's footsteps and become a teacher and spent a year training. In 1950 he began teaching in Derry. In 1952 he began writing short stories which were published regularly in *The New Yorker*. From short stories he moved to radio dramas, the first of which appeared on the BBC in 1958 entitled *A Sort of Freedom*. From there he moved to stage plays, the first of which *The Francophile (A Doubtful Paradise)* premiered at the Group Theatre in Belfast. In 1960, after teaching for ten years, he decided to take up writing full time. At first his plays enjoyed mixed success. People enjoyed them, but the critics were not in agreement about the standard of his work. Some questioned his ability. His first international success came with *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*, which debuted at and was the talk of the Dublin Theatre Festival in 1964. It debuted on Broadway two years later. Since then he has written over twenty plays, many of which enjoy much popular and critical acclaim. He has won numerous awards and has come to be considered Ireland's foremost dramatists. *Faith Healer*, considered another major, work premiered in 1979 concurrently with his play *Aristocrats*. His most notable to date is *Dancing at Lughnasa*, which premiered in 1990 in Dublin and 1991 on Broadway. Aside from writing, Friel is also credited with the foundation of the Field Day Theatre Company which produced his play *Translations* as its first work in 1980. He has also had an active political career and in 1987 he was appointed to the Irish Senate.

When it comes to giving out information about his life and his work, Friel is very elusive. He married a woman named Anne Morrison, whom he met when he was 16, in 1954 and has four daughters and one son. For a while he made it a point to live in Derry because of the loyalty he felt to the region. However, the political atmosphere eventually proved too much and he relocated to Greencastle in County Donegal. When interviewed, he generally avoids giving any real answers about himself and his work aside from speaking about aspects of his life that anyone

could relate to—such as his children and his mortgage, as he did in one newspaper interview. He once said about himself on a BBC radio self portrait. :

I am married, have five children, live in the country, smoke too much, fish a bit, read a lot, worry a lot, get involved in sporadic causes and invariably regret the involvement, and hope that between now and my death I will have acquired a religion, a philosophy, a sense of life that will make the end less frightening than it appears to me at this moment.
qtd.in Keen, 1998

In that same broadcast, he grilled himself with questions about his influences and his favorite work. He replied to himself saying, “I don’t know” and “None of them,” (Wolf, 1994). He avoids the spotlight whenever possible.

Perhaps he keeps himself out of the public eye because his plays are steeped in autobiographical information. Friel himself admits that, when writing a play, he is attempting to deal with a certain part of his past, a part that feels dark to him. Writing the play is an exploration of that experience, a way to find closure. Once the play is written, that part of him is healed and he moves on to other issues within himself. Themes of identity, language, time, memory, escapism, public life versus private life, poverty, etc. run throughout his plays. These issues stem from the environment in which he was raised and still lives. His grandparents on both sides were illiterate and spoke only Irish, so language has always been of interest for him. *Dancing at Lughnasa* is particularly autobiographical. It is based almost directly on his mother’s family and is written “In memory of those five brave Glenties women.” The names of Kate and Maggie are the same, though much about the characters differ from the actual people. The dance, however, was the actual event that spurred the writing of the play. Claudia Harris calls the dance sequence in *Lughnasa* a pure moment of theatre in her article “The Engendered Space.” She hypothesizes that *Lughnasa* was Friel’s attempt to understand the overtly sexual and free act of a group of restrained Irish women whose lives did not follow the normal pattern set for women of the time.

Knowing that Friel's plays are autobiographical helps while interpreting the character by giving clues that his other plays may be sources to help an actor understand that character differently if she gets stuck. Many of Friel's plays take place in the fictional town of Ballybeg and many of the characters have the same names. The name "O'Donnell" pops up in more than one play. One of Friel's earlier plays, *The Mundy Scheme*, deals with another Mundy family. No references imply that the families are the same families. Friel seems to be approaching his plays in this way to make the subjects universal—Ballybeg meaning "small town"—rather than attempting to create his own universe in which the stories of the Mundys, O'Donnells and other families interact. Even if the Mundys of *The Mundy Scheme* and the Mundys of *Dancing at Lughnasa* are not the same, reading the other plays could simply give deeper insight into a Friel character living in the universal world of Ballybeg and thereby help with performance.

The culture of the region in which *Lughnasa* takes place and in which the playwright spent most of his life is instrumental in understanding the world of the Mundy sisters. In 1920 the Irish province of Ulster was split in half. The eastern half became known as Northern Ireland and is a part of the United Kingdom. The western half, ironically farther north than Northern Ireland, remained a part of the Republic of Ireland. The split had a great impact on the western portion of the province. Before the split, much of the commerce in the west, which is made up mainly of small rural towns, relied on the larger cities in the east. When the split occurred the commercial relationship between the east and west portion of Ulster ended, leaving the east in poverty. The geography of Ulster is very different from the rest of Ireland. While the southern part of Ireland is marked by rolling green hills, the north is marked by craggy mountains. Travel is difficult, from north to south, so the two areas did not typically interact. Even before the 1920 split, the north was isolated from the south. When the commercial portion of the province was

taken away, Northwest Ireland became further isolated. The result of this isolation is reflected in the culture of the area. By 1936, most of Ireland had long forsaken its pagan influences and focused mainly on Catholicism. However, the privacy afforded individuals by the mountains (or the “back hills”) and the isolation of the region from the rest of the country allowed Paganism to live on in counties such as Donegal. Because of this, the region has always had conflicts between the ever growing influence of Christianity and the deeply rooted influence of the pagan religion of the area.

Kate is the sister who deals the most with the outside world and also sees herself as the caretaker for the family. It stands to reason that her focus would mainly be on Christianity—she wants her family to fit in to the scheme of the rest of the town. She also wants to protect her sisters from a religion in which people mistreat their bodies with substances and nearly burn themselves to death. Also, the existence of the conflict within the inner world of the family, stands as an example of the universality of the concept in the scheme of life in that region of Ireland.

Procedures: Rehearsal Journal

7/3/2006

In terms of prep work, not too much has happened yet. I’ve read the play again and started to wonder about Ireland at that time, ancient Irish traditions, the influence that Catholicism had on the culture, the accent, the relationships of the sisters, the influence of dance... etc. But so far it’s all been in my head. I haven’t turned to any outside sources to learn what really went on. I’d like to read the play a few more times and start doing research on all the background questions I have. I’m also planning on reading a few more acting books and I’ve begun my dialect work.

8/24/07

THE CAST LIST WENT UP TODAY!

Cast is as follows:

Kate: me, Kat Johnston

Maggie: Angie Joachim

Agnes: Lisa Picone

Rose: Chrissy Garret

Chrissy: Mandi Turner

Michael: Blake Balu

Gerry: James Yeagain

Jack: Louis Q. Barroso

ALL FANTASTIC ACTORS! I'm so excited. I know I'll be able to count on this cast to give me

A LOT to work with and I hope I can deliver the same. I know this will definitely be a learning experience. I'm very excited and a little nervous. I hope to finish my backwards and forwards analysis today or tomorrow and then start scoring it right away. I'd like to have a basic outline done by next week.

8/26/06 First Read

Charges and notes

- ⌘ off book by second rehearsal
- ⌘ Dancing: ORGASMIC. Raw and primal. Private and vulnerable.
- ⌘ Their means of escape... these ladies are a bit pent up...
- ⌘ Lots of smallness in a play with universal bigness
- ⌘ Set: warm, worn, nature, isolated—a little lone house in the hills

Questions:

- ⌘ What does it take to become a national school teacher? What does it imply to the people around her? Did she ever have to leave home?
- ⌘ War of independence: Background? What was Kate's role?
- ⌘ Dance starts after Maggie's sad story
- ⌘ Why "the Gander?" Possible physicalization?
- ⌘ When someone is around who you don't like, what do you think about?
- ⌘ "tinker, wastrel," don't heave them, flick them, maybe. Hide your hatred a bit.
- ⌘ Jack comes in shortly after first break down and says he does the *exact* same thing the people in the hills do.
- ⌘ How does Kate's first breakdown change her behavior?
- ⌘ Why does she hate paganism so much? What is behind that? Fear.

- ⊕ Rose—the straw that breaks the camels back in the first break down. Why?
- ⊕ “Atmosphere is more relevant than incident” What does this mean?

The first rehearsal went well. I have written some questions the read-through posed. I feel as though my dialect is coming along well—I was only aware of it sometimes and I don’t think my reading reflected a preoccupation with the dialect.

I tried to focus, before I started, on what I wanted and what my relationship was to the others and some interesting things happened. Emotions came out all on their own. At one point, during the first break down, tears actually came!!! I have never experienced this before in my life.

Jack’s personality was different than how I had imagined it and I found this helpful. He was far more pathetic and it was easy to connect to my new need to take care of him. I’d like to finish my second analysis, get the major points of my score outlined and get memorized this week.

Vocally, I’m noticing my voice is getting stronger. I feel the vibrations in my belly even when I’m speaking normally. I want to get a Fitzmaurice warm up in at least twice a week and I’ve been trying to focus on Alexander as well, so that I don’t restrict my voice. I have my first scene rehearsal tomorrow for my opening scene. Must look over that scene before rehearsal.

8/30/06

Blocked/worked 23 to 32 ish, up to the dance.

Relationships

Maggie: Often, if something is mentioned about Maggie or if Maggie says something it changes my mind, why?

- ⊕ I tell her the most
 - ⊕ Feel closest to her? She makes me comfortable
 - ⊕ Jealous of her and her impact on everyone? If she wants something, I want something?
- How do I behave in my own home?

First rehearsal on feet, blocked, some of the set was up. Unpacking scene. Felt a little overwhelmed by all the business—will I have enough to put away? Felt nervous when I didn't have something to put away and, also, at first, did not feel comfortable moving through the space.

Things to think about:

What do I do at home? Where in the space is my face? How do I put groceries away? Am I very neat? How quickly do I move? What do the walls look like? How does it feel to live most or all of my life in a tiny room in a tiny house with a lot of other people in it? Do I ever stare into the fire?

Once it was blocked, I felt much more at ease. I think I'm just nervous since I haven't been on stage in a while.

8/31/06

Blocked the rest of Act I

Some moments came out very naturally, all of my prep work reading and imagining the circumstances must be paying off. Even though we all had books in our hands, I was left with a feeling of family and of the beauty and tragedy in the situations. At the end of rehearsal I was barely aware of myself when I was taking Jack on a walk.

I can't wait to memorize. I love this story and this people and I want to dive in. Memorization and score are my next 2 big projects.

9/2/06 Saturday

Blocked beginning of Act I and Dance

Had some of my lines memorized for this rehearsal, which brought interesting results. I must have simply read the script 87 times (approximately, of course) so I'm very familiar with it. Once I got to the pieces I memorized, I felt free and in the moment. It felt natural and I knew

what I was going after. I can't wait to work with props and everything else. I need to be specific with Michael.

As familiar as I am with the script, I'm struggling with the score. I get caught up in how, exactly, to put it into words. However, I think I am not approaching it the right way. I'm trying to be too subjective—investing and scoring at the same time, which is exhausting. Perhaps on paperwork, an objective viewpoint would help.

We choreographed the dance today. Hearing the music and feeling the motion clarified a moment I was really nervous about making real—breaking into the dance and the big yelp. I can see why the sisters like to dance so much.

9/4/06

Act II, Block 54-64

Felt the effects of a couple of days away from the script. Wasn't able to fit as much time with the script over the weekend as I had hoped (though maybe in the end, that's a good thing). Tonight some moments were unclear, the accent was not full and my mind kept going in and out of the scene. Did not like my frame of mind. Lesson learned; always review before rehearsal.

I did, however, get to warm up before rehearsal and spent the time I was warming up focusing on what I wanted. Helpful to get me into the world of the play, not so helpful in that it wasn't specific enough, since I didn't review what we were working. I wish I had a soundproof booth. Warming up with Fitzmaurice is so noisy and weird it's hard to let myself do it. Oh well, should let that go anyway. Something occurred to me today: the performance will not be perfect. It is always growing and changing. All I can do is try to figure out each moment piece by piece and hope that the process works. I have the basis: my objectives, my obstacles, my circumstances and the actions I use to deal with all these things. From there it kind of seems like training an

athlete—need to get the character into shape. Speaking of bodies, I feel much more in mine—I'm aware yet relaxed with it. I owe that to exercise. I think I'll deem it essential for an actor. Overall, feel good with the progress but in no position to slack. Need to memorize, understanding of Act II is a little shaky, score, consistent dialect work. Though, I have to say, my dialect has come a LONG way since July.

9/5/06

Thesis hours:

Did some helpful research on Kate and her involvement in the war. While it was only mentioned in passing in the script, it gives a great deal of insight into a side of Kate I can relate to. I have to use a particularization for the stringently religious part, because I'm quite her opposite on that level. In fact, I'm usually a little angered by people with a very fundamental viewpoint. Being a fighter I can completely understand. It helps me color and relate to the religious side. She's fighting to save her families souls.

Blocked 64-71

There has been a total reversal. As good as last week went for me is how unprepared I feel this week. My accent is in and out—it's much more difficult once I'm surrounded by and hearing everyone else—I'm not as aware of my objectives and I don't feel at all as though I'm in the moment. Perhaps this can be attributed to the fact that I don't know the Second Act as well as I do the first or that the breakdown moments are still a little unclear to me. I think it is because my work is lagging for the moments I'm struggling with. I hope I can find time to catch up. Memorizing takes FOREVER! Blocking this portion was not all lost, however. I still found some things, it's just not where I want it yet. Forced a yell in the attack on Agnes. Need to investigate how I get angry or find a better "as if" to make the stakes real, or be more specific as to the form

the attack takes. I like the moment with Rose, after she comes home. That bit (beat) makes sense to me already.

To do:

1. Vocal practice every day, not just sporadically.
2. Warm up M,W,F,S before rehearsal
3. MEMORIZE
4. SCORE
- 5.

Clarified: Relationships

- a.) Chrissy (the character, not the actor): maternal relationship. She and Michael are the closest thing to babies I'll ever have. More protective of her?
- b.) Maggie: My compatriot. Always makes me laugh and is the only one who shows patience to me when I'm overwhelmed. More at ease with her.
- c.) Agnes: We are very similar and therefore we butt heads—both responsible, faithful, fighters, though she's a little more laid back. I rely on her a lot, even if we don't always get along.
- d.) Rose: ALWAYS concerned about her, but she scares me a little. I can't reason with her so I don't know how to get through to her. When my words fail, I have trouble getting through to people. I don't have the patience to take care of her the way she needs it. I'm a little embarrassed by her at times (god forgive me for sayin' it). When I snap at her I think it comes out of a desire to protect her (however convoluted that logic may seem).
- e.) Jack: Looked up to him... nearly worshipped him for a long time. He was a source of pride for the family. He taught me to take chances and to fight for what I believe in. A saint, that man. ... How do I know him now? I pity him. He's broken. He represents himself as believing something that goes against my very core, but how do I deal with that coming from my idol? I knew Jack before he left. I was very young, but old enough to remember him. I'm

waiting for him to look out for me like he once did, but it doesn't seem to be happening. He's a shell of what he once was.

f.) Gerry: I've always been a bit leery, and not just because I've taken care for Chrissy for so long. I see him with other women—I watch and hear things about town. I see he's a player, he hurt my baby sister and scandalized my family. I can understand the attraction because everyone falls under his spell, but I'm too smart to fall for it.

g.) Michael: The apple of my eye. The sweetness of my life. He can do no wrong in my world, though I'm a little frightened he'll turn out like his papa.

9/7/06

Thesis work day

Am terribly behind on score. I feel as though I know the major beats and that I know what Kate wants: respect, and for her family to be kept together (though I don't know if those are distilled enough)—but I haven't written much down yet. Every time I approach the paper, my head gets bogged down. I feel like I'm wading through quicksand. Perhaps I am pushing too hard. I tried to have the role created entirely before rehearsals started, and isn't the creation of the role the point of rehearsal? On the other hand, shouldn't I be prepared and understand the situation, at least to some degree, when I enter rehearsals. I feel that I did have that understanding for most of the rehearsals so far, but I have a better grasp on Act I than Act II. I memorized last night, at least I hope I did, here's to it sticking!

I want to take a step back and regain perspective on the play as Kat, rather than Kate today. I feel like I've been so immersed in the world of the play that it's hard to have an objective view.

Good Quotation:

“his most haunting passages lie in his characters’ inevitable reacquaintance with this world even as they acknowledge, usually silently, the next” (Wolf, 1994).

I’m looking at other student’s theses for inspiration.

Objectives for the day:

1. outline the major beats
2. Identify the given circumstances for each
3. Complete backwards and forwards analysis

Rehearsal

Blocking: end of Act II

We are now officially blocked. Now we can really start working. I must say, I love these characters. I’m so excited to live with them. We work through Act II tomorrow. I need to look over that act again. Had a nice clarification of a beat—after the Rose incident and Michael’s speech I chose to “beg for comfort,” while I was silent. It felt good. It definitely increased my investment in that moment. I think I’m starting to get the hang of actions. I needed a bit of help at one point. David helped me when I got stuck in the corner, giving me that I was trying a more passive approach to the family. I think that was useful. I had a moment, while Gerry and Agnes were dancing, where I decided to go and comfort Chrissy. I liked that. I think I’m starting to play more at rehearsal, instead of stress about being “good.”

Memorization paid off when I was trying to stop Chrissy from telling Agnes about Vera. I was able to invest in the moment and play rather than just going through the motions. Things are starting to feel real to me, which is what I’m striving for, of course. I have a feeling we’ll take a few steps back tomorrow b/c we’re dropping the books. Gotta practice lines tomorrow.

To do:

- ⊕ Look over score
- ⊕ Find some new actions for Act II
- ⊕ Look at other theses

- ⌘ Work on accent
- ⌘ Read act II again
- ⌘ Identify major intrusions
- ⌘ Run lines

9/8/06

Worked without my script today! Only had to call line a few times. Hooray! Scored about half of the second act, maybe a little more—up to Rose’s coming of age. Didn’t use much of my score at first in performance but I think it helped me invest more. I’ll have to see if I can incorporate the choices I made in rehearsal today. It did clarify some things for me— the diatribe on Jack about the bible, for example. I tried to get through to him several different ways. I liked the softer approach but I think the moment has more of an edge to it. Kate is such a hard woman; I want to work hard to emphasize her softer points. The score I did today didn’t dig deeply enough, but at least it gave me something to play with.

I think the moment with Maggie when covering for Chrissy worked well today. Perhaps a bit to large, but I gave myself that the story was completely untrue. If this is true, I need to make sure that I check and make sure that Agnes is buying it. I used that moment as a turning point. Once Chris relents, my action became to coast. She wants to be comfortable in her own home for a while because the struggle to control everything has left her tired. She gives up some of her responsibility— loosens her grip.

The relationship with Maggie is coming along nicely. She has always been able to make Kate laugh. I played on that today. Would like to find more moments like this. I would also like to focus more on the relationship with Chris. I think Chris is the closest thing Kate has to a child, where might this come out? I was fighting off tears at the end trying to hold it together. David didn’t like it. I spent a lot of time sitting tonight— what are Kate’s activities? If she is still, why?

Thought about being paralyzed after Rose's coming of age during Michael's monologue, but it lasts way too long! I was over it halfway through. What else could be happening there?

We found a workable moment with Gerry– to turn the other cheek. David told me “keep it.” Created a great awkward dynamic onstage. Another interesting dynamic with Vera's news. DH gave me the note not to thrash Vera so much, but rather to struggle to comprehend the impact this has on the family. Question: Kate is so vocal in the first Act and quiet in the second. What exactly has prompted this change and how does it manifest itself? How do I deal with my world now?

9/9/06 Act I through Dance

Had some nice moments today. Had an entrance idea– drop bag, think it speaks for Kate, foreshadows that she's going to lose control. Really I just wanted a way to enter that gave the distinct impression that I was coming from someplace.

James Yeargain said some helpful things to me today– Kate never lets anyone in, which explains everyone's attitude towards her. I think I realized this before but wasn't able to verbalize it very well. Helpful.

Focused on all the news Kate received before coming home and tried to let that inform my actions. It had the following effects:

1. Made seeing Michael more of a joy, raised the stakes for playing with him. I needed it more.
2. Informed the moments I talked about what happened in town. I needed more comfort when I was talking about the priest. here's a moment to focus on softer relationships with Maggie and Chris, does Maggie make me laugh and Chris make me smile?

3. Helped fuel tension with Rose (though this moment still needs attention) because it helped me focus on sacrifice.

Need to strengthen as if/particularization here. Need help to understand Kate's attitude towards Pagans. Feels very general right now. Gave myself that Kate is a good story teller and let that inform Bernie story. Was also the only nice things that happened to me all day. Dance portion messy, but intentions seem true there. Think it will clean up when lines are more solid. Liked the yell going into the dance, but how can it become more ORGASMIC?

Tried to connect to shock b/c of circumstances defined my Michael's monologue:

1. Kate is stunned and shocked by things out of the ordinary to her
2. She tosses her head "defiantly"
3. She's a "very proper woman."

Town gossip:

A. quinine: did not focus on what doctor said, can I let lie slip through a little?

B. Bernie's kid: outburst

C. Rose snap simpler. This is reflexive, I think. Something she immediately wants to repent.

Cross was fixed today: touch all spots, go to the left first. When comforting Maggie with the music before the dance, I need to take her in more. Liked tender moments with Jack. If Kate's goal is to have a comfortable, harmonious and respectable home must remember that is a baseline and the squabbles are coming from somewhere else. I pick a lot. Need to make each conflict varied and specific. Also, find moments of harmony and emphasize. My world is falling apart. Mark each turning point and where might it send her or, really, how does she fight it?

9/12/06

Only worked on 2 little pieces tonight: the boy scene and my monologue. David could not be at rehearsal tonight so worked with stage managers—getting lines and just running the short scenes. Had an idea for the beginning—enter crying. I think it would immediately show the circumstance that something is wrong, that something big happened in town. It also shows Kate

in a vulnerable place from the beginning, she lets the audience in before she lets anyone else in. It allows me to establish that I am trying to stay strong for these people—my family. It's so important to win the audience over somehow, because Kate can be very abrasive. I feel like I need to take every opportunity to show she's human.

It also clarifies my objective for the first beat with the boy. I need to compose myself before I go inside so I turn to the apple of my eye. It doesn't take much from him to cheer me up, so seeing him make kites could have a profound effect—that's a pretty ingenious thing for a kid to do. Anyway, was excited about the idea. Liked the turn it gave the entrance and I can't wait to see what David thinks. I feel like I'm playing the same action throughout. Why am I always lashing out? Aren't there different degrees of that? Don't I love these people? Aren't they the only people in the world who love me? Even in the direst of situation, I wouldn't act like I hated them. I must find different ways to save my family's souls aside from beating them over the head—though I think that does happen.

My first scene with the boy is the perfect opportunity to use some Stella Adler advice on working with things that aren't there. She suggests believing that they are there and making them specific so the audience will buy the convention. The set also lends itself to Uta Hagen work. We have NO walls in our house. What do they look like?

After boy scene worked monologue in lab with Melissa Elliot on my monologue a bit. This moment is where Kate bares her soul. It's the only time she lets anyone in and it changes her relationship with Maggie. Read it first for lines, which I had, and then worked it twice. The first time I focused on each bit of information and the implication of each, hoping that the consequences of the circumstance would stir something up inside me. The second time I tried

just to say it very simply. Liked some parts of that too but the stakes were way too low, but it worked for the Sweeney portion. Still must clarify this scene.

9/13/06 Run /Work Act I

- ⌘ Volume
- ⌘ General: Don't lose dialect when searching for line. Look at names (Vera McLaughlin)
- ⌘ Kneel w/ Jack for a shorter amount of time. Am blocked down there.
- ⌘ General: Just keep going when you go up on lines
- ⌘ General: Motivate blocking, just act, don't try to do director's job

Had both extremes tonight, in terms of rehearsal. I found several useful things, found some new potential choices, had many moments when I really felt like I was experiencing moment to moment reality and felt a lot of honest emotion on stage. This was the first half of rehearsal. The second half. I went up on lines I've never had problems with before. Felt lost and unsure of what was happening, had trouble focusing and was not nearly loud enough.

Rehearsal tonight was listed as running act I. We were working Act 1 on Saturday and did not make it all the way through (The first act is almost twice the length of the second act). We started with Father Jack's first entrance and worked towards the end and then we were to run it. Rehearsal started with a very strange energy. Everyone seemed tense. I think a lot of it came from the stress of getting off book. With such an ensemble play, there are so many lines to learn and it's difficult to get them all. Plus, most people were having rough days. That tension seemed to continue through the first half of rehearsal for everyone else, but I felt fine. I've clarified and articulated my objectives for the beginning of the play and I liked how it manifests itself in rehearsal. Kate wants to save her family's souls. Everything she is doing, all the nagging and the lashing out, the reminding, all of the things that seem bitchy and harsh are all actually coming out of love for them. I was really pleased with how this translated into the beats after Jack has his first moment of clarity at the end of Act I. I've been very harsh up to this point, but I don't think

that's deep enough. This is the first time Jack really has a moment of clarity and, as soon as he does, he uses his newfound lucidity to share that he regularly takes part in ritual sacrifices and reveals, whether he realizes it or not, why he was sent home. Now, when he was sharing all this I felt the strongest sense of being in the moment. I tried to hide in the background, figure out if he really meant it and take it all in. When I suggested reading to him, it was no longer a reprimand. I'm not sure how to articulate what I played, but it came from an unsure place, as though I didn't quite know how to deal with it—this was my struggle. It was as though I was a fish out of water, flopping around to get back in. I'm going to work on clarifying it, but I liked the idea. I'll keep it in the potential pile. Going back, the moment with Rose about the Lughnasa festival—Kate dismisses the subject after the initial reprimand (find new, more specific actions). Struggled with Bernie beat, the lines were escaping me for some reason. Need to clarify this part, anyway. I think Kate's a storyteller. She's very attached to the bible and she reads to Michael, which makes me think she likes stories. I've been playing on this surface level. Need to dig a bit deeper. Also has to do with Maggie? Or am I just gushing about the most exciting thing that happened to me in town. What turns this beat? Must look into it. After Maggie's Bernie story, take Maggie's hand while talking to Chrissy (small)—note from David. After the Dance. Bible moment: Felt in the moment here, too, when I was comfortable with lines. We're all kinda messy with this portion right now, but I think it's because we've harnessed the energy for it, which is high, so now we just need to clean up our business a little. Liked the turn to "you'll buy a new one," in the fight with Agnes about the wireless. Need to articulate action and clarify beat where Agnes stands up for herself.

Same deal after news about Gerry. Good energy. We'll be fine when we know the lines cold. Have tried to cap moment where I give Chrissy a pep talk. Made next moment clear. What are

my other caps? Clarify. Did well enough with cues while Gerry is outside. This is a tough section for that. Need a newspaper. Need lots and lots of clarification. Look up: Tinker, Loafer and Wastrel

Tinker: migrant, wanderer, beggar; Loafer: lazy person, wastrel: wasteful person, an idler or “good for nothing”

toff: stylishly dressed, fashionable person, esp. one who is or wants to be considered a member of the upper class.

Still need to articulate all the definite actions on monologue. Took “righteous bitch,” as revelatory and it fueled my way into soul baring.

Was very tired for second half, think that added to missed lines. Tried entrance idea, but don’t think it came across. Talked to David about it. He wants Kate strong to start off. We agreed that a moment of composure would work. Can’t take too much time, though, the act is long enough. I’ll play around with it.

Don’t like moment after we agree to go to dance. Feels generalized. I know clothes set me off (how fitting), but how do I celebrate and why? Must figure this out.

Got some new books today—one on improv for the lone actor. Want to try some exercises to help my moment to moment life. Also got a Meisner workbook and replaced my practical handbook which I lost last week at the gym. I love bookstores.

Got first volume note today. David said it hadn’t been a problem. I haven’t been warming up and focusing on my voice as much. Gotta stay on that. I guess the Fitzmaurice and Alexander have been working. I have books for both of those too. I’d love to read a little more into them for this project so I can add to what I know, but who has the time? We run Act II tomorrow and I have my thesis time during the day. Maybe I’ll read a little at the gym.

Thursday, September 14, 2006

Ran Act II today. Went well enough. I was focusing again on the softer side of Kate. It brought about some nice things. I liked how it influenced the moment where I force Rose to admit to being with Danny Bradley. On the softer side, the motivation sprang from how much pain it caused me that she went off and did something like that. It was helpful because it gave me somewhere to go. On the whole, after rehearsal, I started to miss the spunky side of Kate. I need to find a way to meld the two. Play too much on the soft side and I lose my steam. Play too much on the hard side and it's one noted. Plus Kate is a fighter, which we know because she fought in the war of independence. Added a sway at the end. Gotta clarify the ending. What do I want? Peace? My world has fallen apart. Should it be a struggle to hold myself together? I wonder if the ceremony isn't more of a turning point. What does this mean to me? I'm not there yet. I need to figure this out. I feel there is a turning point after I make up the lie about Vera's daughter. Kate's tune seems to change. I feel like there is a big exhale after that. I release control. I think I have been approaching the ceremony wrong. It's really endearing. Maybe it wins me over. Maybe it is a moment of surrender to see these two grown men dancing around in their new hats like kids. I have been ignoring the moment of the scene here. Maybe I let my guard down at the end, that's the difference. Must ask David about this. Why does the playwright say she is crying at the end? The given circumstances in the monologues say that she comes to terms with Jack's religion eventually, so maybe the beginning of that is with the ceremony. Yes, I think I have been all wrong about that. Though, it also says she is inconsolable after Jack dies and I think that is because she believes he is going to hell, so is it somewhere in between. I might be too biting when I'm talking about the uniform. David said he didn't want me crying at the end, though. This might not be one for me to figure out on my own. In the second act, is Kate

struggling to be more accepting or is she still trying to change everyone? I think she learns that she can't change people. How is she trying to survive? I think she has surrendered. Am I missing something? I'll play with it tomorrow and see what he says

Tuesday, September 19, 2006
First Run Through.

- ⌘ Do not halt show for line call
- ⌘ Fight it, get open
- ⌘ VOLUME
- ⌘ Drop at the end of bridge
- ⌘ Punch up adult, Michael too young
- ⌘ Not so mean to Rose
- ⌘ Clearer on Okawa
- ⌘ Tend to foot or something—don't get all groceries away before Jack comes in
- ⌘ "cheap wisdom" Harsh
- ⌘ DS after sweeping—throw it at Rose
- ⌘ Don't lose the energy that he is outside when I give Chrissy pep talk
- ⌘ Let Jack dancing bring me down, "ruddier than the Cherry."
- ⌘ Bring Jack DS on "Great Goddess Iggie."
- ⌘ Cloth further right at end of play
- ⌘ No swaying?

Or should I say, stumble through. I have never missed so many lines in a rehearsal as I did today. I mixed them up worse than I have. We haven't gotten our notes yet, and I'm just worried he's going to be pissed. I'm a little frustrated with myself. We are coming off of a break, we all just auditioned for the next show, we open in a week and a half, Mondays are really long days and it was our very first run through. They're usually rough. It will be better tomorrow. I hope I don't get too much to do in the office. I have my thesis time tomorrow too, but I just feel like I need all the time to devote to this as I can get right now. ESPECIALLY this week. There aren't enough hours in a day. Oh yeah, I have other classes too. Ha. Despite the bumpy road, and frustration over lines, I still think I made progress today. The Bernie scene is getting clearer and the more we do it, the freer I feel on stage. I played with nonverbals tonight and it helped me cap

a lot of beats. I was really happy with the developments in the interjecting scenes, with Gerry and Chris outside. The tension was PALPABLE. I definitely need to build them more, but I think I found truth in the interjecting beats tonight. I'm a mess with blocking. I think I change it everyday. I hope I'm not messing up the pictures. I am being bad with focus. What do my walls look like? I'm pretty sure they don't look like glass so maybe I should stop trying to watch people through them. We had an audience tonight. At least we were all in it together as a cast. We even make mistakes as an ensemble. We've got to be doing something right. Crunch time is setting in, folks. Act II was much smoother than Act I. Actually, this was our first time EVER running Act I all the way through. Had fun with the screaming in the dance. I need to drill that step in though. I know I'm doing it wrong. Maybe tomorrow afternoon I will dance the step while saying my lines. I can kill two birds with one stone. I feel so insincere with the "lift our heads" moment. MUST clarify that tomorrow. Though I think I will spend much of the monologue after praying. I like that choice. LOVED the cigarette tonight. Made such a difference to have it lit. and in my face. With the set more complete, it's starting to feel like a home. Really need to clean up grocery packing. I am out of groceries by the time Jack comes in. Maybe I will spend a little time nursing my poor feet after I shoot down the dance. Oh, but I loved watching Gerry and Chrissy dance tonight. I trampled over everyone's lines tonight in my big ole witch shoes (which I love. They are too perfect). If I ever get a spinning top and a whip, I won't know how to use it and I teach Michael how in the beginning. Maybe I'll just have to mime it. I really love this show and I love the cast. I'm so grateful to have been lucky enough to have this as my thesis, because I'm learning so much from everybody there. Will be sleeping with script under my pillow, hoping to make use of the magic of osmosis. I really want to have time, before it opens, to do some of the other exercises I want to do. I still have not finished my

score. I'm chip chip chipping away at it, though. Maybe my exercises will help me with the score. Seems so obvious.

Wednesday, September 20, 2006

Second Run Through

- ⌘ Kneel further stage right with boy
- ⌘ Think of lighting issues when reading—what are our light sources in the house?
- ⌘ Run right on @ doctor w/ Agnes—don't pause for so long
- ⌘ Inhalation on “are we going to dance?”
- ⌘ Change motivation for “Indian meal, jelly...”
- ⌘ Volume was down for breakdown, drive it more Act II
- ⌘ Bring Jack a couple of steps DS when offering him bible
- ⌘ Put laundry on chair

I don't think I called line once today, but I did drop a couple. I also realized how challenging this play really is. I 'm so proud of us. Once again, happier with Act II than with Act I. Then again, I have much less to do in it. I have so much to contend with in Act I it's no wonder it's a challenge. I was tensing up a lot, too, so I was not as focused on the moment. I was trying to force something instead of just being there. I think part of it was because I was scared that I would be dead on stage. I am so tired. I did have a nice relaxing afternoon, though, which was helpful. I keep forgetting moments worked out with David, like looking at Agnes after she comes in with the roses. Will score that scene tomorrow to clarify. Need to go back to original blocking to refresh. Am moving around randomly a lot. Love the moment where I watch the dancing from the window. Am ignoring given circumstance when Chris asks “are you tired,” when I am moving around. HELLO! What makes her ask you—flop down or something. Going to change up some moments tomorrow because I think I may be sticking myself to stale line readings Like the interjecting scenes with Gerry and Chris first meeting. I think I was loud enough all through rehearsal.

Think I'm too light with Jack about mom going to heaven. Got note that I was too frustrated with Jack, felt that. That was a moment I was forcing. Found some joy top of Act II with potential mass. We need to up the urgency when we found out that Rose is gone. What sends me off after "Great Goddess Iggie?" Maybe I should lie better about Vera McLaughlin?

Thursday, September 21, 2006

- ⊕ Heart of the show is there
- ⊕ Relationships blooming—like the stuff with Jack
- ⊕ Take the air out of the show: what is precious and what isn't?
- ⊕ Be moving on "wouldn't like to see those lads..."
- ⊕ Volume
- ⊕ "TEN WILD WOODBINE" annunciate: be clear
- ⊕ Be rhythmic while not participating in dance
- ⊕ Be sure: Everyone looks at everyone else after the dance
- ⊕ Agnes moment @ wireless in Act I: fewer pauses
- ⊕ Pre pep talk: line to Rose doesn't have to stop me
- ⊕ Nice picture watching the dance
- ⊕ Keep DS for soul bearing
- ⊕ Exhale for photograph
- ⊕ React to "walk # 4"
- ⊕ Liked "not to me"
- ⊕ "Great Goddess Iggie" more stank, i.e. throw it in his face more, be aware of the mock
- ⊕ Smaller laugh on Maggie's last riddle

Oh thank god. Today felt sooo much better than it did all week. I think what made the biggest difference for me was that, before rehearsal, I relaxed a bit. I went a couple of hours without thinking about the play, and it paid off. I also revisited with myself about why I love to do this. You could say I had my own memory play about plays past. Because this is my thesis, it seems bigger and different than other shows I've done, and it is, but not in every way. It shouldn't become too much work. I think I was losing some of the play. So, tonight, I went out and enjoyed what I did. The tears came when I wanted them and I got a note after rehearsal that some of the choices I made (or adjustment coming from notes, as the case may be) in regards to my relationship with Father Jack humanized Kate. I felt good, I like to do it, and that little set is

starting to feel like home. I don't have many specific moments today that grew, though many of them did. The main source of progress today was in my mental approach to it. Good thing, since today is our last day before tech.

Saturday, September 23, 2006

Tech rehearsal... or not

- ⌘ Carry top with me—cut down first entrance, get in quicker
- ⌘ Keep yelps, etc in dance to drive it
- ⌘ Maybe put groceries away after telling Bernie's story
- ⌘ Get down after putting broom away
- ⌘ Think up rather than down
- ⌘ Be sure to listen to Jack while folding clothes
- ⌘ Use “ugh” to get up after Jack's story
- ⌘ Minimize pacing after Jack leaves
- ⌘ Until the sway: freeze
- ⌘ Follow Lisa for Sway

Very bad news today. Two of our crew members had to attend to deaths today. One of a friend and the other of his father. Poor guy. So we didn't tech. Life happens. This is going to sound crazy, but I like tech. It takes forever and it's a long, hard day, but it forces the cast together for so long that I think it's a good bonding experience, and I've been through some bad techs. You get through it together, so it makes you stronger as a cast. Instead of having a tech rehearsal, we ran the show. It's strange how different energy is at different times of day. Just by doing it in the morning, it felt different. Not bad or good necessarily, just different. I felt calmer. I feel like the show is coming together, regardless of the setbacks today. I know several cast members are really concerned about lines, so we'll probably have a line through tomorrow before rehearsal. I have to note that it was strange to me because everyone looked to me to plan it. Maybe it's because it's my thesis. Well, I'm happy to call everyone, though I think they're all going to be fantastic. This play is really hard, so I can understand all the stress. Maybe they all just have yet to learn what I learned the other day. What did I find in rehearsal today? Well, I got

all the lines in the Agnes interrogation in act 2. Usually I get so worked up, I forget them. I like that moment, but I think I need to make the physical attack a little clearer. I think it's a bit muddy right now. I tried to put more oomph on "great goddess Iggie." I think I could still do more (probably need to go back and look at that action again) but even the small shift helped motivate my cross upstage. I tried listening to Gerry and Chrissy when Gerry first comes today. I liked it. I think I'll try it again, but I need to go back to those lines. We flubbed them a little today. I also tried something a little different with the "Gerry's decisions... godless communism speech." I didn't stammer it as much. I think she says that as a release to the tension having Gerry in the house causes. I wonder if that's right. For once she's talking about Gerry not leaving. I wonder if that's not tender. Maybe this is Kate's way of saying to Chrissy that she is okay with Gerry. I like that. I'll try that tomorrow. I can't wait for rehearsal now. Liked Rose interrogation today. I was much more aware of my struggle with the fact that this happened to my most helpless sister. I was conscious of how difficult those words must be to say. I hope it was coming across. Our charge today was an "urgency through." I tried to drive it more. It probably could be quicker. I'll try that tomorrow too. I only have the last ten pages to score. Hooray. I'm going to go finish that now and then for the rest of next week I can tweak it, and do some of the other exercises I've been dying to try. Oh yeah, and I can relax a little so I'm not so stressed out. I've been getting a little snippy.

Sunday, September 24, 2006
Second tech run through.

Notes:

- ⊕ "Identical twins' too soft
- ⊕ Annunciate on "no need for corner boy language, Christina."
- ⊕ "her whole being alters when she's happy."
- ⊕ Deride Maggie more for singing
- ⊕ "Let 'er rip" on the monologue: show some more guts

- ⌘ When Jack recognizes me, almost break into tears
- ⌘ “ceremony,” bigger jump
- ⌘ Exit upstairs to get cardigan
- ⌘ More face on Jack’s story in Act II
- ⌘ Lean with Rose putting down dead Rooster

We attempted a line through before and only got through act 1. Not everyone could come and we didn’t finish, but I still think it was productive (even if people were stressing by the end).

Overall, still feel less invested in act I than I am in act II. I think I need to keep in mind what I’m struggling against. It’s been easier to show the change, but I need to make sure the struggle leading up to it is clear. That’s not to say I’m not invested in Act I, though. There are a lot of moments I like. I did get the note to show my guts a little more during the monologue. The tears have not been coming, so I need to work that a little bit. I’ll think about it today. Do I fake crying or if the tears don’t come just spill them in another way. I like the vulnerability of crying but I hate faking an emotion onstage. I think if I collapse on the stool that’s right by my feet I could at least give the illusion. BUT, Uta Hagen has some suggestions for producing real emotion, so I might turn to some of her exercises. I know there’s something there I can tap into and I have some control over it, but it’s elusive. A lot of it has been depending on the moment before, the realization that I’m treating everyone around me like shit and that’s been muddy with lines, I haven’t been totally invested in that moment. If I have a spare moment I’ll try to do the Uta exercise. I don’t usually, so , if not, I’ll just make sure to fully invest in the scene leading up to it, rather than focusing on line flubs and if I don’t feel it coming, I’ll try collapsing on the stool and faking it. I think it would help if I drove the monologue a little more too. I’ll go back and look at my score.

I need to clean up my entrances during the monologues. My first entrance is especially muddy to me because we just changed it. I think it’s the same as the pre monologue scene. I just

need to invest and not worry so much about stealing focus. I think it's something I need to be conscious of, but it's not like I walk on super loud anyway. I'll look at the script for that and the end of Act I.

I tried to change up my actions on the bit where I talk to Chris about Gerry's going off to fight in Spain. It didn't really change her reaction so, instead of a tender moment, it became another struggling moment for Kate, but coming from a different place—I can't even extend the olive branch without people misunderstanding me (granted it's a strangely worded olive branch). I think that still works, but I'm going to ask Mandi what she thinks about that moment.

Tried to go more orgasmic on the dance now that I have the step down and there was nothing for my feet to contend with on the table. I was able to get a little out, but I know I could go more. I think I'll try and ask my sisters about that. If we all get together on it we might be able to get it to the place David wants it. Right now it's just joyous, which he said was okay and which he likes, but might as well shoot for the moon.

I've barely, if at all, worked on any class work. I feel safe putting this in here because it will be months before anyone reads this. I don't care though, I love working on this play. I'm excited for the days where, after rehearsing a show that I love and working so hard, I'll get to perform it for more than just 2 weeks. There's so much juice there I don't think I could ever get sick of this show. Trust me, if I could have, I probably would have by now. I practically take the thing to bed now as it is. I can't say it makes a very good pillow. I have to reiterate. I love this cast. I love this crew. I love this show. I'm so excited to open on Thursday and yet so glad that I still have a couple more days to make a good show even better.

9/25/06

1st dress.

Notes:

- ⌘ Check notes from yesterday
- ⌘ don't spin the top –Maybe I'll wind it.
- ⌘ vary the yelping during the dance
- ⌘ after dance, take more time to take the vulnerability of the moment and it's being exposed to your sisters in. Let Chris break it.
- ⌘ Volume anytime there is music
- ⌘ pick up cue on “righteous bitch.”
- ⌘ where's my handkerchief?
- ⌘ juice better on monologue, but don't get stuck in upper register
- ⌘ physicalize freaking out more during Jack's story: “As if he has three heads.”
- ⌘ Take more time on cross to window after Rose gets back. Struggle with the situation more.
- ⌘ Louder over radio
- ⌘ US with cloth-- crossed wrong way
- ⌘ Keep the group reach for the chicken.

Seemed to go fine. We are still having a few technical problems; we had a missed entrance at the very end of the play. Everyone seems to be at their wits end. There's something I'm not understanding though. Everyone who has come to see it has not said good job. Granted, it's not open yet, but the reactions still seem off to me. There are a lot of obligatory “Ooooooh, it was goooooood's” going around. The thing is, I don't understand why. I think it's a good show. I think we're doing well with it. I love this play and I want the audience to love it too. What can I do differently to get a different reaction? What am I or what are we missing that merits these reactions that I just don't understand. Maybe it's too long. I'll try to “urgency through it” again. I hope I'm not being too indulgent. I'm not consciously doing it if I am. I'm going to ask David tomorrow, perhaps, because I don't think I have the perspective to answer this question. I'm still having some volume issues. I want to warm up everyday, but I have to leave class early as it is just to make it for the call, so it's hard. I may use my thesis time tomorrow for breathing exercises. It might also be a good idea to take some time for myself before we start, since I am

usually working the entire day through. If I can't get Fitzmaurice in, I can at least have a lie down. I hope I'm not doing terribly. David said the other day that we were all doing great work. I believe him. Is this play something you have to live with before you like it? I have been living in this world for so long, I wonder if I even have the ability to discern whether or not the story is getting across. Then again, that's not my job. As far as my job is concerned; I can't seem to get the dance step in the moment. I'm worried about my investment. Maybe the stakes aren't high enough for most of what I do. Tomorrow I am going to "urgency through" it. I know this is a consistent problem I have and a lot of what I do drives the first act, so I need to step it up. Maybe that will help the problem. I am taking too long. At least, I can try it. Maybe Kate is a motor mouth. Not everything is precious. This play is long and if the pace is off we've lost the audience. Up to this point I have been feeling so good about it, but I'm a little worried now. Why have the responses been what they have? This is a good story. One of my given circumstances, really, is that the pace of the Irish dance music underscores the whole thing. I'm certainly not moving at that pace.

2nd Dress
Tuesday, September 26 2006

Notes:

- ⊕ Top must end up far right and down
- ⊕ Don't flop foam props
- ⊕ Sweep under the rug or someplace, not out the door
- ⊕ Go back around, back DS with broom
- ⊕ Don't lose words behind tears in monologue. Top the tears with the words
- ⊕ No throwing kite sticks—end act I
- ⊕ Let Maggie draw me into dance
- ⊕ Keep track of handkerchief
- ⊕ Great reactions to Jack's Act II speech
- ⊕ Hands on arms rather than shoulders for "Stop sniveling Agnes..."

My goal tonight was an “urgency through.” It’s funny that I mentioned this in my journal last night because I was talking to Luis Q today and he said the same thing—he feels like it’s just too casual. I think it might come down to my “as if” for the first act. It might not be strong enough. I’ll have to go back and look at that. I didn’t have much energy tonight, so it took a lot of warming up to get what I needed.

I was hoping maybe because I picked up my pace, which I tried very hard to do, that we’d cut more time off the first act. We didn’t, but David seemed happy with it. We changed what brings me into the dance, which I’m glad about. It takes too long for watching to motivate me. I guess I could have just used setting down the chair to set me off, but, instead, Maggie will pull me into it. I think that’s appropriate anyway. Haven’t really gotten to the orgasmic level with the dance, but it at least becomes about abandon.

I forgot the handkerchief again today, but I asked Maggie to get one for me, which I liked. I also collapsed onto the stool, which I think worked well. Once I got the handkerchief I actually started crying. Usually I calm myself by the time I sit down, but tonight I just kept on crying. I like that, I think Kate needs it—everyone needs a good cry once in a while. This is one of the few moments of release, it makes sense to let go for as long as possible. It also helps with Chris’s entrance. I wish I could bring myself to tears every night, but I’ve at least done it enough in rehearsal that I know what it feels like and I guess I’m reproducing it well, because my sisters say they can’t tell. As long as the audience believes it, but I’m still going to strive for real tears. If I get there in at least one performance, I will be satisfied. I liked reacting to Jack’s speech in Act II better, just as David did. Keeps the moment going and informs the moment after when I’m trying to convince Maggie how bad the situation is.

I realized something tonight. The lines at the end of act I can be informed by how disgusting the uniform is. It seemed like I was back pedaling to be so bitchy there, but I think it's an example of how she's now going to deal with her problems. I like the staring into space during and after the 3 page monologue.

Final Dress
Wednesday, September 27, 2006

Tonight is our last chance to rehearse. I looked to the other theses today to see where everyone else was the day before they opened. Most said they were ready to open. I think I could use one thing—relaxation. I have analyzed the play time and again and I think at this point, it's time to let myself just run with it. That was my goal for tonight. Have fun and be there on the stage. I think we have a good show and I just want to enjoy it. I've worked freaking hard enough on it. I feel like it went well. My energy was sapped in the first act, but I just drove through it anyway, and trying to pretend like I was absolutely fine (drama always pops up elsewhere once it calms down in one place). During intermission David came back and said he didn't think he could have liked the show more than he already did. What a compliment. I guess we pulled it off, then. I'm starting to feel the same flow with act I as with act II.

I realized something tonight. The line about the radio isn't a snap at Gerry; it's a snap at the goddamn radio that has been causing all the freaking drama in our lives. It was so much easier to motivate that. One of my favorite moments is when I interrogate Rose. The greatest moment happened in Act II. Rose got a new rooster today and the sight of it and Chrissy's wonderful ability to play with props was the most hilarious thing you could imagine. The rooster she had been using was flat and this one had wings sticking out, so when she laid it down on the sheet, she crossed the wings over one another, like she was clothing it in a burial shroud. I was

losing it by this point, but then one of the wings flopped open. The best part was, I think it fit the scene for us to laugh. I didn't laugh outright, I just sniggered to myself. Anyway, it made a nice way to end the night. I am going to laugh outright at the end. I like the contrast that has with the final monologue and I think Kate finally lets go in the end. Plus it allows me to use what's in front of me, which is funny. We won't get our notes until tomorrow. I'm so excited for tomorrow!

OPENING NIIIIIGHT
Thursday, September 28, 2006

Got several positive notes from the night before. I guess relaxing with it works. I still got a volume note, however. I went in determined to be heard. I spent more time warming up and made sure my voice was supported. I was conscious of having people hear me when I was onstage, but not in a distracting way. I think I did it tonight. I hope.

I couldn't have been happier. We were all gushing and giddy when the show ended. I felt good and I think everyone else did too. I found some new things. When Gerry comes, I think I'm going to start from a calmer place. I want to stay calm and dignified and, if Chris follows my advice, there's no way Mr. Evans will be there long. The first thing I hear is that he's terrified, which is exactly what I want. Plus it gives me some variety in those interjections. I also decided not to listen to them. I like it better if Kate can't hear them, and then I don't have to try and justify my questioning of what's going on. I like having the handkerchief. It gives me an outlet when Jack is revealing that he sacrifices things on a regular basis. I think that hearing Jack start to talk about Okawa is what shifts me in Act II after Jack starts saying mass. I've probably heard a lot about Okawa lately and, I would imagine, that, whenever Okawa is mentioned, I don't like what comes out next. I think I need to drive the interrogation of Agnes a little more so that

grabbing her feels more natural. I think I'm close, but I still feel a bit forced. I liked "lift our heads" moment better today. I'm still struggling with that moment a little. She surrenders after that, but gradually. Agnes looked at me today when I laughed. If she does it again tomorrow, I might give her a little hug.

Before the show I had to stave off the feeling that I would forget all my lines. As the show started, Michael paused a bit before launching into his monologue. As soon as he started off, I felt better. I was beaming all night after we finished. I can now say I played this role, we have officially opened.

I got feedback on the performance. One person said that he understood where Kate's bitchiness was coming from, which I was thankful to hear and that he noticed the change through the play and that it seemed to come gradually. He never wondered where it came from. Blake Balu, who played Michael, said the same thing, and added that it might make the audience more sympathetic because everyone has been in a similar situation. I'm glad that all of that is coming across, because that's exactly how I see it too.

Friday, September 29th 2006

Well, I guess you can't escape some mistakes. We had some prop issues tonight but I think we covered them really well. Overall, I think we still performed well and I'm happy to report I really cried tonight. Again, I'm happy to see my analysis and prep work is consistently paying off. I should have checked my props better. There's a little tension between some of the actors and the crew now, but I'm trying not to get involved. Mistakes happen and I didn't really hold up my end of the bargain either. A weird thing happened today though. David asked all about the ages of everyone in the show, as well as my age and Angie's age. I think I might be aging myself too much. He wouldn't tell me why he said it, but it was in my head all day. I did

my make up a bit lighter today. Though, I think Kate's 40 would probably be a bit older than Angie's 42, but I probably did look a little too old. It's hard to say since I can't see myself under the lights. I was still happy with the show. I could do this show for months.

Saturday, September 30th, 2006

Felt pretty flat for the first act, though everyone said it didn't seem it. Actually, most people were pretty happy with the pace. The stage manager commented she thought it was spot on. I could just be feeling off because I've been sure to exercise the day of the show, which gives me energy, and I didn't today, because it's Saturday. Definitely didn't cry tonight, though. Felt kind of forced. I hope it read okay to the audience. I've been focusing on being in the moment, being aware of my actions and just enjoying the performance. I could use a little more time to focus while waiting backstage for my first entrance, but I'm trying to moderate that, because I tend to think about it too much if left entirely to my own devices, and my nerves will get me. I try to think about the walk to my home in Donegal. I've picked what the bottom of my feet would feel like after a day of walking to make the exhaustion real to me, using an Uta Hagen suggestion there. I also focus on my objective. On the technical side, I listen to Michael because I don't have an exact cue. I'm feeling more and more in the moment. I don't have to work so hard to focus on what's going on onstage. I know the character's thought process and I don't have to force my inner monologue as I do sometimes. I thoroughly enjoy this show, and I think the audience is recognizing that. I don't feel like I'm picking through too many obligatory "good jobs." They seem sincere, which is exciting. My family comes next weekend and the cast party was last night.

Thursday, October 5, 2006

I planned to spend more time looking at my script in the off days than I did. Coming in, I was a little worried about the effects of the four days off, but we ran lines in the dressing room, so it was fine. Act 1 went better than it has for me. I actually cried, so I must have been well invested. I'm starting to understand what I need to do to control it. I felt really free with my actions in Act I. I knew what I wanted and felt connected. It just went well. Act II was quite a different story. It wasn't terrible for me, I just felt very out of it. I don't think it helped that there were a lot of line issues with Father Jack. It threw me a little, but Luis is great at covering and Father Jack's character leaves room for that, so, all in all, I was happy with the show. The audience tonight was HUGE and they all seemed to be really enjoying it, so that made it pretty easy.

Friday, October 6, 2006

Tonight was, in my opinion, my worst performance yet. The audience was tiny and quiet and I didn't get my normal warm up. Plus, I had a pretty exhausting day—taking my family around New Orleans, so my energy was low. I've been really active through the rehearsal process and I figured a day walking around wouldn't take any more out of me than some time at the gym... well, I was wrong. It did. I felt totally off and I think everyone else felt that too (from me at least), because all my sisters seemed angrier at me than usual on stage. Act II was better, because I felt so flat in Act I. Tomorrow is the day my family comes. I have 14 people in the audience so it's a good thing I got my bad one out of the way today. Today was also the day I was supposed to be in my best friend's wedding. Oh, and the review came out today. I haven't read it yet, but I'm told it's good. Luis and Blake got high praise, I hear, which is awesome. This is the only show I've had a big acting role in that's gotten a review, so that was a new experience. I'm sad there wasn't a little more mention of the performances of the women, since

we are the center of the story, but I am certainly not going to complain about getting a good review.

Saturday, October 7, 2006

My family was here tonight and they loved it. This made me feel a bit better about yesterday. I made sure that I got some down time today and that I was at the theatre with plenty of time to warm up. I also got a little alone time, so I could focus. It made such a difference in my performance. I was able to forget whatever was going on and just focus on the show—so I was able to enjoy it. I really cried, so all my analysis work has payed off. I'm sure my excitement that my family was there helped my energy. I wanted to do my best. Only one performance left.

Sunday, October 8, 2006 Closing Day

One more time. Today was the matinee. Matinees are weird because they totally break the normal routine. You get there in the morning and get ready when the sun is still shining. I've been in shows where the windows weren't that great and you could actually see the sunlight in the theatre. That doesn't apply here, but it's still such a different experience. Maybe that's good that our first matinee is our closing show, because it makes it more special. Plus, you can celebrate when it's done. I felt good this morning, though. Because I didn't have to go through an entire day, I could really feel my warm up working well. It was probably my favorite warm up yet. The show didn't feel any different. In fact, it felt good. I went in wanting to savor it because it was my last chance to do it. In my initial breakdown, I didn't really cry, but I did when I was sitting at the table. I felt a little disconnected in Act I and found myself wondering how actors get through doing the same show 8 days a week for a year at a time sometimes. But Act II I loosened up and I think I answered my own question. I found myself just watching the other people on

stage with me and just went along for the ride. I guess that's what's meant by being "in the moment."

Results: Assessments

After the show closed, I was bombarded with reviews, student's papers and the assessments of my professors. The main lesson I learned in reviewing all these reactions to my performance is that everyone's experience is entirely subjective. The more the assessors seemed to know about theatre, the more astute their criticism became. The published reviews were the most exciting to me simply because they were published. The goal of these reviews is generally to sell the show to people in town so I couldn't rely on those too heavily for any measure of my performance. Most of the student papers were useless to me. I had to weed through to find ten of them that made any sort of intelligent comments, positive or negative, that were useful in assessing my performance. Most of the papers seemed to be written just to be written and focused mainly on the teacher of the class, which is a dynamic I would expect to find in papers written for an acting class. The handful of papers that were of any use to me varied greatly in assessment, reinforcing my perspective that judging a performance is entirely subjective. The most useful assessments were those I received from my professors, as they had my personal growth as an actor in mind.

The published reviews were mainly favorable towards the show in general, but provided little feedback to my performance in particular. I received only a couple of lines in any of them. One mentioned that the audience always understood where Kate was coming from, which was my goal in performance, so I considered that to be one of my best reviews. Another commented that my interpretation of Kate was "not... craggy enough" (Sands 2006). In the rehearsal period I focused a lot on finding the soft parts of Kate so that she did not come across as a one

dimensional bitch. In doing so, I may have lost sight of one of her defining character traits and played the opposite too strongly, undercutting the function of the character. Focusing more on the harshness of the character might have been helpful in Act I, when trying to establish the build of the conflict. It was necessary to create the tension at the beginning of the play. Then, I could have focused on the softness more in Act II when Kate gives up control, making her arc more pronounced. Mr. Sands review provided the most constructive criticism.

The student's papers were the most painful to read. In looking at criticism, one must consider whether it is instructive, constructive or destructive. While most of the students reported that they enjoyed the show, if they did not like it, their criticism was typically destructive, which, naturally, made it very painful to read. Of the ten papers that I was able to glean any intelligent analysis from, four were negative or mainly negative and six were positive or mainly positive. I found this discouraging. I worked very hard on this show and I put everything I had into it, so to come out from this experience, which I was proud of and found very rewarding, and then have my work torn apart in these papers is very painful to go through. Reading them was my least favorite part of this entire experience and I hope I never have to do it again. I think in this portion of assessment, ignorance is bliss and for the only time in my life, I'd like to remain blissful, rather than seeking enlightenment.

It was from these papers that I had to glean the subjectivity of the experience. While two or three papers said they felt my actions were well played and that my objectives were clear, two more said that I was playing emotion and needed a more thorough analysis. I found that those writing negative comments were typically better at articulating their criticisms as well. Really, it is very difficult to gain any real feedback from the student papers. More people reported to have

enjoyed the show and my performance than reported to have disliked the show and/or my performance, so, statistically speaking, this reflects positively on my work.

After the show closed I interviewed my major professor, David Hoover, and another member of my committee with a background in acting, Phil Karnell. I asked for an assessment of my performance. David reported that he was very pleased overall with my performance and that one of my main points of growth was in my rehearsal preparation—I came in with things to try. Also, my investment or willingness to invest improved. He also commented that my dialect work was effective. David's criticism had to do with the moment with Agnes after the dance, which came across as an attack on Agnes rather than a byproduct of the tension remaining after the dance. Also, of course, while my vocal support has improved, I still have a lot more room to grow. He did comment, however, that it seems that I have the tools I need to learn that support.

I recorded the interviews on a voice recorder that lost much of the second conversation due to technical malfunctions. I know I took the advice to heart, but my evidence of the conversation is lost, so I can not provide the exact details of the conversation. Phil's main criticism was that the breakdown scene lacked credibility because the scenes leading up to it did not establish the struggle well enough—it was too easy. Also, in terms of acting in general, Phil advised me to get out of my head. Rather than thinking so much, try to just live in the moment. However, he did say that he was able to see that I had grown as an actor from the time that I started in school. Phil reported that my main point of growth had to do with my openness as an actor—I dropped a lot of the defensiveness I started with and, in doing so, made myself more available to the process.

Conclusion: Self Assessment

In going through the assessments, it seems my performance had many more weaknesses than I was aware of at the time of rehearsal and during the run of the show. I may have been looking at my work with slightly rose tinted glasses. If I was biased, however, it is only because the experience was so rewarding for me. Even if there was room for improvement in my creation, the project as a whole achieved exactly what it was designed to achieve. I grew as an actor. I honed the skills I am going to need to continue to grow as an actor and, in terms of my personal struggles with acting, my confidence has grown as a result of this show. I can look back on this experience and I will always feel good about what I did because I enjoyed the experience and I learned a great deal from it.

I agree with the criticisms from both of my professors. The moment with Agnes after the dance never did come to fruition, nor did many of the moments in Act I have the underlying tension that was needed in order to justify my breakdown. I know that my voice has a tendency to become quiet, and I know that this struggle may have several more years before it is fully resolved. As far as living in the moment goes, it is something I am working towards and, just as my voice will take time to improve, so will my ability to let my mind go and be in the moment. I know it's something I need to work on, which is another goal furthered by this project. As far as the student's criticisms go, I guess I was fortunate that the most articulate papers came in the form of criticism, however harsh. If it seemed that I was playing emotion to some of the audience members, it reinforces the fact that I still have room to grow in terms of analysis, another weakness of which I am aware. It also speaks to the ability to live in the moment. I know that one of the students with the harshest criticism came on the night of the missing props and

that my performance was influenced by the mishap. Perhaps she might have taken my performance differently if she had seen it on another night.

I was pleased to hear the positive feedback. I was satisfied to hear that, for the most part, it seemed that I was able to portray a rather hardened character with whom the audiences could relate. I was quite happy to hear that I made some major steps as an actor in terms of preparation and availability. I hope that I continue to grow.

The results of my study supported my hypothesis. I used as many methods as I could to fill in the character based on the idea that each actor will need to create his or her own custom made method. There are so many approaches to acting in the world and it is necessary that each of us must find what works for the individual. The extent to which I examined these methods in this instance is far deeper than I would delve normally, but it served my purposes in this case. In the end, that is the essential question of acting techniques: Does this technique serve me? I found some that did and some that didn't. As a result, I have a more clearly defined technique and a basis to work from as I continue to work and grow as an actor

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Appendix A: Scored Script

ACT I

When the play opens MICHAEL is standing downstage left in a pool of light. The rest of the stage is in darkness. Immediately MICHAEL begins speaking, slowly bring up the lights on the rest of the stage.

Around the stage and at a distance from MICHAEL the other characters stand motionless in formal tableau. MAGGIE is at the kitchen window (right). CHRIS is at the front door. KATE at extreme stage right. ROSE and GERRY sit on the garden seat. JACK stands beside ROSE. AGNES is upstage left. They hold these positions while MICHAEL talks to the audience.

MICHAEL: When I cast my mind back to that summer of 1936 different kinds of memories offer themselves to me. We got our first wireless set that summer – well, a sort of a set; and it obsessed us. And because it arrived as August was about to begin, my Aunt Maggie – she was the joker of the family – she suggested we give it a name. She wanted to call it Lugh* after the old Celtic God of the Harvest. Because in the old days August the First was *Lá Lughnasa*, the feast day of the pagan god, Lugh; and the days and weeks of harvesting that followed were called the Festival of Lughnasa. But Aunt Kate – she was a national schoolteacher and a very proper woman – she said it would be sinful to christen an inanimate object with any kind of name, not to talk of a pagan god. So we just called it Marconi because that was the name emblazoned on the set.

And about three weeks before we got that wireless, my mother's brother, my Uncle Jack, came home from Africa for the first time ever. For twenty-five years he had worked in a leper colony there, in a remote village called Kyanga in Uganda. The only time he ever left that village was for about six months during World War One when he was chaplain to the British army in East Africa. Then back to that grim

*Lugh – pronounced 'Loo'. *Lughnasa* – pronounced 'Loo-nah-sah'.

hospice where he worked without a break for a further eighteen years. And now in his early fifties and in bad health he had come home to Ballybeg – as it turned out – to die.

And when I cast my mind back to that summer of 1936, these two memories – of our first wireless and of Father Jack's return – are always linked. So that when I recall my first shock at Jack's appearance, shrunken and jaundiced with malaria, at the same time I remember my first delight, indeed my awe, at the sheer magic of that radio. And when I remember the kitchen throbbing with the beat of Irish dance music beamed to us all the way from Dublin, and my mother and her sisters suddenly catching hands and dancing a spontaneous step-dance and laughing – screaming! – like excited schoolgirls, at the same time I see that forlorn figure of Father Jack shuffling from room to room as if he were searching for something but couldn't remember what. And even though I was only a child of seven at the time I know I had a sense of unease, some awareness of a widening breach between what seemed to be and what was: of things changing too quickly before my eyes, of becoming what they ought not to be. That may have been because Uncle Jack hadn't turned out at all like the resplendent figure in my head. Or maybe because I had witnessed Marconi's voodoo derange those kind, sensible women and transform them into shrieking strangers. Or maybe it was because during those Lughnasa weeks of 1936 we were visited on two occasions by my father, Gerry Evans, and for the first time in my life I had a chance to observe him.

The lighting changes. The kitchen and garden are now lit as for a warm summer afternoon.

MICHAEL, KATE, GERRY and FATHER JACK go off. The others busy themselves with their tasks. MAGGIE makes a mash for hens.

AGNES knits gloves. ROSE carries a basket of turf into the kitchen and empties it into the large box beside the range. CHRIS irons at the kitchen table. They all work in silence. Then CHRIS stops ironing,

goes to the tiny mirror on the wall and scrutinizes her face.

CHRIS: When are we going to get a decent mirror to see ourselves in?

MAGGIE: You can see enough to do you.
CHRIS: I'm going to throw this aul cracked thing out.
MAGGIE: Indeed you're not, Chrissie. I'm the one that broke it and the only way to avoid seven years bad luck is to keep on using it.
CHRIS: You can see nothing in it.
AGNES: Except more and more wrinkles.
CHRIS: D'you know what I think I might do? I think I just might start wearing lipstick.
AGNES: Do you hear this, Maggie?
MAGGIE: Steady on, girl. Today it's lipstick; tomorrow it's the gin bottle.
CHRIS: I think I just might.
AGNES: As long as Kate's not around. 'Do you want to make a pagan of yourself?'
(CHRIS puts her face up close to the mirror and feels it.)
CHRIS: Far too pale. And the aul mousey hair. Need a bit of colour.
AGNES: What for?
CHRIS: What indeed. (She shrugs and goes back to her ironing. She holds up a surprise.) Make a nice dress that, wouldn't it? . . .
God forgive me . . .
(Work continues. Nobody speaks. Then suddenly and unexpectedly ROSE bursts into raucous song:)
ROSE: 'Will you come to Abyssinia, will you come?
Bring your own cup and saucer and a bun . . .'
(As she sings the next two lines she dances – a gauche, graceless shuffle that defies the rhythm of the song.)
'Mussolini will be there with his airplanes in the air,
Will you come to Abyssinia, will you come?'
Not bad, Maggie – eh?
(MAGGIE is trying to light a very short cigarette butt.)
MAGGIE: You should be on the stage, Rose.
(ROSE continues to shuffle and now holds up her apron skirt.)
ROSE: And not a bad bit of leg, Maggie – eh?
MAGGIE: Rose Mundy! Where's your modesty!
(MAGGIE now hitches her own skirt even higher than Rose's and does a similar shuffle.)
Is that not more like it?

ROSE: Good, Maggie – good – good! Look, Agnes, look!
AGNES: A right pair of pagans, the two of you.
ROSE: Turn on Marconi, Chrissie.
CHRIS: I've told you a dozen times: the battery's dead.
ROSE: It is not. It went for me a while ago.
(*She goes to the set and switches it on. There is a sudden, loud three-second blast of 'The British Grenadiers'.*)
You see! Takes aul Rosie!
(*She is about to launch into a dance – and the music suddenly dies.*)
CHRIS: Told you.
ROSE: That aul set's useless.
AGNES: Kate'll have a new battery back with her.
CHRIS: If it's the battery that's wrong.
ROSE: Is Abyssinia in Africa, Aggie?
AGNES: Yes.
ROSE: Is there a war there?
AGNES: Yes. I've told you that.
ROSE: But that's not where Father Jack was, is it?
AGNES: (*Patently*) Jack was in Uganda, Rosie. That's a different part of Africa. You know that.
ROSE: (*Unhappily*) Yes, I do . . . I do . . . I know that . . .
(*MAGGIE catches her hand and sings softly into her ear to the same melody as the 'Abyssinia' song.*)
MAGGIE: 'Will you vote for De Valera, will you vote?
If you don't, we'll be like Gandhi with his goat.'
(*ROSE and MAGGIE now sing the next two lines together:*)
'Uncle Bill from Baltinglass has a wireless up his —
(*They dance as they sing the final line of the song:*)
'Will you vote for De Valera, will you vote?'
MAGGIE: I'll tell you something, Rosie: the pair of us should be on the stage.
ROSE: The pair of us should be on the stage, Aggie!
(*They return to their tasks. AGNES goes to the cupboard for wool. On her way back to her seat she looks out the window that looks on to the garden.*)
AGNES: What's that son of yours at out there?
CHRIS: God knows. As long as he's quiet.
AGNES: He's making something. Looks like a kite.

(*She taps on the window, calls 'Michael!' and blows a kiss to the imaginary child.*)

Oh, that was the wrong thing to do! He's going to have your hair, Chris.

CHRIS: Mine's like a whin-bush. Will you wash it for me tonight, Maggie?

MAGGIE: Are we all for a big dance somewhere?

CHRIS: After I've put Michael to bed. What about then?

MAGGIE: I'm your man.

AGNES: (*At window*) Pity there aren't some boys about to play with.

MAGGIE: Now you're talking. Couldn't we all do with that?

AGNES: (*Leaving window*) Maggie!

MAGGIE: Wouldn't it be just great if we had a – (*Breaks off.*) Shhh.

CHRIS: What is it?

MAGGIE: Thought I heard Father Jack at the back door. I hope Kate remembers his quinine.

AGNES: She'll remember. Kate forgets nothing.

(*Pause.*)

ROSE: There's going to be pictures in the hall next Saturday, Aggie. I think maybe I'll go.

AGNES: (*Guarded*) Yes?

ROSE: I might be meeting somebody there.

AGNES: Who's that?

ROSE: I'm not saying.

CHRIS: Do we know him?

ROSE: I'm not saying.

AGNES: You'll enjoy that, Rosie. You loved the last picture we

saw.

ROSE: And he wants to bring me up to the back hills next Sunday – up to Lough Anna. His father has a boat there. And I'm

thinking maybe I'll bring a bottle of milk with me. And I've enough money saved to buy a packet of chocolate biscuits.

CHRIS: Danny Bradley is a scut, Rose.

ROSE: I never said it was Danny Bradley!

CHRIS: He's a married man with three young children.

ROSE: And that's just where you're wrong, missy – so there! (*To*

AGNES) She left him six months ago, Aggie, and went to

England.

wool). If we don't work a bit faster we'll never get two dozen pairs finished this week.

(The conversation must now be established that the (imaginary)

BOY MICHAEL is working at the kite materials lying on the ground. No dialogue with the BOY MICHAEL must ever be addressed directly to adult MICHAEL, the narrator. Here, for example, MAGGIE has her back to the narrator. MICHAEL responds to MAGGIE in his ordinary narrator's voice. MAGGIE enters the garden from the back of the house.)

MAGGIE: What are these supposed to be?

BOY: Kites.

MAGGIE: Kites! God help your wit!

BOY: Watch where you're walking, Aunt Maggie – you're standing on a tail.

MAGGIE: Did it squeal? – haaaa! I'll make a deal with you, cub: I'll give you a penny if those things ever leave the ground. Right?

BOY: You're on.

(She now squats down beside him.)

MAGGIE: I've new riddles for you.

BOY: Give up.

MAGGIE: What goes round the house and round the house and sits in the corner? *(Pause.)* A broom! Why is a river like a watch?

BOY: You're pathetic.

MAGGIE: Because it never goes far without winding! Hairy out and hairy in, lift your foot and stab it in – what is it?

(Pause.)

BOY: Give up.

MAGGIE: Think!

BOY: Give up.

MAGGIE: Have you even one brain in your head?

BOY: Give up.

MAGGIE: A sock!

BOY: A what?

MAGGIE: A sock – a sock! You know – lift your foot and stab it.

(She demonstrates. No response.)

D'you know what your trouble is, cub? You-are-buck-stupid!

BOY: Look out – there's a rat!
(*She screams and leaps to her feet in terror.*)
MAGGIE: Where? – where? – where? – Jesus, Mary and Joseph, where is it?

BOY: Caught you again, Aunt Maggie.

MAGGIE: You evil wee brat – God forgive you! I'll get you for that, Michael! Don't you worry – I won't forget that!
(*She picks up her bucket and moves off towards the back of the house. Stops.*)

And I had a barley sugar sweet for you.

BOY: Are there bits of cigarette tobacco stuck to it?

MAGGIE: Jesus Christ! Some day you're going to fill some woman's life full of happiness. (*Moving off*) Tchook-tchook-tchook-tchook . . .

(*Again she stops and throws him a sweet.*)

There. I hope it chokes you. (*Exits.*) Tchook-tchook-tchook-tchook-tchookeeeeee . . .

MICHAEL: When I saw Uncle Jack for the first time the reason I was so shocked by his appearance was that I expected – well, I suppose, the hero from a schoolboy's book. Once I had seen a photograph of him radiant and splendid in his officer's uniform. It had fallen out of Aunt Kate's prayer book and she snatched it from me before I could study it in detail. It was a picture taken in 1917 when he was a chaplain to the British forces in East Africa and he looked – magnificent. But Aunt Kate had been involved locally in the War of Independence; so Father Jack's brief career in the British army was never referred to in that house. All the same the wonderful Father Jack of that photo was the image of him that lodged in my mind.

But if he was a hero to me, he was a hero and a saint to my mother and to my aunts. They pored over his occasional letters. They prayed every night for him and for his lepers and for the success of his mission. They scraped and saved for him – sixpence here, a shilling there – sacrifices they made willingly, joyously, so that they would have a little money to send to him at Christmas and for his birthday. And every so often when a story would appear in the *Donegal Enquirer* about 'our own leper priest', as they called him –

BEAT 1, ACT I

- ◆ Literal action: Kate is playing with her nephew to compose herself before going inside
- ◆ Objective: I want a big fat hug
- ◆ Essential action: To cuddle with a teddy bear
- ◆ Action list:
 1. to marvel
 2. to pinch his cheeks
 3. to inspect
 4. to test
 5. to build up
 6. to bear hug
 7. to admire
 8. to hide
 9. to reassure
 10. to repent
 11. to pray
 12. to tickle
 13. to escape
 14. to entice
 15. to test
 16. to play along
 17. to let him in
 18. to nuzzle
 19. to raise an eyebrow
 20. to present
 21. to dig
 22. to demonstrate
 23. to pull
 25. to dangle
 26. to light a fire
 27. to pump up
 28. to wink
 29. to charm
 30. to hug

because Ballybeg was proud of him, the whole of Donegal was proud of him – it was only natural that our family would enjoy a small share of that fame – it gave us that little bit of status in the eyes of the parish. And it must have helped my aunt to bear the shame Mother brought on the household by having me – as it was called then – out of wedlock.

① *(KATE enters left, laden with shopping bags. When she sees the BOY working at his kites her face lights up with pleasure. She watches him for a few seconds. Then she goes to him.)*

KATE: Well, that's what I call a busy man! Come here and give your Aunt Kate a big kiss.²
(She catches his head between her hands and kisses the crown of his head.)

BOY: It's two kites.³
 And what's all this? It's a kite, is it?⁴

KATE: *(Inspecting them)* It certainly is two kites. And they're the most wonderful kites I've ever seen. And what are these designs?⁵

BOY: They're faces. I painted them.
(She studies the kite faces which the audience cannot see.)

KATE: *(Pretended horror)* Oh, good Lord, they put the heart across me! You did those? Oh, God bless us, those are scary! What are they? Devils? Ghosts? I wouldn't like to see those lads up in the sky looking down at me! Hold on now. *(She searches in her bags and produces a small, wooden spinning-top and whip.)* Do you know what this is? Of course you do – a spinning-top! Good boy! And this? This is the whip! You know how to use it? Indeed you do! What do you say?⁶

BOY: Thanks.
 KATE: Thank you, Aunt Kate. And do you know what I have in here? A new library book! With coloured pictures! We'll begin reading it at bedtime.⁷

(Again she kisses the top of his head. She gets to her feet.)
 Call me the moment you're ready to fly them. I wouldn't miss that for all the world.⁸

② *(She goes into the kitchen.)*
 Did you see, Christina? Making two kites! Making two kites!⁹
 CHRIS: Some kites he'll make.

2: Con't

KATE: All by himself... to help from anybody. ⁴
 AGNES: You always said he was talented, Kate.
 KATE: No question about that. ⁵ And very mature for his years.
 CHRIS: Very cheeky for his years.
 ROSE: I think he's beautiful, Chris. I wish he was mine.
 CHRIS: Is that a spinning-top he has?
 KATE: It's nothing. ⁷
 (MICHAEL exits left.)
 CHRIS: Oh, Kate, you have him spoiled. Where did you get it?
 KATE: Morgan's Arcade. ⁸
 CHRIS: And I'm sure he didn't even thank you.
 ROSE: I know why you went into Morgan's!
 KATE: He did indeed! He's very mannerly. ¹⁰
 ROSE: You wanted to see Austin Morgan!
 KATE: Every field along the road — they're all out at the hay and the corn. ¹¹
 ROSE: Because you have a notion of that aul' Austin Morgan!
 KATE: Going to be a good harvest by the look of it. ¹²
 ROSE: I know you have! She's blushing! Look! Isn't she blushing?
 (CHRIS holds up a shirt she is ironing.)
 CHRIS: You'd need to put a stitch in that hem, Rosie.
 ROSE: (To KATE) But what you don't know is that he's going with a wee young thing from Carrickfad. ¹³
 KATE: Rose, what Austin Morgan does or doesn't do with —
 ROSE: Why are you blushing then? She's blushing, isn't she? Why-why-why, Kate?
 KATE: (Sudden anger) For God's sake, Rose, shut up, would you! ¹⁴
 ROSE: Anyhow we all know you always had a —
 AGNES: Rosie, pass me those steel needles — would you, please? (Pause.)

CHRIS: (To KATE) Are you tired?
 (KATE flops into a seat.) ¹
 KATE: That road from the town gets longer every day! You can laugh if you want but I am going to get that old bike fixed up and I am going to learn to ride this winter. ³
 AGNES: Many about Ballybeg? ⁴
 KATE: Ballybeg's off us head. I'm telling you. ⁵ Everywhere you go! ⁶
 9 — everyone you meet — it's the one topic: Are you going to the

BEAT 3, ACT I

- ◆ Literal action: Kate is trying to make up for the previous snap
- ◆ Objective: I want my sister's trust
- ◆ Essential action: I want to rally my comrades to my side
- ◆ Action list:
 1. to level
 2. to guilt
 3. to marvel
 4. to warn
 5. to level
 6. to lament
 7. to balk
 8. to wince
 9. to whine
 10. to reminisce
 11. to spit
 12. to play it cool
 13. to present
 14. to joke
 15. to pet
 16. to prescribe
 17. to defend
 18. to reason
 19. to entreat
 20. to slip away
 21. to regale
 22. to narrate
 23. to search
 24. to involve
 25. to call for line
 26. to get into character
 27. to get into action
 28. to reel them in
 29. to swoon
 30. to indulge
 31. to break
 32. to share
 33. to snort
 34. to sigh
 35. to roll my eyes

harvest dance? Who are you going with? What are you wearing?
 This year's going to be the biggest ever and the best ever. 11
 AGNES: All the same I remember some great harvest dances.
 CHRIS: Don't we all.
 KATE: (*Unpacking*) Another of those riveting Annie M.P. 12
 Smithsonian novels for you, Agnes.
 AGNES: Ah. Thanks. 13
 KATE: *The Marriage of Nurse Harding* / oh, dear / for you. 14 15
 Christina / One teaspoonful every morning before breakfast. 16
 CHRIS: What's this? 18
 KATE: Cod-liver oil / You're far too pale. 18
 CHRIS: I thank you, Kate. 19
 KATE: Because you take no exercise. / Anyhow I'm in the chemist's
 shop and this young girl / ~~will~~ slip of a thing / can't even 23
 remember her name / her mother's the knitting agent that
 buys your gloves, Agnes - 34
 AGNES: Vera McLaughlin.
 KATE: Her daughter whatever you call her. 35
 ROSE: Sophia. 36
 KATE: 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 39
 dance, Miss Mundy. It's going to be just *supreme* this year.
 3-3 And honest to God / if you'd seen the delight in her eyes / you'd
 think it was heaven she was talking about. / I'm telling you - off 34
 is head / like a fever in the place. / That's the quinine / The
 doctor says it won't cure the malaria but it might help to
 contain it / Is he in his room? 3
 CHRIS: He's wandering about out the back somewhere.
 KATE: I told the doctor you thought him very quiet. Agnes. 4
 (AGNES had stopped knitting and is looking abstractedly into the
 middle distance.)
 AGNES: Yes? 5
 KATE: Well, didn't you? / And the doctor says we must remember
 how strange everything here must be to him after so long / And 7
 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 difficulty finding the English words for what he wants 8
 to say.
 CHRIS: No matter what the doctor says, Kate, his mind is a bit

4

confused. Sometimes he doesn't know the difference between us. I've heard him calling you Rose and he keeps calling me some strange name like -

KATE: Okawa. ⁹

CHRIS: That's it! Aggie, you've heard him, haven't you?

KATE: Okawa was his house boy. ¹¹ He was very attached to him. ¹¹
(⁵ Taking off her shoe) I think I'm getting corns in this fob! I hope to God I don't end up crippled like poor mother may she rest in peace. ¹⁴

AGNES: Wouldn't it be a good one if we all went?

CHRIS: Went where?

AGNES: To the harvest dance.

CHRIS: Aggie!

AGNES: Just like we used to. All dressed up. I think I'd go.

ROSE: I'd go, too, Aggie! I'd go with you!

KATE: For heaven's sake you're not serious, Agnes + are you?

AGNES: I think I am.

KATE: Hah! There's more than Ballybeg off its head. ³

AGNES: I think we should all go.

KATE: Have you any idea what it'll be like? ⁴ ⁵ Crawling with ⁵ cheeky young brats that I taught years ago.

AGNES: I'm game.

CHRIS: We couldn't, Aggie - could we?

KATE: And all the riff-raff of the countryside!

AGNES: I'm game.

CHRIS: Oh God, you know how I loved dancing, Aggie.

AGNES: (To KATE) What do you say?

KATE: (To CHRIS) You have a seven-year-old child - have you forgotten that? ¹

AGNES: (To CHRIS) You could wear that blue dress of mine - you have the figure for it and it brings out the colour of your eyes.

CHRIS: Can I have it? God, Aggie, I could dance non-stop all night - all week - all month!

KATE: And who'd look after Father Jack? ⁸

AGNES: (To KATE) And you look great in that cotton dress you got for confirmation last year. You're beautiful in it, Kate.

KATE: What sort of silly talk is - ⁹

AGNES: (To KATE) And you can wear my brown shoes with the crossover straps.

BEAT 4, ACT I

◆ Literal action: Kate is inventing lies about what the doctor said

◆ I want to gloss over a serious problem

◆ Action list:

1. to test the water
2. to sugar coat
3. to make sure the coast is clear
4. to seek reinforcements
5. to press on
6. to lie
7. to cover
8. to recite
9. to jump at my victory
10. to reason
11. to dismiss
12. to change the subject
13. to sigh
14. to thank god

5: cost

KATE: This is silly talk / We can't, Agnes. How can we?

ROSE: Will Maggie go with us?

CHRIS: Will Maggie what! Try to stop her!

KATE: Oh God / Agnes, what do you think?

AGNES: We're going.

KATE: Are we? /

ROSE: We're off! We're away!

KATE: Maybe we're mad / are we mad?

CHRIS: It costs four and six to get in.

AGNES: I've five pounds saved. I'll take you. I'll take us all.

KATE: Hold on now -

AGNES: How many years has it been since we were at the harvest

dance? - at any dance? And I don't care how young they are,

how drunk and dirty and sweaty they are. I want to dance,

Kate. It's the Festival of Lughnasa. I'm only thirty-five. I

want to dance.

KATE: (Wretched) I know, I know, Agnes, I know, All the same

Oh my God, I don't know if it's -

AGNES: It's settled. We're going - the Mundy girls - all five of us

together.

CHRIS: Like we used to.

AGNES: Like we used to.

ROSE: I love you, Aggie! I love you more than chocolate biscuits!

(ROSE kisses AGNES impetuously, flings her arms above her head,

begins singing 'Abyssinia' and does the first steps of a bizarre and

abandoned dance. At this KATE panics.)

KATE: No, no, no! We're going nowhere!

CHRIS: If we all want to go -

KATE: Look at yourselves. Will you just look at yourselves!

Dancing at our time of day? That's for young people with no

duties and no responsibilities and nothing in their heads but

pleasure.

AGNES: Kate, I think we -

KATE: Do you want the whole countryside to be laughing at us?

What's come over you all? And this is Father Jack's home - we must never

forget that -

ROSE: But you just said -

KATE: And there'll be no more discussion about it!

BEAT 5, ACT I

- ◆ Literal action: Kate is trying to convince her sisters not to go to the dance, after Agnes brings it up and ropes everybody in
- ◆ Objective: I want to maintain my dignity
- ◆ Essential action: To talk a friend out of a really stupid idea
- ◆ Action list:
 1. to share the joke
 2. to make certain
 3. to dismiss
 4. to reason
 5. to disgust
 6. to revolt
 7. to scold
 8. to guilt
 9. to swat away
 10. to laugh off
 11. to stand firm
 12. to reason
 13. to take it all in
 14. to pass the hot potato
 15. to celebrate
 16. to bask
 17. to stop the presses
 18. to sigh
 19. to relate
 20. to level
 21. to reason
 22. to shove off (the thought of the cost)
 23. to break bad news
 24. to panic
 25. to swipe away
 26. to entreat
 27. to beg
 28. to toss up the tennis ball
 29. to serve the ball
 30. to challenge
 31. to raise an eyebrow
 32. to make fun
 33. to shake my hear
 34. to up the ante
 35. to trump
 36. to guilt
 37. to wash my hands of this
 38. to put my food down
 39. to shut up
 40. to shrug off
 41. to warn

over/I don't want it mentioned again.
(Silence. MAGGIE returns to the garden from the back of the house. She has the hen bucket on her arm and her hands are cupped as if she were holding something fragile between them. She goes to the kite materials.)

MAGGIE: The fox is back.

BOY: Did you see him?

MAGGIE: He has a hole chewed in the henhouse door.

BOY: Did you get a look at him, Aunt Maggie?

MAGGIE: Wasn't I talking to him. He was asking for you.

BOY: Ha-ha. What's that you have in your hands?

MAGGIE: Something I found.

BOY: What?

MAGGIE: Sitting very still at the foot of the holly tree.

BOY: Show me.

MAGGIE: Say please three times.

BOY: Please-please-please.

MAGGIE: In Swahili.

BOY: Are you going to show it to me or are you not?

MAGGIE: *(Crouching down beside him)* Now, cub, put your ear over here. Listen. Shhhh. D'you hear it?

BOY: I think so . . . yes.

MAGGIE: What do you hear?

BOY: Something.

MAGGIE: Are you sure?

BOY: Yes, I'm sure. Show me, Aunt Maggie.

MAGGIE: All right. Ready? Get back a bit. Bit further. Right?

BOY: Yes.

(Suddenly she opens her hands and her eyes follow the rapid and imaginary flight of something up to the sky and out of sight. She continues staring after it. Pause.)

What was it?

MAGGIE: Did you see it?

BOY: I think so . . . yes.

MAGGIE: Wasn't it wonderful?

BOY: Was it a bird?

MAGGIE: The colours are so beautiful. *(She gets to her feet.)*

Trouble is – just one quick glimpse – that's all you ever get. And if you miss that . . .

BEAT 6, ACT 1

- ♣ Literal action: Everyone silently goes back to their tasks
- ♣ I want to let reality sink in
- ♣ Essential action: to parole the periphery

BEAT 7, ACT I

- ◆ Literal action: Maggie comes in; Kate gives her her
cigs.; Kate distracts Rose with her shoes; Kate goes
back to unpacking; hinting at others' responsibilities
and talking about happenings in town
- ◆ Objective: I want the matter dropped for good
- ◆ Essential action: to settle a rambunctious crowd
- ◆ Action list:
 1. to cut tension
 2. to charm
 3. to sugar coat
 4. to marvel
 5. to teach a lesson
 6. to belittle
 7. to dig
 8. to gloss over
 9. to sigh
 10. to stab
 11. to calm
 12. to undermine
 13. to shut up
 14. to change the subject

(She moves off towards the back door of the kitchen.)

BOY: What was it, Aunt Maggie?

MAGGIE: Don't you know what it was? It was all in your mind.

Now we're quits

KATE: (Unpacking) Tea ... soap ... Indian meal ... jelly!

MAGGIE: I'm sick of that white rooster of yours, Rosie. Some pet
that. Look at the lump he took out of my arm.

ROSE: You don't speak to him right.

MAGGIE: I know the speaking he'll get from me - the weight of
my boot. Would you put some turf on that fire, Chrissie; I'm
going to make some soda bread.

(Maggie washes her hands and begins baking.)

ROSE: (Privately) Watch out. She's in one of her cranky moods.

KATE: Your ten Wild Woodbine, Maggie.

MAGGIE: Great. The tongue's out a mile.

ROSE: (Privately) You missed it all, Maggie.

MAGGIE: What did I miss this time?

ROSE: We were all going to go to the harvest dance - like the old
days. And then Kate -

KATE: Your shoes, Rose. The shoemaker says, whatever kind of
feet you have, only the insides of the soles wear down.

ROSE: Is that a bad thing?

KATE: That is neither a bad thing nor a good thing. ⁵ It's just
- distinctive - as might be expected. ⁶

(ROSE grimaces behind KATE'S back.)

Cornflour ... salt ... tapioca - it's gone up a penny for some
reason. - sugar for the bilberry jam if we ever get the
bilberries. ¹⁰

(AGNES and ROSE exchange looks.)

MAGGIE: (Privately to ROSE) Look at the packet of Wild
Woodbine she got me.

ROSE: What's wrong with it?

MAGGIE: Only nine cigarettes in it. They're so wild one of them
must have escaped on her.

(They laugh secretly.)

CHRIS: Doesn't Jack sometimes call you Okawa, too, Maggie?

MAGGIE: Yes. What does it mean?

CHRIS: Okawa was his house boy, Kate says.

MAGGIE: Dammit. I thought it was Swahili for gorgeous.

7

7 Cont

AGNES: Maggie!
MAGGIE: That's the very thing we could do with here - a house boy.
KATE: And the batter! The man in the shop says we go through these things quicker than anyone in Ballybeg. 14

CHRIS: Good for us.

(CHRIS takes the battery and leaves it beside Margaret.)
KATE: I met the parish priest. I don't know what has happened to a that man. But ever since Father Jack came home he can hardly look me in the eye.

MAGGIE: That's because you keep winking at him, Kate.

KATE: Maybe that's it. The paper... candles... matches. 5
The word's not good on that young Sweeney boy from the back hills. He was anointed last night. 7

MAGGIE: I didn't know he was dying?

KATE: Not an inch of his body that isn't burned. 8

AGNES: Does anybody know what happened?

KATE: Some silly prank up in the hills. He knows he's dying, the poor boy. Just lies there, moaning. 9

CHRIS: What sort of prank?

KATE: How would I know? 10

CHRIS: What are they saying in the town?

KATE: I know no more than I've told you, Christina. 11

(Pause)
ROSE: (Quietly, resolutely) It was last Sunday week, the first night of the Festival of Lughnasa; 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 devil! 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? 5

ROSE: They do it every Lughnasa. I'm telling you. That's what happened.

BEAT 8, ACT I

Literal action: Kate tries to tell everyone about town

Objective: I want release

Essential Action: to fish for relief

Action list:

1. to throw the bait
2. to wait it out
3. to wiggle the bait
4. to drop it
5. to run away
6. to re bait
7. to cast again
8. to get a grip
9. to reel it in
10. to slip
11. to shove it back in

BEAT 9, ACT 1

- ♣ Literal Action: Rose starts talking about Lughnasa; Kate argues and then yells at her
- ♣ Objective: I want to protect a helpless person
- ♣ Essential Action: to save a child from getting too close to a dangerous highway
- ♣ Action list:
 1. To scoff
 2. to undermine
 3. to balk
 4. to reason
 5. to accuse
 6. to denounce
 7. to pull her back to me
 8. to back myself up
 9. to tech a lesson
 10. to lay down the law
 11. to punctuate
 12. to guilt
 13. to cross

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 ours! ⁷ And what pagan practices they have are no concern of ours! None whatever! It's a sorry day to hear it talk like that in a Christian home! A Catholic home! All I can say is that I'm shocked and disappointed to hear you repeating rubbish like that! ⁶ Rose! 14

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

MAGGIE: All the same it would be very handy in the winter time to have a wee house boy to feed the hens: 'Tchook-tchook-tchook-tchook-tchook-tchook-tchook-tchook-tee...'

(FATHER JACK enters by the back door. He looks frail and older than his fifty-three years. Broad-brimmed black hat. Heavy grey top coat. Woollen trousers that stop well short of his ankles. Heavy black boots. Thick woollen socks. No clerical collar. He walks - shuffles quickly - with his hands behind his back. He seems uneasy, confused. Scarcely any trace of an Irish accent.)

JACK: I beg your pardon... the wrong apartment... forgive me...

KATE: Come in and join us, Jack. 1

JACK: May I?

MAGGIE: You're looking well, Jack.

JACK: Yes? I expected to enter my bedroom through that... what I am missing - what I require... I had a handkerchief in my pocket and I think perhaps I -

CHRIS: (Taking one from the ironing pile) Here's a handkerchief.

JACK: I thank you. I am grateful. It is so strange: I don't remember the - the architecture? - the planning? - what's the word? - the lay-out! - I don't recollect the lay-out of this home... scarcely. That is strange, isn't it? I thought the front door was there. (To KATE) You walked to the village to buy stores, Agnes? 3

KATE: It's Kate. And dozens of people were asking for you.

JACK: They remember me? 4

KATE: Of course they remember you! And when you're feeling stronger they're going to have a great public welcome for you! - flags, bands, speeches, everything! 5

JACK: Why would they do this?

10

10: cont

KATE: Because they're delighted you're back. ¹

JACK: Yes?

KATE: Because they're delighted you're home. ⁵

JACK: I'm afraid I don't remember them. I couldn't name ten people in Ballybeg now.

CHRIS: It will all come back to you. Don't worry.

JACK: You think so?

AGNES: Yes, it will.

JACK: Perhaps . . . I feel the climate so cold . . . if you'll forgive me . . .

AGNES: Why don't you lie down for a while?

JACK: I may do that . . . thank you . . . you are most kind . . .
(He shuffles off. Pause. A sense of unease, almost embarrassment.)

KATE: (Brisily) It will be a slow process but he'll be fine. Apples, butter, margarine, flour. ¹⁰ And wait till you hear! Who did I meet in the post office? Maggie, are you listening to me? ¹⁵

11

MAGGIE: Yes?

KATE: You'll never believe it. ⁵ Your old pal, Bernie O'Donnell, ¹⁰ home from London. First time back in twenty years. ¹⁵

MAGGIE: Bernie . . .

KATE: Absolutely gorgeous! The figure of a girl of eighteen ¹⁰ dressed to kill from head to foot! And the hair, as black ¹⁵ and as curly as the day she left! I can't tell you! A film star! ²⁰

MAGGIE: Bernie O'Donnell . . .

KATE: And beside her two of the most beautiful children you ¹⁰ ever laid eyes on! ¹⁵ I wish! They'll be fourteen next month! ²⁰

MAGGIE: And to see the three of them together like sisters, I'm telling you! ²⁵

MAGGIE: Twin girls.

KATE: Identical. ³⁰

MAGGIE: Identical.

KATE: Nora and Nina. ³⁵

ROSE: Mother used to say twins are a double blessing.

MAGGIE: Bernie O'Donnell . . . oh my goodness . . . ⁴⁰

KATE: And wait till you hear! ⁴⁵ They are pure blond! ⁵⁰ Where in the name of God did the blond hair come from? I asked her! ⁵⁵ The father, Eric, she says. He's from Stockholm. ⁶⁰

BEAT 10, ACT I

♣ Literal action: Jack comes in and the women try their best to accommodate and orient him

♣ Objective: I want my big brother back

♣ Essential action: to nurse a sick person back to health

♣ Action list:

1. to falter
2. to compliment
3. to pet
4. to excite
5. to inspire
6. to reassure
7. to hug
8. to circumvent
9. to brush off

11: CONT

AGNES: Stockholm!

ROSE: Where's Stockholm, Aggie?

KATE: So there you are. **Bernie O'Donnell** married to a Swede! ³⁷ I ³⁸ couldn't believe my eyes! **But** the same bubbly, laughing, ³⁹ happy **Bernie**! **Asking** about everybody by name. ⁴⁰ (*MAGGIE goes to the window and looks out so that the others cannot see her face. She holds her hands, covered with flour, out from her body.*)

CHRIS: She remembered us all? ⁴¹

KATE: **Knew** all about **Michael**! **had** his age to the very month! ⁴² **Was** **Agnes** still the quickest knitter in **Ballybeg**? **Were** none of us ⁴³ **thinking** of getting married? **And** weren't we wise! ⁴⁴

ROSE: Did she remember me?

KATE: **Rose** had the sweetest smile I ever saw. ⁴⁵

ROSE: There!

KATE: **But** asking specially for you, **Maggie**! **how** you were doing – what you were doing – **how** were you looking – were you as light-hearted as ever? **Everytime** she thinks of you, she says, ⁴⁶ she has the memory of the two of you **hiding** behind the turf stack, passing a cigarette between you and falling about laughing about some boy called **what** was it? – **Curley**? ⁴⁷ **somebody**?

MAGGIE: **Curley** McDaid. An eejit of a fella. **Bald** as an egg at seventeen. **Bernie** O'Donnell . . . oh my goodness . . . (*Pause.*)

AGNES: Will she be around for a while?

KATE: **Leaving** tomorrow. ⁴⁸

AGNES: We won't see her so. That's a pity.

CHRIS: Nice names, aren't they? – **Nina** and **Nora**.

KATE: **Like** **Nora**? **Nice** name! **Strong** name! ⁴⁹

AGNES: Not so sure about **Nina**. (*To CHRIS*) **Do** you like **Nina** for a name?

CHRIS: **Nina**? **No**, not a lot.

KATE: **Well**, if there's a **Saint** **Nina**, I'm afraid she's not in my prayer book. ⁵⁰

AGNES: Maybe she's a Swedish saint.

KATE: **Saints** in **Sweden**? **What**! **It** be next! ⁵¹

ROSE: **Mother** used to say twins are a double blessing.

KATE: (*Shrilly*) **You've** offered us that cheap wisdom already, **Rose**. ⁵²

BEAT 11, ACT I

- ♣ **Literal Action:** Kate tells everyone about seeing Bernie in town. She updates everyone on Bernie and delivers the good wishes Bernie sent
- ♣ **Objective:** I want to redeem myself as a sister
- ♣ **Essential action:** to regale my audience
- ♣ **Action list:**
 1. to switch feet
 2. to dangle
 3. to snap to reality
 4. to build
 5. to set up
 6. to savor
 7. to cry up
 8. to impress
 9. to sign
 10. to confide
 11. to covet
 12. to pine for
 13. to paint
 14. to shake my head
 15. to relish
 16. to top
 17. to gawk
 18. to blow away
 19. to let them in on a secret
 20. to cherish
 21. to egg on
 22. to dab
 23. to finale
 24. to trump
 25. to swat
 26. to play it cool
 27. to chuckle
 28. to confess
 29. to compliment
 30. to cuddle
 31. to buddy up
 32. to squeeze
 33. to flatter
 34. to fool
 35. to share with my comrades
 36. to pet
 37. to hold her hand
 38. to drive the point
 39. to reminisce
 40. to include
 41. to pout
 42. to indulge
 43. to agree
 44. to philosophize
 45. to crack a joke
 46. to act
 47. to roll my eyes
 48. to vomit words

CHRIS: You've got some flour on your nose, 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 eyelashes 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 . . .

(MAGGIE stands motionless, staring out of the window, seeing nothing. The others drift back to their tasks: ROSE and AGNES knit; KATE puts the groceries away; CHRIS connects the battery. Pause.)

KATE: Is it working now, Christina? ✓

BEAT 12, ACT I

- ♣ Literal Action: Maggie tells her story of lost love; Kate gets Christina to turn on the music
- ♣ Objective: I want to comfort my sister
- ♣ To soothe a loved one's pain
- ♣ Action list:
 1. to create a diversion
 2. to play innocent

BEAT 13, ACT I

DANCE

Left undefined to come out of onstage action.

CHRIS: What's that?

KATE: Marconi. *a*

CHRIS: Marconi? Yes, yes, ... should be.

(She switches the set on and returns to her ironing. The music, at first scarcely audible, is Irish dance music – 'The Mason's Apron', played by a celtic band. Very fast; very heavy beat; a raucous sound. At first we are aware of the beat only. Then, as the volume increases slowly, we hear the melody. For about ten seconds – until the sound has established itself – the women continue with their tasks. Then MAGGIE turns round. Her head is cocked to the beat, to the music. She is breathing deeply, rapidly. Now her features become animated by a look of defiance, of aggression; a crude mask of happiness. For a few seconds she stands still, listening, absorbing the rhythm, surveying her sisters with her defiant grimace. Now she spreads her fingers (which are covered with flour), pushes her hair back from her face, pulls her hands down her cheeks and patterns her face with an instant mask. At the same time she opens her mouth and emits a wild, raucous 'Yaaaah!' – and immediately begins to dance, arms, legs, hair, long bootlaces flying. And as she dances she lifts – sings – shouts and calls, 'Come on and join me! Come on! Come on!' For about ten seconds she dances alone – a white-faced, frantic dervish. Her sisters watch her.

Then ROSE's face lights up. Suddenly she flings away her knitting, leaps to her feet, shouts, grabs MAGGIE's hand. They dance and sing – shout together; Rose's wellingtons pounding out their own erratic rhythm. Now after another few seconds AGNES looks around, leaps up, joins MAGGIE and ROSE. Of all the sisters she moves most gracefully, most sensuously. Then after the same interval CHRIS, who has been folding Jack's surplice, tosses it quickly over her head and joins in the dance. The moment she tosses the vestment over her head KATE cries out in remonstrance, 'Oh, Christina –!' But her protest is drowned. AGNES and ROSE, CHRIS and MAGGIE, are now all doing a dance that is almost recognizable. They meet – they retreat. They form a circle and wheel round and round. But the movements seem caricatured; and the sound is too loud, and the beat is too fast; and the almost recognizable dance is made grotesque because – for example – instead of holding hands, they have their arms tightly

around one another's neck, one another's waist. Finally KATE, who has been watching the scene with unease, with alarm, suddenly leaps to her feet, flings her head back, and emits a loud 'Yaaaah!'

KATE dances alone, totally concentrated, totally private; a movement that is simultaneously controlled and frantic; a weave of complex steps that takes her quickly round the kitchen, past her sisters, out to the garden, round the summer seat, back to the kitchen; a pattern of action that is out of character and at the same time ominous of some deep and true emotion. Throughout the dance ROSE, AGNES, MAGGIE and CHRIS shout – call – sing to each other. KATE makes no sound.

With this too loud music, this pounding beat, this shouting – calling – singing, this parodic reel, there is a sense of order being consciously subverted, of the women consciously and crudely caricaturing themselves, indeed of near-hysteria being induced. The music stops abruptly in mid-phrase. But because of the noise they are making the sisters do not notice and continue dancing for a few seconds. Then KATE notices – and stops. Then AGNES. Then CHRIS and MAGGIE. Now only ROSE is dancing her graceless dance by herself. Then finally she, too, notices and stops. Silence. For some time they stand where they have stopped. There is no sound but their gasping for breath and short bursts of static from the radio. They look at each other obliquely; avoid looking at each other; half smile in embarrassment; feel and look slightly ashamed and slightly defiant. CHRIS moves first. She goes to the radio.)

CHRIS: It's away again, that aul thing. Sometimes you're good with it, Aggie.

AGNES: Feel the top. Is it warm?

CHRIS: Roasting.

AGNES: Turn it off till it cools down.

(CHRIS turns it off – and slaps it.)

CHRIS: Bloody useless set, that.

KATE: No need for corner-boy language, Christina.

AGNES: There must be some reason why it overheats.

CHRIS: Because it's a goddamn, bloody useless set – that's why.

ROSE: Goddamn bloody useless.

KATE: Are wellingtons absolutely necessary on a day like this, Rose?

BEAT 14, ACT I

♣ Literal Action: The sisters bicker after they are done dancing

♣ Objective: I want to protect myself from judgment

♣ Essential Action: to shadowbox my nemesis

♣ Action list:

1. to scold a child
2. to condescend
3. to mock
4. to pass judgment
5. to command
6. to wring
7. to switch tracks
8. to beg
9. to gawk

14

BEAT 15, ACT I

- ◆ Literal action: Kate tells Agnes off for her disrespect
- ◆ Objective: I want her to show me some respect
- ◆ Essential action: to put a judgmental bitch in her place
- ◆ Action list:

1. to throw the gauntlet
2. to cut down
3. to call her out
4. to defend myself
5. to interrogate
6. to stab
7. to lick my wounds

ROSE: I've only my wellingtons and my Sunday shoes, Kate. And it's not Sunday, is it?

KATE: Oh, dear, we're suddenly very logical, aren't we? 3

MAGGIE: (*Lighting a cigarette*) I'll tell you something, girls: this Ginger Rogers has seen better days.

KATE: It's those cigarettes are killing you. 4

MAGGIE: (*Exhaling*) Wonderful Wild Woodbine. Next best thing to a wonderful, wild man. Want a drag, Kitty? 6

KATE: Go and wash your face, Maggie. (*And for goodness' sake tie those laces.*)

MAGGIE: Yes, miss. (*At window*) Where's Michael, Chrissie?

CHRIS: Working at those kites, isn't he?

MAGGIE: He's not there. He's gone.

CHRIS: He won't go far.

MAGGIE: He was there ten minutes ago.

CHRIS: He'll be all right.

MAGGIE: But if he goes down to the old well -

CHRIS: Just leave him alone for once, will you, please?

(*MAGGIE shrugs and goes out the back door. Pause.*)

KATE: Who's making the tea this evening? 7

AGNES: Who makes the tea every evening?

CHRIS: (*At radio*) The connections seem to be all right.

KATE: Please take that surplus off, Christina. 9

CHRIS: Maybe a valve has gone - if I knew what a valve looked like.

KATE: Have you no sense of propriety? 9

CHRIS: If you ask me we should throw it out.

AGNES: I'd be all for that. It's junk, that set.

ROSE: Goddamn and bloody useless.

KATE: (*To AGNES*) And you'll buy a new one, will you? 1

AGNES: It was never any good.

KATE: You'll buy it out of your glove money, will you? (*Thoughtful*) 3
what you and Rose earned knitting gloves was barely

sufficient to clothe the pair of you.

AGNES: This isn't your classroom, Kate.

KATE: Because I certainly don't see any of it being offered for the upkeep of the house. 4

AGNES: Please, Kate -

KATE: BUT NOW it stretches to buying a new wireless. (*Wonderful!*)

15

15: Cont

AGNES: I make every meal you sit down to every day of the week -
 KATE: Maybe I should start knitting gloves? 1
 AGNES: I wash every stitch of clothes you wear. I polish your shoes. I make your bed. We both do - Rose and I. Paint the house. Sweep the chimney. Cut the grass. Save the turf. What you have here, Kate, are two unpaid servants.
 ROSE: And d'you know what your nickname at school is? The Gander!

Gander! Everybody calls you the Gander!
 (MAGGIE runs on and goes straight to the window.)

MAGGIE: Come here till you see! Look who's coming up the lane!
 AGNES: Who's coming?

MAGGIE: I only got a glimpse of him - but I'm almost certain it's -
 AGNES: Who? Who is it?

MAGGIE: (To CHRIS) It's Gerry Evans, Chrissie.
 CHRIS: Christ Almighty.

MAGGIE: He's at the bend in the lane.
 CHRIS: Oh, Jesus Christ Almighty.

(The news throws the sisters into chaos. Only CHRIS stands absolutely still, too shocked to move. AGNES picks up her knitting and works with excessive concentration. ROSE and MAGGIE change their footwear. Everybody dashes about in confusion - peering into the tiny mirror, bumping into one another, peeping out the window, combing hair. During all this hectic activity they talk over each other and weave around the immobile CHRIS. The lines overlap.)

KATE: How dare Mr Evans show his face here. 1
 MAGGIE: He wants to see his son, doesn't he?

KATE: There's no welcome for that creature here. 2
 ROSE: Who hid my Sunday shoes?

MAGGIE: We'll have to give him his tea.
 KATE: I don't see why we should. 3

MAGGIE: And there's nothing in the house.
 KATE: No business at all coming here and upsetting everybody. 4

ROSE: You're right, Kate. I hate him!
 MAGGIE: Has anybody got spare shoelaces?

KATE: Look at the state of that floor. 5
 MAGGIE: Maybe he just wants to meet Father Jack.

KATE: Father Jack may have something to say to Mr Evans (Of the ironing) Agnes, put those clothes away. 7

BEAT 16, ACT I

♣ Literal Action: The women run around trying to fix up the house before Gerry gets there

♣ Objective: I want that creature to stop hurting my family

♣ Essential action: To rally the troops against the enemy

♣ Action list

1. to comprehend
2. to laugh off
3. to challenge
4. to convince
5. to lament
6. to relish
7. to entreat
8. to reassure
9. to stop
10. to prepare
11. to snap
12. to investigate
13. to make fun
14. to clench
15. to counsel
16. to play to her point of view
17. To convince
18. to soothe
19. to build up
20. to ground
21. to simplify
22. to encourage
23. to command
24. to reassure
25. to pet
26. to acquiesce
27. to spit
28. to hug
29. to lay down the law
30. to compose myself
31. to beg

knitting.)

MAGGIE: My Woodbine! Where's my Woodbine?

ROSE: He won't stay the night, Kate, will he?

KATE: He most certainly won't stay the night in this house! 8

MAGGIE: Have you a piece of cord, Aggie? Anybody got a bit of twine? 9

KATE: Behave quite normally. Be very calm and very dignified. 10

Stop peeping out, Rose! 11

ROSE: (At window) There's nobody coming at all.

(Silence. Then AGNES puts down her knitting, rushes to the window, pushes ROSE aside and looks out.)

AGNES: Let me see.

ROSE: You imagined it, Maggie.

CHRIS: Oh God.

ROSE: He's not there at all.

AGNES: (Softly) Yes, he is. Maggie's right. There he is.

ROSE: Show me.

KATE: Has he a walking stick? 12

ROSE: Yes.

KATE: And a straw hat? 13

ROSE: Yes.

KATE: It's Mr Evans all right. 14

AGNES: Yes. There he is.

CHRIS: Oh sweet God – look at the state of me – what'll I say to him? – how close is he?

ROSE: I couldn't look that man in the face. I just hate him – hate him!

KATE: That's a very unchristian thing to say, Rose! (As ROSE rushes off) There's no luck in talk like that! 15

CHRIS: Look at my hands, Kate – I'm shaking.

(KATE catches her shoulders.) 16

KATE: You are not shaking. You are perfectly calm and you are looking beautiful and what you are going to do is this. You'll meet him outside. You'll tell him his son is healthy and happy.

And then you'll send him packing – yourself and Michael are managing quite well without him – as you always have. 17

(CHRIS does not move. She is about to cry. KATE now takes her in her arms.) 18

Of course ask him in. And give the creature his tea. And stay 19

25

the night if he wants to. *(Firm again)* But in the outside loft.
And alone.

Now. I brought a newspaper home with me. Did anybody
see where I left it? *30*

*(CHRIS now rushes to the mirror and adroitly adjusts her hair and
her clothes.)*

AGNES: Where is he, Maggie?

MAGGIE: In the garden.

KATE: Agnes, did you see where I left the paper? *31*

MAGGIE: It's on the turf box, Kate.

*(KATE reads the paper – or pretends to. AGNES sits beside the
radio and knits with total concentration. MAGGIE stands at the
side of the garden window. GERRY EVANS enters left, his step
jaunty, swinging his cane, his straw hat well back on his head.
He knows he is being watched. Although he is very ill at ease the
smile never leaves his face. CHRIS goes out to the garden where
they meet. GERRY has an English accent.)*

GERRY: How are you, Chrissie? Great to see you.

CHRIS: Hello, Gerry.

GERRY: And how have you been for the past six months?

CHRIS: Thirteen months.

GERRY: Thirteen? Never!

CHRIS: July last year; July the seventh.

GERRY: Wow-wow-wow-wow. Where does the time go? Thirteen
months? Phew! A dozen times – two dozen times I planned a
visit and then something turned up and I couldn't get away.

CHRIS: Well, you're here now.

GERRY: Certainly am. And that was a bit of good fortune. Last
night in a bar in Sligo. Bump into this chappie with a brand
new Morris Cowley who lets slip that he's heading for
Ballybeg in the morning. Ballybeg? Something familiar
about that name! So. Here I am. In the flesh. As a matter of
interest. Bit of good luck that, wasn't it?

CHRIS: Yes.

GERRY: He just let it slip. And here I am. Oh, yes, wonderful
luck.

CHRIS: Yes.

(Pause.)

MAGGIE: Looks terrified, the poor fella.

BEAT 17, ACT I

♣ Literal Action: Kate waits inside while Chris is outside
with Gerry

♣ Objective: I want to send Gerry packing

♣ Essential Action: to wait out a loathsome presence

♣ Action list:

1. to swat
2. to puff up
3. to pinch
4. to check in
5. to wring
6. to float
7. to mock
8. to snort
9. to shove
10. to shrug off
11. to gape
12. to lay out the
facts
13. to hiss
14. to pop
15. to shake off
16. to bang my chest
17. to pace
18. to dig my nails
19. to rear back
20. to reprimand
21. to pounce
22. to dud
23. to whine
24. to melt
25. to convince myself
26. to swoon
27. to indulge
28. to brag

17: Cont

KATE: Terrified, my foot. 1
MAGGIE: Come here till you see him. Aggie.
AGNES: Not just now.
MAGGIE: I'm sure he could do with a good meal. 3
KATE: I'll give him three minutes. Then if she doesn't hunt him, I will.
GERRY: You're looking wonderful, Chrissie. Really great.
Terrific.
CHRIS: My hair's like a whin-bush.
GERRY: Looks lovely to me.
CHRIS: Maggie's going to wash it tonight.
GERRY: And how's Maggie?
CHRIS: Fine.
GERRY: And Rose and Kate?
CHRIS: Grand.
GERRY: And Agnes?
CHRIS: Everybody's well, thanks.
GERRY: Tell her I was asking for her – Agnes.
CHRIS: I would ask you in but the place is –
GERRY: No, no, some other time; thanks all the same. The old schedule's a bit tight today. And the chappie who gave me the lift tells me Father Jack's home.
CHRIS: Just a few weeks ago.
GERRY: All the way from Africa.
CHRIS: Yes.
GERRY: Safe and sound.
CHRIS: Yes.
GERRY: Terrific.
CHRIS: Yes.
GERRY: Lucky man.
CHRIS: Yes. _____
(GERRY uses the cane as a golf club and swings.)
GERRY: Must take up some exercise. Putting on too much weight.
KATE: He's not still there, is he? 4
MAGGIE: Yes.
KATE: Doing what, in God's name?
MAGGIE: Talking. 5
KATE: Would someone please tell me what they have to say to each other? 6

17:cont

MAGGIE: He's Michael's father, Kate.
KATE: That's a responsibility never burdened Mr Evans.
CHRIS: A commercial traveller called into Kate's school last Easter. He had met you somewhere in Dublin. He had some stupid story about you giving dancing lessons up there.
GERRY: He was right.
CHRIS: He was not, Gerry!
GERRY: Cross the old ticker.
CHRIS: Real lessons?
GERRY: All last winter.
CHRIS: What sort of dancing?
GERRY: 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 prouette.*) 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

17
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.

CHRIS: Michael?

GERRY: Pretend you don't notice. Just carry on. This all his stuff?

CHRIS: He's making kites if you don't mind.

GERRY: Unbelievable. Got a glimpse of him down at the foot of the lane. He is just enormous.

CHRIS: He's at school, you know.

GERRY: Never! Wow-wow-wow. Since when?

CHRIS: Since Christmas. Kate got him in early.

GERRY: Fabulous. And he likes it?

CHRIS: He doesn't say much.

GERRY: He loves it. He adores it. They all love school nowadays. And he'll be brilliant at school. Actually I intended bringing him something small -

CHRIS: No, no; his aunts have him -

GERRY: Just a token, really. As a matter of interest I was looking at a bicycle in Kilkenny last Monday. But they only had it in blue and I thought black might be more - you know - manly. They took my name and all. Call next time I'm down there. Are you busy yourself?

CHRIS: Oh, the usual - housework - looking after his lordship.

GERRY: Wonderful.

CHRIS: Give Agnes and Rose a hand at their knitting. The odd bit of sewing. Pity you don't sell sewing-machines.

GERRY: That's an idea! Do the two jobs together! Make an absolute fortune. You have the most unbelievable business head, Chrissie. Never met anything like it.

(*She laughs.*)

What are you laughing at?

MAGGIE: You should see the way she's looking at him – you'd think he was the biggest toff in the world.

KATE: Tinker, ^{more} likely! ~~L~~o^ofer! ~~W~~astrel!

MAGGIE: She knows all that, too.

KATE: ~~T~~ob? ^{That's all there is.}

MAGGIE: Come over till you see them, Agnes.

AGNES: Not just now.

GERRY: You'd never guess what I met on the road out from the town. Talk about good luck! A cow with a single horn coming straight out of the middle of its forehead.

CHRIS: You never did!

GERRY: As God is my judge. Walking along by itself. Nobody near it.

CHRIS: Gerry –

GERRY: And just as I was passing it, it stopped and looked me straight in the eye.

CHRIS: That was no cow you met – that was a unicorn.

GERRY: Go ahead and mock. A unicorn has the body of a horse. This was a cow – a perfectly ordinary brown cow except that it had a single horn just here. Would I tell you a lie?

(CHRIS laughs.)

Go ahead. Laugh. But that's what I saw. Wasn't that a spot of good luck?

CHRIS: Was it?

GERRY: A cow with a single horn? Oh, yes, that must be a good omen. How many cows like that have you ever met?

CHRIS: Thousands. Millions.

GERRY: Stop that! I'm sure it's the only one in Ireland; maybe the only one in the world. And I met it on the road to Ballybeg. And it winked at me.

CHRIS: You never mentioned that.

GERRY: What?

CHRIS: That it winked at you.

GERRY: Unbelievable. That's what made it all so mysterious. Oh, yes, that must be a fabulous omen. Maybe this week I'm going to sell a gramophone or two after all.

CHRIS: But I thought you – ?

GERRY: Look! A single magpie! That's definitely a bad omen – one for sorrow. (His stick as a gun) Bang! Missed. (Mock

serious) Where's my lucky cow? Come back, brown cow, come back!

(They both laugh.)

KATE: They're not still talking, are they?

MAGGIE: Laughing. She laughs all the time with him. D'you hear them, Aggie?

AGNES: Yes.

KATE: Laughing? Absolutely beyond my comprehension.

AGNES: Like so many things, Kate.

KATE: Two more minutes and Mr Evans is going to talk to me.
Laughing? Hah!

GERRY: Thinking of going away for a while, Chrissie.

CHRIS: Where to?

GERRY: But I'll come back to say goodbye first.

CHRIS: Are you going home to Wales?

GERRY: Wales isn't my home any more. My home is here – well, Ireland. To Spain – as a matter of interest. Just for a short while.

CHRIS: To sell gramophones?

GERRY: Good God, no! (*Laughs.*) You'll never believe this – to do a spot of fighting. With the International Brigade. A company leaves in a few weeks. Bit ridiculous, isn't it? But you know old Gerry when the blood's up – bang-bang-bang! – missing everybody.

CHRIS: Are you serious?

GERRY: Bit surprised myself – as a matter of interest.

CHRIS: What do you know about Spain?

GERRY: Not a lot. A little. Enough, maybe. Yes, I know enough. And I thought I should try my hand at something worthy for a change. Give Evans a Big Cause and he won't let you down.

It's only everyday stuff he's not so successful at. Anyhow

I've still to enlist . . . He's still watching us. He thinks we don't see him. I wouldn't mind talking to him.

CHRIS: He's a bit shy.

GERRY: Naturally. And I'm a stranger to him practically . . . does he know my name?

CHRIS: Of course he knows your name.

GERRY: Good. Thanks. Well, maybe not so good. He's a very handsome child. With your eyes. Lucky boy.

(*Dancing in the Dark* softly from the radio.)

AAGGIE: Good for you, Aggie. What did you do to it?

AGNES: I didn't touch it.

KATE: Turn that thing off, Aggie, would you?

(AGNES does not.)

HERRY: You have a gramophone! I could have got it for you wholesale.

HRIS: It's a wireless set.

HERRY: Oh, very posh.

HRIS: It doesn't go half the time. Aggie says it's a heap of junk.

HERRY: I know nothing about radios but I'll take a look at it if you -

HRIS: Some other time. When you come back.

(Pause.)

HERRY: And Agnes is well?

HRIS: Fine - fine.

HERRY: Of all your sisters Agnes was the one that seemed to object least to me. Tell her I was asking for her.

HRIS: I'll tell her.

(*They listen to the music.*)

HERRY: Good tune.

(*Suddenly he takes her in his arms and dances.*)

HRIS: Gerry -

HERRY: Don't talk.

HRIS: What are you at?

HERRY: Not a word.

HRIS: Oh God, Gerry -

HERRY: Shhh.

HRIS: They're watching us.

HERRY: Who is?

HRIS: Maggie and Aggie. From the kitchen window.

HERRY: Hope so. And Kate.

HRIS: And Father Jack.

HERRY: Better still! Terrific!

AAGGIE: (*Quietly*) They're dancing.

KATE: What! I?

AAGGIE: They're dancing together.

KATE: God forgive you! 26
 MAGGIE: He has her in his arms.
 KATE: He has not! The animal! 27
 (She flings the paper aside and joins MAGGIE at the window.)
 MAGGIE: They're dancing round the garden, Aggie.
 KATE: Oh God, what sort of fool is she? 28
 MAGGIE: He's a beautiful dancer, isn't he?
 KATE: He's leading her astray again, Maggie. 29
 MAGGIE: Look at her face – she's easy led. Come here till you see, Aggie.
 AGNES: I'm busy! For God's sake can't you see I'm busy!
 (MAGGIE turns and looks at her in amazement.) 30
 KATE: That's the only thing that Evans creature could ever do well – was dance. (Pause.) And look at her, the fool. For God's sake, would you look at that fool of a woman? (Pause.) 31
 Her whole face alters when she's happy, doesn't it? (Pause.) 32
 They dance so well together. They're such a beautiful couple. (Pause.) She's as beautiful as Bernie O'Donnell any day, isn't she? 33
 (MAGGIE moves slowly away from the window and sits motionless.)
 GERRY: Do you know the words?
 CHRIS: I never know any words.
 GERRY: Neither do I. Doesn't matter. This is more important. (Pause.) Marry me, Chrissie. (Pause.) Are you listening to me?
 CHRIS: I hear you.
 GERRY: Will you marry me when I come back in two weeks?
 CHRIS: I don't think so, Gerry.
 GERRY: I'm mad about you. You know I am. I've always been mad about you.
 CHRIS: When you're with me.
 GERRY: Leave this house and come away with –
 CHRIS: But you'd walk out on me again. You wouldn't intend to but that's what would happen because that's your nature and you can't help yourself.
 GERRY: Not this time, Chrissie. This time it will be –
 CHRIS: Don't talk any more; no more words. Just dance me down the lane and then you'll leave.

GERRY: Believe me, Chrissie; this time the omens are terrific!
The omens are unbelievable this time!
(They dance off. After they have exited the music continues for a few seconds and then stops suddenly in mid-phrase. MAGGIE goes to the set, slaps it, turns it off. KATE moves away from the window.)

KATE: They're away! Dancing. 2

MAGGIE: Whatever's wrong with it, that's all it seems to last – a few minutes at a time. Something to do with the way it heats up.

KATE: We probably won't see Mr Evans for another year 3 4
the humour suddenly takes him again.

AGNES: He has a Christian name.

KATE: And in the meantime it's Christina's heart that gets 7
crushed again. That's what I mind! But what really infuriates
me is that the creature has no sense of ordinary duty. Does
he ever wonder how she clothes and feeds Michael? Does he
ask her? Does he care? 10

(AGNES rises and goes to the back door.)

AGNES: Going out to get my head cleared. Bit of a headache all day.

KATE: Seems to me the beasts of the field have more concern for
their young than that creature has. 11

AGNES: Do you ever listen to yourself, Kate? You are such a damned righteous bitch! And his name is Gerry! – Gerry! – Gerry!

(Now on the point of tears, she runs off.)

KATE: And what was that all about? 1

MAGGIE: Who's to say?

KATE: Don't I know his name is Gerry? What am I calling him? –
St. Patrick? 2

MAGGIE: She's worried about Chris, too.

KATE: You see, that's what a creature like Mr Evans does! 3

It appears out of nowhere and suddenly poisons the 5

atmosphere in the whole house! God forgive him! The

'bastard!' There! That's what I mean! God forgive me! 6

(MAGGIE begins putting on her long-laced boots again. As she does she sings listlessly, almost inaudibly.)

MAGGIE: "I was on the Isle of Capri that he found her

BEAT 18, ACT I

♣ Literal Action: Kate rants about Gerry

♣ Objective: I want to let off some of my steam before I burst

♣ Essential action: to confess my sins to a compatriot

♣ Action list:

1. to update
2. to disapprove
3. to brood
4. to spit
5. to make sense of it all
6. to redeem myself
7. to tear my hair out
8. to reason it out
9. to challenge
10. to throw my hands up
11. to seek an ally

Beneath the shade of an old walnut tree.
Oh, I can still see the flowers blooming round her,

Where they met on the Isle of Capri.
KATE: If you knew your prayers as well as you know the words of those aul pagan songs! She's right: I am a righteous bich, amn't I?

MAGGIE: She was as sweet as a rose at the dawning

But somehow fate hadn't meant it to be,
And though he sailed with the tide in the morning,
Still his heart's in the Isle of Capri.

(MAGGIE now stands up and looks at her feet.)

Now. Who's for a fox-trot?

KATE: You work hard at your job. You try to keep the home together. You perform your duties as best you can because a 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 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 - the boy 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 monthsland 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?

BEAT 19, ACT I

- ⚡ Literal Action: Kate tries to understand why Agnes yelled at her; blames Gerry, snaps at Maggie
- ⚡ Objective: I want a moment of peace
- ⚡ Essential action: to extract myself from the chains that weigh me down
- ⚡ Action list:
 1. to flail
 2. to make fun
 3. to slash
 4. to float
 5. to punch
 6. to redeem
 7. to spit
 8. to jump
 9. to repent
 10. to bite
 11. to deflate

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 left.)

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, musn't I? He'll look after her, won't he? You believe that, Maggie, don't you? (BOY enters.)

MAGGIE: Kate . . . Kate, love . . .

KATE: I believe that, too . . . I believe that . . . I do believe that . . . (MAGGIE holds her and rocks her.)

CHRIS enters quickly left, hugging herself. She sees the boy at his knees, goes to him and gets down beside him. She speaks eagerly, excitedly, confidentially.)

CHRIS: Well, now you've had a good look at him. What do you think of him? Do you remember him?

BOY: (Bored) I never saw him before.

CHRIS: Shhh. Yes, you did; five or six times. You've forgotten. And he saw you at the foot of the lane. He thinks you've got very big. And he thinks you're handsome!

BOY: Aunt Kate got me a spinning-top that won't spin.

CHRIS: He's handsome. Isn't he handsome?

BOY: Give up.

CHRIS: I'll tell you a secret. The others aren't to know. He has got a great new job! And he's wonderful at it!

BOY: What does he do?

CHRIS: Shhh. And he has bought a bicycle for you – a black bike – a man's bike and he's going to bring it with him the next time he comes.

(She suddenly embraces him and hugs him.)

BOY: Is he coming back soon?

CHRIS: (Eyes closed) Maybe – maybe. Yes! Yes, he is!

BOY: How soon?

CHRIS: Next week – the week after – soon – soon – soon! Oh, yes, you have a handsome father. You are a lucky boy and I am a

BEAT 20, ACT I

Literal Action: Kate tells Maggie the truth about what happened in town

Objective: I want to unburden myself.

Essential Action: to bare my soul to a confidante

Action list:

1. to lay out the facts
2. to justify
3. to stare in the face
4. to flail
5. to float
6. to warn
7. to remind
8. wince
9. to unload
10. to toss
11. to swear off
12. to call for back up
13. to detach
14. to confess
15. to come clean
16. to comprehend
17. to reach out
18. to dump on
19. to cut
20. to pound
22. to flail
23. to bleed
24. to stare a monster
25. to make light
26. to roll my eyes
27. to let it out
28. to get to the heart of the problem
29. to grasp for a line
30. to pull myself out of it
31. to soothe

BEAT 21, ACT I

- ♣ Literal Action: Chris comes in and Kate acts as if nothing happened
- ♣ Objective: I want to encourage others' happiness
- ♣ Essential action: to keep my nose out of other people's business
- ♣ Action list:
 1. to attempt disappointment
 2. to pat
 3. to sting
 4. to whine

very, very lucky woman.
(*She gets to her feet, then bends down again and kisses him lightly.*)
And another bit of good news for you, lucky boy: you have your mother's eyes!
(*She laughs, pirouettes flirtatiously before him and dances into the kitchen.*)

And what's the good news here?

MAGGIE: The good news here is . . . that's the most exciting turf we've ever burned!

KATE: Geiry's not gone, is he?!

CHRIS: Just this minute.
(*AGNES enters through the back door. She is carrying some roses.*)
He says to thank you very much for the offer of the bed.

KATE: Next time he's back. ♪

CHRIS: That'll be in a week or two – depending on his commitments.

KATE: Well, if the outside loft happens to be empty. ♪

CHRIS: And he sends his love to you all. His special love to you, Aggie; and a big kiss.

AGNES: For me?

CHRIS: Yes! For you!

MAGGIE: (*Quickly*) Those are beautiful, Aggie. Would Jack like some in his room? Put them on his windowsill with a wee card – 'ROSES' – so that the poor man's head won't be demented looking for the word. And now, girls, the daily dilemma: what's for the tea?

CHRIS: Let me make the tea, Maggie.

MAGGIE: We'll both make the tea. Perhaps something thrilling with tomatoes? We've got two, I think. Or if you're prepared to wait, I'll get that soda-bread made.

AGNES: I'm making the tea, Maggie.

CHRIS: Let me, please. Just today.

AGNES: (*Almost aggressively*) I make the tea every evening, don't I? Why shouldn't I make it this evening as usual?

MAGGIE: No reason at all. Aggie's the chef. (*Sings raucously:*)
'Everybody's doing it, doing it,
Picking their noses and chewing it, chewing it,
it . . .'

KATE: Maggie, please! ♪

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MAGGIE: If she knew her prayers half as well as she knows the words of those aul pagan songs . . .
(*Now at the radio*) Marconi, my friend, you're not still asleep, are you?

(*FATHER JACK enters. He shuffles quickly across the kitchen floor, hands behind his back, eyes on the ground, as if he were intent on some engagement elsewhere. Now he becomes aware of the others.*)

JACK: If anybody is looking for me, I'll be down at the bank of the river for the rest of the . . .

(*He tails off and looks around. Now he knows where he is. He smiles.*)

I beg your pardon. My mind was . . . It's Kate.

KATE: It's Kate. I

JACK: And Agnes. And Margaret.

MAGGIE: How are you, Jack?

JACK: And this is - ?

CHRIS: Chris - Christina.

JACK: Forgive me, Chris. You were only a baby when I went away. I remember Mother lifting you up as the train was pulling out of the station and catching your hand and waving it at me. You were so young you had scarcely any hair but she had managed to attach a tiny pink - a tiny pink - what's the word? - a bow! - a bow! - just about here; and as she waved your hand, the bow fell off. It's like a - a picture? - a camera-picture? - a photograph! - it's like a photograph in my mind.

CHRIS: The hair isn't much better even now, Jack.

JACK: And I remember you crying, Margaret.

MAGGIE: Was I?

JACK: Yes; your face was all blotchy with tears.

MAGGIE: You may be sure - beautiful as ever.

JACK: (*To AGNES*) And you and Kate were on Mother's right and Rose was between you; you each had a hand. And Mother's face, I remember, showed nothing. I often wondered about that afterwards.

CHRIS: She knew she would never see you again in her lifetime.

JACK: I know that. But in the other life. Do you think perhaps Mother didn't believe in the ancestral spirits?

BEAT 22, ACT I

♣ Literal Action: Jack comes in and has a moment of clarity and then starts on about Ryanga; Kate tries to fight it
♣ Objective: I want to save my brother from damning himself
♣ Essential Action: to set my hero back on the right path

♣ Action list:

1. to applaud
2. to pop
3. to collect myself
4. to laugh off
5. to inform
6. to wave a finger
7. to affirm
8. to jump after
9. to encourage
10. to cite
11. to back myself up
12. to save face
13. to ramble
14. to put a stop to this
15. to admonish
16. to soften
17. to counsel
18. to assure
19. to clue in
20. to alert
21. to steer
22. to stare down
23. to pet
24. to hearten
25. to escape
26. to dab
27. to catch
28. to rid
29. to cuddle up

KATE: Ancestral ³ ⁴ ⁵ What are you blathering about, Jack? Mother was a spindly woman who knew she was going straight to heaven. And don't you forget to take your medicine again this evening! You're supposed to take it three times a day. 7

JACK: One of our priests took so much quinine that he became an addict and almost died. A German priest; Father Sharpeggi. He was rushed to hospital in Kampala but they could do nothing for him. So Okawa and I brought him to our local medicine man and Karl Sharpeggi lived until he was eighty-eight! There was a strange white bird on my windowsill when I woke up this morning.

AGNES: That's Rosie's pet rooster. Keep away from that thing.

MAGGIE: Look what it did to my arm, Jack. One of these days I'm going to wring its neck.

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 . . . ? (*Storily, 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 on more clothes . . .

(Pause.)

MAGGIE: Did you speak Swahili all the time out there, Jack?

JACK: 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 –

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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. What was I telling you?

AGNES: The district commissioner gave you this present.
JACK: Yes, a wonderful triangular hat with three enormous white ostrich plumes rising up out of the crown. I have it in one of my trunks. I'll show it to you later. Ceremony! I'm so glad I got that. Do you know what I found very strange? Coming back in the boat there were days when I couldn't remember even the simplest words. Not that anybody seemed to notice. And you can always point, Margaret, can't you?

MAGGIE: Or make signs.

JACK: Or make signs.

MAGGIE: Or dance.

KATE: ^{8 9} What you must do is read a lot of books, papers, magazines, anything I read every night with young Michael! It's great for his vocabulary. ¹¹

JACK: I'm sure you're right, Kate. I'll do that. (To CHRIS) I haven't seen young Michael today, Agnes.

KATE: Christina, Jack. ¹²

JACK: Sorry, I –

CHRIS: He's around there somewhere. Making kites, if you don't mind.

JACK: And I have still to meet your husband.

CHRIS: I'm not married.

JACK: Ah. ¹³

KATE: Michael's father was here a while ago. ¹⁴ Gerry Evans. Mr. Evans is a Welshman... not that that's relevant to...
JACK: You were never married?

CHRIS: Never.

MAGGIE: We're all in the same boat, Jack. We're hoping that you'll hunt about and get men for all of us.

JACK: (To CHRIS) So Michael is a love-child?

CHRIS: I – yes – I suppose so...

JACK: He's a fine boy.

CHRIS: He's not a bad boy.

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JACK: You're lucky to have him.

AGNES: We're all lucky to have him.

JACK: In Ryanga women are eager to have love-children. The more love-children you have, the more fortunate your household is thought to be. Have you other love-children?

KATE: She certainly has not, Jack, and strange as it may seem to you, neither has Agnes nor Rose nor Maggie nor myself. No harm to Ryanga but you're home in Donegal now and much as we cherish love-children here they are not exactly the norm. And the doctors says if you don't take exercise your legs will seize up on you so I'm going to walk you down to the main road and up again three times and then you'll get your tea and then you'll read the paper from front to back and then you'll take your medicine and then you'll go to bed. And we'll do the same thing tomorrow and the day after and the day after that until we have you back to what you were. You start off and I'll be with you in a second. Where's my cardigan? 25

(JACK goes out to the garden. KATE gets her cardigan.)

MICHAEL: Some of Aunt Kate's forebodings weren't all that inaccurate. Indeed some of them were fulfilled before the Festival of Lughnasa was over.

She was right about Uncle Jack. He had been sent home by his superiors, not because his mind was confused, but for reasons that became clearer as the summer drew to a close.

And she was right about losing her job in the local school. The parish priest didn't take her back when the new term began; although that had more to do with Father Jack than with falling numbers.

And she had good reason for being uneasy about Rose – and, had she known, about Agnes, too. But what she couldn't have foreseen was that the home would break up quite so quickly and that when she would wake up one morning in early September both Rose and Agnes would have left for ever.

(At this point in MICHAEL's speech JACK picks up two pieces of wood, portions of the kites, and strikes them together. The sound they make pleases him. He does it again – and again – and again. Now he begins to beat out a structured beat whose rhythm

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gives him pleasure. And as MICHAEL continues his speech, JACK begins to shuffle—dance in time to his tattoo — his body slightly bent over, his eyes on the ground, his feet moving rhythmically. And as he dances—shuffles, he mutters — sings — makes occasional sounds that are incomprehensible and almost inaudible. KATE comes out to the garden and stands still, watching him. ROSE enters. Now ROSE and MAGGIE and AGNES are all watching him — some at the front door, some through the window. Only CHRIS has her eyes closed, her face raised, her mouth slightly open; remembering. MICHAEL continues without stopping:)

But she was wrong about my father. I suppose their natures were so out of tune that she would 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.

(KATE now goes to JACK and gently takes the sticks from him. She places them on the ground.)

KATE: We'll leave these back where we found them, Jack. They aren't ours. They belong to the child.³

(She takes his arm and leads him off.)

Now we'll go for our walk.⁴

(The others watch with expressionless faces.)

ACT 2

Early September; three weeks later. Ink bottle and some paper on the kitchen table. Two finished kites – their artwork still unseen – lean against the garden seat.

MICHAEL stands downstage left, listening to MAGGIE as she approaches, singing. Now she enters left carrying two zinc buckets of water. She is dressed as she was in Act 1. She sings in her usual parodic style:

MAGGIE: 'Oh play to me, Gypsy;
The moon's high above.

Oh, play me your serenade,
The song I love . . .

(She goes into the kitchen and from her zinc buckets she fills the kettle and the saucepan on the range. She looks over at the writing materials.)

Are you getting your books ready for school again?

BOY: School doesn't start for another ten days.

MAGGIE: God, I always hated school.

(She hums the next line of the song. Then she remembers.)

You and I have a little financial matter to discuss. (Pause.)

D'you hear me, cub?

BOY: I'm not listening.

MAGGIE: You owe me money.

BOY: I do not.

MAGGIE: Oh, yes, you do. Three weeks ago I bet you a penny those aul kites would never get off the ground. And they never did.

BOY: Because there was never enough wind; that's why.

MAGGIE: Enough wind! Would you listen to him. A hurricane wouldn't shift those things. Anyhow a debt is a debt. One penny please at your convenience. Or the equivalent in kind: one Wild Woodbine.

(Sings:) 'Beside your caravan

The campfire's bright . . .'

(She dances her exaggerated dance across to the table and touses

the BOY's hair.)

BOY: Leave me alone, Aunt Maggie.

MAGGIE: 'I'll be your vagabond

just for tonight . . .

BOY: Now look at what you made me do! The page is all blotted!

MAGGIE: Your frank opinion, cub: am I vagabond material?

BOY: Get out of my road, will you? I'm trying to write a letter.

MAGGIE: Who to? That's for me to know and you to find out.

Whoever it is, he'd need to be smart to read that scrawl!

(She returns to her buckets.)

BOY: It's to Santa Claus.

MAGGIE: In September? Nothing like getting in before the rush.

What are you asking for?

BOY: A bell.

MAGGIE: A bell.

BOY: For my bicycle.

MAGGIE: For your bicycle.

BOY: The bike my daddy has bought me – stupid!

MAGGIE: Your daddy has bought you a bicycle?

BOY: He told me today. He bought it in Kilkenny. So there!

(Her manner changes. She returns to the table.)

MAGGIE: *(Softly)* Your daddy told you that?

BOY: Ask him yourself. It's coming next week. It's a black bike –

a man's bike.

MAGGIE: Aren't you the lucky boy?

BOY: It's going to be delivered here to the house. He promised

me.

MAGGIE: Well, if he promised you . . . *(Very brisk)* Now! Who can

we get to teach you to ride?

BOY: I know how to ride!

MAGGIE: You don't.

BOY: I learned at school last Easter. So there! But you can't ride.

MAGGIE: I can so.

BOY: I know you can't.

MAGGIE: Maybe not by myself. But put me on the bar, cub –

magnificent!

BOY: You never sat on the bar of a bike in your life, Aunt Maggie!

MAGGIE: Oh yes, I did, Michael. Oh yes, indeed I did. *(She*

gathers up the papers.) Now away and write to Santa some

other time. On a day like this you should be out running about the fields like a young calf. Hold on – a new riddle for you.

BOY: Give up.

MAGGIE: A man goes to an apple tree with two apples on it. He doesn't take apples off it. He doesn't leave apples on it. How does he do that?

BOY: Give up.

MAGGIE: Think, will you!

BOY: Give up.

MAGGIE: Well, since you don't know, I will tell you. He takes one apple off! Get it? He doesn't take *apples* off! He doesn't leave *apples* on!

BOY: God!

MAGGIE: You might as well be talking to a turf stack.

(JACK enters. *He looks much stronger and is very sprightly and alert. He is not wearing the top coat or the hat but instead a garish-coloured – probably a sister's – sweater. His dress looks now even more bizarre.*)

JACK: Did I hear the church bell ringing?

MAGGIE: A big posh wedding today.

JACK: Not one of my sisters?

MAGGIE: No such luck. A man called Austin Morgan and a girl from Carrickfad.

JACK: Austin Morgan – should I know that name?

MAGGIE: I don't think so. They own the Arcade in the town. And how are you today?

JACK: Cold as usual, Maggie. And complaining about it as usual. (MICHAEL exits.)

MAGGIE: Complain away – why wouldn't you? And it is getting colder. But you're looking stronger every day, Jack.

JACK: I feel stronger, too. Now! Off for my last walk of the day.

MAGGIE: Number three?

JACK: Number four! Down past the clothes line; across the stream; round the old well; and up through the meadow.

And when that's done Kate won't have to nag at me – nag? – nag? – sounds funny – something wrong with that – nag? – that's not a word, is it?

MAGGIE: Nag – yes; to keep on at somebody.

JACK: Yes? Nag. Good. So my English vocabulary is coming back, too. Great. Nag. Still sounds a bit strange.

(KATE enters with an armful of clothes from the clothes line.)

KATE: Time for another walk, Jack.

JACK: Just about to set out on number four, Kate. And thank you for keeping at me.

KATE: No sign of Rose and Agnes yet?

MAGGIE: They said they'd be back for tea. (To JACK) They're away picking bilberries.

KATE: (To JACK) You used to pick bilberries. Do you remember?

JACK: Down beside the old quarry?

MAGGIE: The very place.

JACK: Mother and myself; every Lughnasa; the annual ritual. Of course I remember. And then she'd make the most wonderful jam. And that's what you took to school with you every day all through the winter: a piece of soda bread and bilberry jam.

MAGGIE: But no butter.

JACK: Except on special occasions when you got scones and for some reason they were always buttered. I must walk down to that old quarry one of these days.

O ruddier than the cherry,

O sweeter than the berry,

O nymph more bright,

Than moonshine night,

Like kidlings blithe and merry.

(Laughs.) Where on earth did that come from? You see,

Kate, it's all coming back to me.

KATE: So you'll soon begin saying Mass again?

JACK: Yes, indeed.

MAGGIE: Here in the house?

JACK: Why not? Perhaps I'll start next Monday. The neighbours would join us, wouldn't they?

KATE: They surely would. A lot of them have been asking me already.

JACK: How will we let them know?

MAGGIE: I wouldn't worry about that. Word gets about very quickly.

BEAT 1, ACT II

⚡ Literal action: Jack shows he's much better; Kate asks about church; Jack reveals he's no longer Christian;

Kate still pushes church

⚡ Objective: I want to bring my brother back to the right path

⚡ Essential action: to steer a recovering addict towards a life saving opportunity

⚡ Action list:

1. to nag
2. to make conversation
3. to buddy up
4. to entreat
5. to make bold
6. to evade
7. to dangle
8. to face facts
9. to back off
10. to cover
11. to stall
12. to stop
13. to beg

JACK: What Okawa does – you know Okawa, don't you?
MAGGIE: Your house boy?

JACK: My friend – my mentor – my counsellor – and yes, my house boy as well; anyhow Okawa summons our people by striking a huge iron gong. Did you hear that wedding bell this morning, Kate?

KATE: Yes.

JACK: Well, Okawa's gong would carry four times as far as that. But if it's one of the bigger ceremonies, he'll spend a whole day going round all the neighbouring villages, blowing on this enormous flute he made himself.

MAGGIE: And they all meet in your church?

JACK: When I had a church. Now we gather in the common in the middle of the village. If it's an important ceremony, you would have up to three or four hundred people.

KATE: All gathered together for Mass? 7

JACK: Maybe. Or maybe to offer sacrifice to Obi, our Great Goddess of the Earth, so that the crops will flourish. Or maybe to get in touch with our departed fathers for their advice and wisdom. Or maybe to thank the spirits of our tribe if they have been good to us; or to appease them if they're angry. I complain to Okawa that our calendar of ceremonies gets fuller every year. Now at this time of year over there – at the Ugandan harvest time – we have two very wonderful ceremonies: the Festival of the New Yam and the Festival of the Sweet Casava; and they're both dedicated to our Great Goddess, Obi –

KATE: But these aren't Christian ceremonies, Jack, are they? 8

JACK: Oh, no. The Ryangans have always been faithful to their own beliefs – like these two Festivals I'm telling you about; and they are very special, really magnificent ceremonies. I haven't described those two Festivals to you before, have I?

KATE: Not to me. 9

JACK: Well, they begin very formally, very solemnly with the ritual sacrifice of a fowl or a goat or a calf down at the bank of the river. Then the ceremonial cutting and anointing of the first yams and the first casava; and we pass these round in huge wooden bowls. Then the incantation – a chant, really – that expresses our gratitude and that also acts as a rhythm or

percussion for the ritual dance. And then, when the thanksgiving is over, the dance continues. And the interesting thing is that it grows naturally into a secular celebration; so that almost imperceptibly the religious ceremony ends and the community celebration takes over. And that part of the ceremony is a real spectacle. We light fires round the periphery of the circle; and we paint our faces with coloured powders; and we sing local songs; and we drink palm wine. And then we dance – and dance – and dance – children, men, women, most of them lepers, many of them with misshapen limbs, with missing limbs – dancing, believe it or not, for days on end! It is the most wonderful sight you have ever seen! (*Laughs.*) That palm wine! They dole it out in horns! You lose all sense of time . . . !

Oh, yes, the Ryangans are a remarkable people: there is no distinction between the religious and the secular in their culture. And of course their capacity for fun, for laughing, for practical jokes – they've such open hearts! In some respects they're not unlike us. You'd love them, Maggie. You should come back with me!

How did I get into all that? You must stop me telling these long stories. Exercise time! I'll be back in ten minutes; and only last week it took me half an hour to do number four. You've done a great job with me, Kate. So please do keep nagging at me.

(*He moves off – then stops.*)

It's not Gilbert and Sullivan, is it?

TE: ~~SOIRY?~~ 10

JK: That quotation.

TE: What's that, Jack? 11

JK: 'O ruddier than the cherry / O sweeter than the berry' – no, it's not Gilbert and Sullivan. But it'll come back to me, I promise you. It's all coming back.

(*Again, he moves off.*)

TE: Jack. 12

JK: Yes?

TE: You are going to start saving Mass again? 13

JK: We've agreed on next Monday, haven't we? Haven't we, Maggie?

BEAT 2, ACT II

- ⊕ Literal Action: trying to convince Maggie how bad Jack's state is
- ⊕ Objective: I want help in my quest.
- ⊕ Essential action: to pull the opposition onto my platform
- ⊕ Action list:
 1. to tug at heart strings
 2. to reach out
 3. to crush the argument
 4. to caricature
 5. to reason
 6. to contradict
 7. to lay out the truth
 8. to warn
 9. to conclude
 10. to mourn
 11. to seek comfort
 12. to challenge
 13. to face facts
 14. to lament
 15. to throw a bone
 16. to play
 17. to repent
 18. to halt
 19. to plead
 20. to squeeze
 21. to order

MAGGIE: Yes.

JACK: At first light. The moment Rose's white cock crows. A harvest ceremony. You'll have to find a big gong somewhere, Kate.

(He leaves. Pause. KATE and MAGGIE stare at each other in concern, in alarm. They speak in hushed voices.)

KATE: Told you—you wouldn't believe me—I told you!

MAGGIE: Shhh.

KATE: What do you think? ²

MAGGIE: He's not back a month yet.

KATE: Yesterday I heard about their medicine man who brought a woman back from death—³

MAGGIE: He needs more time.

KATE: And this morning it was 'the spirits of the tribe'! And when I mentioned Mass to him you saw how he dodged about.

MAGGIE: He said he'd say Mass next Monday, Kate.

KATE: No, he won't! You know he won't! He's changed, Maggie.

MAGGIE: In another month, he'll be—⁴

KATE: Completely changed! He's not our Jack at all! And it's what he's changed into that frightens me.

MAGGIE: Doesn't frighten me.

KATE: If you saw your face—⁵ of course it does. Oh, dear God—

(MAGGIE now drifts back to the range. KATE goes to the table and with excessive vigour wipes it with a damp cloth. Then she stops suddenly, slumps into a seat and covers her face with her hands. MAGGIE watches her, then goes to her. She stands behind her and holds her shoulders with her hands. KATE grasps MAGGIE's hands in hers.)

MAGGIE: All the same, Kitty, I don't think it's a sight I'd like to see.

KATE: What sight? ⁶

MAGGIE: A cluster of lepers trying to do the Military Two-step.

KATE: God forgive you, Maggie Maudy! The poor creatures are as entitled to—

(She breaks off because CHRIS's laughter is heard off. KATE jumps to her feet.)

This must be kept in the family, Maggie! Not a word of this must go outside these walls. For you hear? ⁷ Not a syllable! ⁸

(CHRIS and GERRY enter left. He enters backwards, pulling CHRIS who holds the end of his walking stick. Throughout the scene he keeps trying to embrace her. She keeps avoiding him.)

ERRY: No false modesty. You know you're a great dancer,

Christie.

HRIS: No, I'm not.

ERRY: You should be a professional dancer.

HRIS: You're talking rubbish.

ERRY: Let's dance round the garden again.

HRIS: We've done that; and down the lane and up again – without music. And that's enough for one day. Tell me about signing up. Was it really in a church?

ERRY: I'm telling you – it was unbelievable.

HRIS: It was a real church?

ERRY: A Catholic church as a matter of interest.

HRIS: I don't believe a word of it.

ERRY: Would I tell you a lie? And up at the end – in the sanctuary? – there were three men, two of them with trench-coats; and between them, behind this lectern and wearing a sort of military cap, this little chappie who spoke in an accent I could hardly understand. Naturally I thought he was Spanish. From Armagh, as it turned out.

HRIS: I'm sure he couldn't understand you either.

ERRY: He described himself as the recruiting officer. 'Take it from me, comrade, nobody joins the Brigade without my unanimity.'

(She laughs – and avoids his embrace.)

HRIS: It's a wonder he accepted you.

ERRY: 'Do you offer your allegiance and your loyalty and your full endeavours to the Popular Front?'

HRIS: What's the Popular Front?

ERRY: The Spanish government that I'm going to keep in power. 'I take it you are a Syndicalist?' 'No.' 'An Anarchist?' 'No.' 'A Marxist?' 'No.' 'A Republican, a Socialist, a Communist?' 'No.' 'Do you speak Spanish?' 'No.' 'Can you make explosives?' 'No.' 'Can you ride a motor-bike?' 'Yes.' 'You're in. Sign here.'

HRIS: So you'll be a dispatch rider?

(GERRY imitates riding a motor-bike.)

BEAT 3, ACT II

Literal Action: Kate retreats to table and reads her bible

Objective: I want to escape the subject

Essential Action: to keep a gawking stranger away

Action list:

1. to make myself busy

2. to ignore

BEAT 4, ACT II

- ◆ Literal action: Gerry enters the house; Kate is courteous to him; Kate talks to Chris about Gerry
- ◆ Objective: I want to turn the other cheek
- ◆ Essential action: to extend the olive branch to a former enemy
- ◆ Action list:
 1. to chit chat
 2. to test the waters
 3. to beg forgiveness
 4. to deflate like a balloon
 5. to retreat
 6. to nurse my wounds

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.

(*She turns into the kitchen. He follows.*)

You should see Jack striding through the meadow. He looks like a new man.

KATE: (*To Gerry*) Were you talking to him?!

GERRY: He wants to do a swap with me: I'm to give him this hat

and he's to give me some sort of a three-cornered hat with feathers that the district commissioner gave him. Sounds a fair exchange.

MAGGIE: Chrissie says you're great with radios, Gerry.

GERRY: I'll take a look at it – why not?

MAGGIE: All I can tell you is that it's not the battery. I got a new one yesterday.

GERRY: Let me check the aerial first. Very often that's where the trouble lies. Then I'll have a look at the ignition and sparking plugs. Leave it to Gerry.

(*He winks at CHRIS as he goes out the front door and off right.*)

MAGGIE: He sounds very knowledgeable.

CHRIS: It may be something he can't fix.

KATE: I know you're not responsible for Gerry's decisions,

Christina! But it would be on my conscience if I didn't tell you how strongly I disapprove of this International Brigade caper! It's a sorry day for Ireland when we send young men off to Spain to fight for godless Communism.

CHRIS: For democracy, Kate.

KATE: I'm not going to argue! I just want to clear my conscience.

CHRIS: That's the important thing, of course. And now you've cleared it.

(*GERRY runs on and calls through the window:*)

GERRY: Turn the radio on, Chrissie, would you?

MAGGIE: It's on.

GERRY: Right.

(*He runs off again.*)

CHRIS: Just as we were coming out of the town we met Vera McLaughlin, the knitting agent. (*Softly*) Agnes and Rose aren't back yet?

MAGGIE: They'll be here soon.

CHRIS: She says she'll call in tomorrow and tell them herself. The poor woman was very distressed.

KATE: Tell them what?!

CHRIS: She's not buying any more hand-made gloves.

MAGGIE: Why not?

CHRIS: Too dear, she says.

KATE: Too dear! She pays them a pittance!

CHRIS: There's a new factory started up in Donegal Town. They

BEAT 5, ACT II

◆ Literal action: Chris reveals to Kate and Maggie that Agnes and Rose are about to lose their jobs

◆ Objective: I want to help my family

◆ Essential action: to help a loved one let out painful truths

◆ Action list:

1. to scan
2. to cognize
3. to panic
4. to warn
5. to sort out
6. to beseech

BEAT 6, ACT II

- ⚡ Literal action: Kate, Chrissy and Maggie are trying to accommodate Agnes
- ⚡ Objective: I want Agnes relaxed and happy
- ⚡ Essential action: to shelter a wounded friend from a storm
- ⚡ Action list:
 1. to sweeten up

make machine gloves more quickly there and far more cheaply. The people Vera used to supply buy their gloves direct from the factory now.

MAGGIE: That's awful news, Chrissy.

CHRIS: She says they're organizing buses to bring the workers to the factory and back every day. Most of the people who used to work at home have signed on. She tried to get a job there herself. They told her she was too old. She's forty-one. The poor woman could hardly speak.

MAGGIE: Oh God . . . poor Aggie . . . poor Rose . . . what'll they do?

(AGNES enters the garden. KATE sees her.)

KATE: ~~Shhh!~~ They're back. ⁶ Let them have their tea in peace. Tell them later. ⁶

(*A key busy murmures with their sisters. AGNES is carrying two small pairs of blackberries which she leaves outside the door of the house. Just as she is about to enter the kitchen a voice off calls her.*)

GERRY: (Off) Who is that beautiful woman!

(*She looks around, puzzled.*)

AGNES: Gerry?

GERRY: Up here, Aggie!

AGNES: Where?

GERRY: On top of the sycamore.

(*Now she sees him. The audience does not see him.*)

AGNES: Mother of God!

GERRY: Come up and join me!

AGNES: What are you doing up there?

GERRY: You can see into the future from here, Aggie!

AGNES: The tree isn't safe, Gerry. Please come down.

GERRY: Come up and see what's going to happen to you!

AGNES: That branch is dead, Gerry. I'm telling you.

(*The branch begins to sway.*)

GERRY: Do you think I could get a job in a circus? Wow-wow-wow-wow!

AGNES: Gerry —!

GERRY: (Sings.) He flies through the air with the greatest of ease — ' Whooooooooo!

(*She covers her eyes in terror.*)

6

AGNES: Stop it, Gerry, stop it, stop it!
GERRY: That daring young man on the flying trapeze...
AGNES: You're going to fall! I'm not looking! I'm not watching!

(She dashes into the house.)

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? 3

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? 4

AGNES: That's what she said.

(MAGGIE enters.)

MAGGIE: She's not in her bed.

AGNES: Oh God! Where could she be?

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

BEAT 7, ACT II

Literal action: The sisters pump Agnes for information on

Rose's whereabouts

Objective: I want my sister home safely

Essential action: to build up a loved one's confidence

Action list:

1. to take in
2. to search
3. to take charge
4. to clarify
5. to soothe
6. to lead
7. to speed up
8. to pull from the air
9. to steer
10. to shake
11. to chase
12. to spell out
13. to double check

BEAT 8, ACT II

- ◆ Literal action: Maggie figures out where Rose is, Chris reveals Rose's affair, Kate interrogates Agnes
- ◆ Objective: I want the truth
- ◆ Essential action: to coerce a criminal into confession
- ◆ Action list:
 1. to hang
 2. to demand
 3. to question
 4. to crush
 5. to demand
 6. to accuse
 7. to press
 8. to yank
 9. to attack
 10. to beg
 11. to flop around

KATE: Good—good! 1

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? 2

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 her head.)

KATE: Then what? 3

(AGNES begins to cry.)

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

KATE: What direction did she go when she left you? 4

AGNES: Direction? 5

KATE: Stop snivelling, 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? 6

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.

MAGGIE: (Softly) Danny Bradley.

KATE: What?—who? 7

MAGGIE: Danny Bradley . . . Lough Anna . . . up in the back hills.

CHRIS: Oh God, no.

KATE: What?—what's this?—what about the back hills? 8

CHRIS: She has some silly notion about that scamp, Bradley. She believes he's in love with her. He gave her a present last Christmas—she says.

KATE: (To AGNES) What do you know about this Bradley business? ↗

AGNES: I know no more than Chris has -

KATE: I've often seen you and Rose whispering together. What plot has been hatched between Rose and Mr Bradley? ↘

AGNES: No plot . . . please, Kate -
KATE: You're lying to me, Agnes! You're withholding the truth! ↗

AGNES: Honest to God, all I know is what Chris has just -

KATE: I want to know everything you know! Now! I want to -^{ca}

MAGGIE: That'll do, Kate! Stop that at once! (Calmly) She may be in the town. She may be on her way home now. She may have taken a weak turn on her way back from the quarry.

We're going to find her. (To CHRIS) You search the fields on the upper side of the lane. (To AGNES) You take the lower side, down as far as the main road. (To KATE) You go to the old well and search all around there. I'm going into the town to tell the police.

KATE: You're going to no police, Maggie. If she's mixed up with that Bradley creature, I'm not going to have it broadcast all

over -

MAGGIE: I'm going to the police and you'll do what I told you to do.

CHRIS: There she is! Look - look! There she is!

(She has seen ROSE through the window and is about to rush out to greet her. MAGGIE catches her arm and restrains her. The four sisters watch ROSE as she crosses the garden - CHRIS and KATE from the window, MAGGIE and AGNES from the door. ROSE is unaware of their anxious scrutiny. She is dressed in the 'good' clothes described by AGNES and they have changed her appearance. Indeed, had we not seen the ROSE of Act 1, we might not now be immediately aware of her disability. At first look this might be any youngish country woman, carefully dressed, not unattractive, returning from a long walk on a summer day. She walks slowly, lethargically, towards the house. From her right hand hangs a red poppy that she plucked casually along the road. Her face reveals nothing - but nothing is being deliberately concealed. She sees Agnes's cans of fruit. She stops beside them and looks at them. Then she puts her hand into one of

BEAT 9, ACT II

Literal action: Rose is spotted; Rose comes in; the other sisters make her comfortable, ignoring the obvious questions, while Kate lies low; Maggie changes the subject; Kate pushes Rose to answer; Rose tells everything; Kate collapses

Objective: I want a respectable house

Essential action: to discipline a naughty child

Action list:

1. to appeal
2. to lay out
3. to compel
4. to demand
5. to stalk
6. to grasp
7. to start in
8. to expose
9. to freeze
10. to shake off
11. to drop

the cans, takes a fistful of berries and thrusts the fistful into her mouth. Then she wipes her mouth with her sleeve and the back of her hand. As she chews she looks at her stained fingers. She wipes them on her skirt. All of these movements – stopping, eating, wiping – are done not dreamily, abstractedly, but calmly. naturally. Now she moves towards the house. As she approaches the door AGNES rushes to meet her. Instead of hugging her, as she wants to, she catches her arm.)

AGNES: Rosie, love, we were beginning to get worried about you.
ROSE: They're nice, Aggie. They're sweet. And you got two canfuls. Good for you.

(AGNES leads her into the house.)

AGNES: Is your stomach settled?

ROSE: My stomach?

AGNES: You weren't feeling well – remember? – when we were at the quarry?

ROSE: Oh, yes. Oh, I'm fine now, thanks.

AGNES: You left me there and you said you were coming home to lie down. D'you remember that?

ROSE: Yes.

CHRIS: But you didn't come home, Rosie.

ROSE: That's right.

AGNES: And we were very worried about you.

ROSE: Well . . . here I am.

CHRIS: Were you in the town?

AGNES: That's why you're all dressed up, isn't it?

CHRIS: You went into Ballybeg, didn't you?

(Pause. ROSE looks from one to the other.)

MAGGIE: (Briskly) She's home safe and sound and that's all that matters. Now I don't know about you girls but I can tell you this chicken is weak with hunger. Let me tell you what's on the menu this evening. Our beverage is the usual hot, sweet tea. There is a choice between caraway-seed bread and soda bread, both fresh from the chef's oven. But now we come to the difficulty: there's only three eggs between the seven of us – I wish to God you'd persuade that white rooster of yours to lay eggs, Rosie.

CHRIS: There are eight of us, Maggie.

MAGGIE: How are there – ? Of course – the soldier up the

sycamore! Not a great larder but a nice challenge to someone like myself. Right. My suggestion is . . . Eggs Ballybeg; in other words scrambled and served on lightly toasted caraway-seed bread. Followed – for those so inclined – by one magnificent Wild Woodbine. Everybody happy?

CHRIS: Excellent, Margaret!

MAGGIE: Settled.

(ROSE has taken off her shoe and is examining it carefully.)

AGNES: We'll go and pick some more bilberries next Sunday, Rosie.

ROSE: All right.

AGNES: Remember the cans you had? You had your own two cans – remember? Did you take them with you?

ROSE: Where to, Aggie?

AGNES: Into the town . . . wherever you went . . .

ROSE: I hid them at the quarry behind a stone wall. They're safe there. I'll go back and pick them up later this evening. Does anybody know where my overall is?

MAGGIE: It's lying across your bed. And you'd need to bring some turf in, Rosie.

ROSE: I'll change first, Maggie.

MAGGIE: Be quick about it.

CHRIS: How many pieces of toast do you want?

MAGGIE: All that loaf. And go easy on the butter – that's all we have. Now. Parsley. And just a whiff of basil. I don't want you to be too optimistic, girls, but you should know I feel very creative this evening.

(ROSE moves towards the bedroom door. Just as she is about to exit.)

KATE: I want to know where you have been, Rose!

(ROSE stops. Pause.)

You have been gone for the entire afternoon. I want you to tell me where you've been.

AGNES: Later, Kate; after –

KATE: Where have you been for the past three hours?!

ROSE: (Inaudible) Lough Anna.

KATE: I didn't hear what you said, Rose.

ROSE: Lough Anna.

CHRIS: Kate, just leave –

BEAT 10, ACT II

- ◆ Literal action: Chris and Maggie break the tension, Kate just sits there; Maggie offers Kate the ciggy and gives her bible. Kate lets her family in by accepting
- ◆ Objective: I want relief
- ◆ Essential action: to give up control
- ◆ Action list:
 - I. to tickle

KATE: You walked from the quarry to Lough Anna? 6

ROSE: Yes.

KATE: Did you meet somebody there? 7

ROSE: Yes.

KATE: Had you arranged to meet somebody there? 8

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 on 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. (She exits, her shoes in one hand, the poppy in the other. MICHAEL enters.)

KATE: What has happened to this house? Mother of God, will we ever be able to lift our heads ever again...? (Pause)

MICHAEL: The following night Vera McLaughlin arrived and explained to Agnes and Rose why she couldn't buy their hand-knitted gloves any more. Most of her home knitters were already working in the new factory and she advised Agnes and Rose to apply immediately. The Industrial Revolution had finally caught up with Ballybeg.

They didn't apply, even though they had no other means of making a living, and they never discussed their situation with their sisters. Perhaps Agnes made the decision for both of them because she knew Rose wouldn't have got work there anyway. Or perhaps, as Kate believed, because Agnes was too notionate to work in a factory. Or perhaps the two of them just wanted... away.



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Anyhow, on my first day back at school, when we came into the kitchen for breakfast, there was a note propped up against the milk jug: 'We are gone for good. This is best for all. Do not try to find us.' It was written in Agnes's resolute hand.

Of course they did try to find them. So did the police. So did our neighbours who had a huge network of relatives all over England and America. But they had vanished without trace. And by the time I tracked them down – twenty-five years later, in London – Agnes was dead and Rose was dying in a hospice for the destitute in Southwark.

The scraps of information I gathered about their lives during those missing years were too sparse to be coherent. They had moved about a lot. They had worked as cleaning women in public toilets, in factories, in the Underground. Then, when Rose could no longer get work, Agnes tried to support them both – but couldn't. From then on, I gathered, they gave up. They took to drink; slept in parks, in doorways, on the Thames Embankment. Then Agnes died of exposure. And two days after I found Rose in that grim hospice – she didn't recognize me, of course – she died in her sleep.

Father Jack's health improved quickly and he soon recovered his full vocabulary and all his old bounce and vigour. But he didn't say Mass that following Monday. In fact he never said Mass again. And the neighbours stopped enquiring about him. And his name never again appeared in the *Domegal Enquirer*. And of course there was never a civic reception with bands and flags and speeches.

But he never lost his determination to return to Uganda and he still talked passionately about his life with the lepers there. And each new anecdote contained more revelations. And each new revelation startled – shocked – stunned poor Aunt Kate. Until finally she hit on a phrase that appealed her: 'his own distinctive spiritual search'. 'Leaping around a fire and offering a little hen to Uka or Ito or whoever is not religion as I was taught it and indeed know it,' she would say with a defiant toss of her head. 'But then Jack must make his own distinctive search.' And when he died suddenly of a heart attack – within a year of his homecoming, on the very

eve of the following Lá Lughnasa – my mother and Maggie mourned him sorely. But for months Kate was inconsolable. My father sailed for Spain that Saturday. The last I saw of him was dancing down the lane in imitation of Fred Astaire, swinging his walking stick, Uncle Jack's ceremonial tricorne at a jaunty angle over his left eye. When he got to the main road he stopped and turned and with both hands blew a dozen theatrical kisses back to Mother and me.

He was wounded in Barcelona – he fell off his motor-bike – so that for the rest of his life he walked with a limp. The limp wasn't disabling but it put an end to his dancing days; and that really distressed him. Even the role of maimed veteran, which he loved, could never compensate for that.

He still visited us occasionally, perhaps once a year. Each time he was on the brink of a new career. And each time he proposed to Mother and promised me a new bike. Then the war came in 1939; his visits became more infrequent; and finally he stopped coming altogether.

Sometime in the mid-fifties I got a letter from a tiny village in the south of Wales; a curt note from a young man of my own age and also called Michael Evans. He had found my name and address among the belongings of his father, Gerry Evans. He introduced himself as my half-brother and he wanted me to know that Gerry Evans, the father we shared, had died peacefully in the family home the previous week. Throughout his final illness he was nursed by his wife and his three grown children who all lived and worked in the village.

My mother never knew of that letter. I decided to tell her – decided not to – vacillated for years as my father would have done; and eventually, rightly or wrongly, kept the information to myself.

(MAGGIE, CHRIS, KATE AND MOTHER NOW RESUME THEIR MASKS.)

CHRIS: Well, at least that's good news.

MAGGIE: What's that?

CHRIS: That the young Sweeney boy from the back hills is going to live.

MAGGIE: Good news indeed.

(CHRIS goes to the door and calls.)

CHRIS: Michael! Where are you? We need some turf brought in!

(She now goes outside and calls up to GERRY. MICHAEL exits.)
Are you still up there?

GERRY: (Off) Don't stand there. I might fall on top of you.

CHRIS: Have you any idea what you're doing?

GERRY: (Off) Come on up here to me.

CHRIS: I'm sure I will.

GERRY: (Off) We never made love on top of a sycamore tree.

(She looks quickly around: did her sisters hear that?)

CHRIS: If you fall and break your neck it'll be too good for you.

(She goes inside.) Nobody can vanish quicker than that

Michael fellow when you need him.

MAGGIE: (To AGNES) I had a brilliant idea when I woke up this morning. Aggie. I thought to myself: what is it that Ballybeg badly needs and that Ballybeg hasn't got?

AGNES: A riddle. Give up.

MAGGIE: A dressmaker! So why doesn't Agnes Mundy who has such clever hands, why doesn't she dressmake?

AGNES: Clever hands!

(MAGGIE looks around for her cigarettes.)

MAGGIE: She'd get a pile of work. They'd come to her from far and wide. She'd make a fortune.

AGNES: Some fortune in Ballybeg.

MAGGIE: And not only would the work be interesting but she wouldn't be ruining her eyes staring at grey wool eight hours a day. Did you notice how Rosie squints at things now? It's the job for you, Aggie; I'm telling you. Ah, holy God, girls, don't tell me I'm out of fags! How could that have happened?

(CHRIS goes to the mantelpiece and produces a single cigarette.)
Chrissie, you are one genius. Look, Kate. (Sooths.) Misery.

(Lights cigarette.) Happiness! Want a drag?

KATE: What's keeping those wonderful Eggs Ballybeg? A

MAGGIE: If I had to choose between one Wild Woodbine and a man of – say – fifty-two – widower – plump, what would I do, Kate? I'd take fatso, wouldn't I? God, I really am getting desperate.

(JACK enters through the garden.)

Maybe I should go to Ryanga with you, Jack.

JACK: I know you won't but I know you'd love it.

MAGGIE: Could you guarantee a man for each of us?

BEAT 11, ACT II

♣ Literal action: Jack comes in and begins to joke with Maggie about Ryanga; they tease Kate; Kate evades at first but eventually tries to convert Jack in a new way; Jack continues to tease

♣ Objective: I want a harmonious family

♣ Essential action: to pick my battles

♣ Action list:

1. to stick out my tongue
2. to blush
3. to acknowledge
4. to straighten out
5. to preach
6. to mock
7. to beg
8. to plug my ears

JACK: I couldn't promise four men but I should be able to get one husband for all of you.

MAGGIE: Would we settle for that?

CHRIS: One between the four of us?

JACK: That's our system and it works very well. One of you would be his principal wife and live with him in his largest hut -

MAGGIE: That'd be you, Kate.

KATE: ~~Stop that~~, Maggie! ♪

JACK: And the other three of you he'd keep in his enclosure. It would be like living on the same small farm.

MAGGIE: Snug enough, girls, isn't it? (To JACK) And what would be - what sort of duties would we have?

JACK: Cooking, sewing, helping with the crops, washing - the usual housekeeping tasks.

MAGGIE: Sure that's what we do anyway.

JACK: And looking after his children.

MAGGIE: That he'd have by Kate.

KATE: Maggie! ♪

JACK: By all four of you! And what's so efficient about that system is that the husband and his wives and his children make up a small commune where everybody helps everybody else and cares for them. I'm completely in favour of it.

KATE: It may be efficient and you may be in favour of it, Jack, but I don't think it's what Pope Pius XI considers to be the holy sacrament of matrimony. And it might be better for you if you paid just a bit more attention to our Holy Father and a bit less to the Great Goddess... Jiggie. ♪
(Music of 'Anything Goes' very softly on the radio.)

CHRIS: Listen.

MAGGIE: And they have hens there, too, Jack?

JACK: We're overrun with hens.

MAGGIE: Don't dismiss it, girls. It has its points. Would you be game, Kate?

KATE: Would you give my head peace, Maggie 7

CHRIS: Gerry has it going!

MAGGIE: Tell me this, Jack: what's the Swahili for 'tchhook-tchhook-tchhook-tchhook'?

JACK: You'd love the climate, too, Kate.

KATE: I'm not listening to a word you're saying 8

(GERRY turns on.)

GERRY: Well? Any good?

CHRIS: Listen.

GERRY: Aha. Leave it to the expert.

JACK: I have something for you, Gerry.

GERRY: What's that?

JACK: The plumed hat – the ceremonial hat – remember? We agreed to swap. With you in a second.

(He goes to his bedroom.)

MAGGIE: Good work, Gerry.

GERRY: Thought it might be the aerial. That's the end of your troubles. (Listens. Sings a line of the song.) Dance with me, Agnes.

AGNES: Have a bit of sense, Gerry Evans.

GERRY: Dance with me. Please. Come on.

MAGGIE: Dance with him, Aggie.

GERRY: (Sings:) 'In olden times a glimpse of stocking
Was looked on as something shocking –'
Give me your hand.

MAGGIE: Go on, Aggie.

AGNES: Who wants to dance at this time of –

(GERRY pulls her to her feet and takes her in his arms.)
GERRY: (Sings:) '... anything goes.

Good authors, too, who once knew better words

Now only use four-letter words

Writing prose,

Anything goes . . .'

(Bring up the sound. With style and with easy elegance they dance once around the kitchen and then out to the garden –

GERRY singing the words directly to her face.)

If driving fast cars you like,

If low bars you like,

If old hymns you like,

If bare limbs you like,

If Mae West you like,

Or me undressed you like,

Why, nobody will oppose.

When ev'ry night, the set that's smart is in-

truding in nudist parties in

1 α

BEAT 12, ACT II

⚡ Literal action: Gerry gets the wireless working and comes in; he dances with Agnes while everyone watches; Chris is clearly upset so Kate goes to her. The two come back in and Kate retreats; He asks Chris to dance, she refuses;

Maggie offers, Gerry accepts. Chrissy turns off the radio;

Maggie eases tension; Gerry mentions the set; Kate snaps

⚡ Objective: I want to protect Chrissy

⚡ Essential action: To guard like a mother hen

⚡ Action list:

1. to flick up my pinky

Studios,

Anything goes . . .

(*They are now in the far corner of the garden.*)

You're a great dancer, Aggie.

AGNES: No, I'm not.

GERRY: You're a superb dancer.

AGNES: No, I'm not.

GERRY: You should be a professional dancer.

AGNES: Too late for that.

GERRY: You could teach dancing in Ballybeg.

AGNES: That's all they need.

GERRY: Maybe it is!

(*He bends down and kisses her on the forehead. All this is seen — but not heard — by CHRIS at the kitchen window. Immediately after this kiss GERRY bursts into song again, turns, AGNES four or five times very rapidly and dances her back to the kitchen.*)

There you are. Safe and sound.

MAGGIE: I wish to God I could dance like you, Aggie.

AGNES: I haven't a breath.

GERRY: Doesn't she dance elegantly?

MAGGIE: Always did, our Aggie.

GERRY: Unbelievable. Now, Chrissie — you and I.

CHRIS: (*Sharply*) Not now. I wonder where Michael's got to?

GERRY: Come on, Chrissie. Once round the floor.

CHRIS: Not now, I said. Are you thick?

MAGGIE: I'll dance with you, Gerry! (*She kicks her wellingtons off.*)

Do you want to see real class?

GERRY: Certainly do, Maggie.

MAGGIE: Stand back there, girls. Shirley Temple needs a lot of space.

GERRY: Wow-wow-wow-wow!

MAGGIE: Hold me close, Gerry. The old legs aren't too reliable.

(*She and GERRY sing and dance.*)

In olden times a glimpse of stocking

Was looked on as something shocking

But now —

(*CHRIS suddenly turns the radio off.*)

CHRIS: Sick of that damned thing.

GERRY: What happened?

MAGGIE: What are you at there, Chrissie?

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CHRIS: We're only wasting the battery and we won't get a new one until the weekend.

MAGGIE: It wasn't to be, Gerry. But there'll be another day.

GERRY: That's a promise, Maggie.

(*He goes to CHRIS at the radio.*)

Not a bad little set, that.

KATE: Peace, thanks be to God! D'you know what that thing has done? Killed all Christian conversation in this country.

CHRIS: (*To AGNES, icily*) Vera McLaughlin's calling here

tomorrow. She wants to talk to you and Rose.

AGNES: What about?

KATE: (*Quickly*) I didn't tell you, did I? ¹ ² Her daughter's got engaged!

MAGGIE: Which of them?

KATE: The harvest dance is going to be just supreme this year, Miss Mundy? ³ ⁴ That wee brat!

MAGGIE: Sophia. Is she not still at school?

KATE: Left last year! ⁵ She's fifteen. And the lucky man is sixteen.

MAGGIE: Holy God. We may pack it in, girls.

KATE: It's indecent, I'm telling you! Fifteen and sixteen! ⁶ ⁷ Don't tell me that's not totally improper. It's the poor mother I feel sorry for. ⁸ ⁹

AGNES: What does she want to talk to us about?

CHRIS: (*Relucting*) Something about wool. Didn't sound important. She probably won't call at all.

(CHRIS turns the radio on again. No sound.)

(*To MAGGIE*) Go ahead and dance, you two.

MAGGIE: Artistes like Margaret Mundy can't perform on demand, Chrissie. We need to be in touch with other forces first, don't we, Gerry?

GERRY: Absolutely. Why is there no sound?

KATE: Maggie, are we never going to eat? ¹

MAGGIE: Indeed we are - outside in the garden! Eggs Ballybeg *à la fresco*. Lughnasa's almost over, girls. There aren't going to be many warm evenings left.

KATE: Good idea, Maggie. ²

AGNES: I'll get the cups and plates.

GERRY: (*With CHRIS at radio*) Are you all right?

CHRIS: It's not gone again, is it?

BEAT 13, ACT II

Literal action: Chris tries to tell Agnes about Vera; Kate and Maggie make up a story; Chris relents

Objective: I want to protect Agnes

Essential action: to create a diversion to allow a dear one to escape

Action list:

1. to grab focus
2. to announce
3. to over act
4. to shoot a dart
5. to gossip
6. to scandalize
7. to bite
8. to distract
9. to stare down
10. to convince

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GERRY: Have I done something wrong?
 CHRIS: I switched it on again – that's all I did.
 MAGGIE: Take out those chairs, Gerry.
 GERRY: What about the table?
 MAGGIE: We'll just spread a cloth on the ground.
 (MAGGIE exits with the cloth which she spreads in the middle of the garden. GERRY kisses CHRIS lightly on the back of the neck.)
 GERRY: At least we know it's not the aerial.
 CHRIS: According to you.
 GERRY: And if it's not the aerial the next thing to check is the ignition.
 CHRIS: Ignition! Listen to that bluffer!
 GERRY: Bluffer? (To AGNES as she passes) Did you hear what she called me? That's unfair, Agnes, isn't it?
 (AGNES smiles and shrugs.)

Let's take the back off and see what's what.
 (ROSE enters the garden from the back of the house. At first nobody notices her. She is dressed as in Act 1. In her right hand she holds the dead rooster by the feet. Its feathers are ruffled and it is stained with blood. ROSE is calm, almost matter-of-fact. AGNES sees her first and goes to her. CHRIS and GERRY join the others in the garden.)

AGNES: Rosie, what is it, Rosie?
 ROSE: My rooster's dead.
 AGNES: Oh Rosie . . .
 ROSE: (Holding the dead bird up) Look at him. He's dead.
 AGNES: What happened to him?
 ROSE: The fox must have got him.
 AGNES: Oh, poor Rosie . . .
 ROSE: Maggie warned me the fox was about again. (To all) That's the end of my pet rooster. The fox must have got him. You were right, Maggie.
 (She places it carefully on the tablecloth in the middle of the garden.)
 MAGGIE: Did he get at the hens?
 ROSE: I don't think so.
 MAGGIE: Was the door left open?
 ROSE: They're all right. They're safe.
 MAGGIE: That itself.

BEAT 14, ACT II

- ⌘ Literal action: Chris changes the subject to dancing; Maggie makes a joke; Kate changes the subject back to dinner; Maggie takes charge of the situation
- ⌘ Objective: I want to relax
- ⌘ Essential action: to ride the waves
- ⌘ Action list:
 1. to change the subject
 2. to collapse

15

AGNES: We'll get another white rooster for you, Rosie.
ROSE: Doesn't matter.

MAGGIE: And I'll put manners on him early on.

ROSE: I don't want another.

MAGGIE: *(Quick hug)* Poor old Rosie. *(As she moves away)* We can hardly expect him to lay for us now . . .

CHRIS: Where's that Michael fellow got to? Michael! He hears me rightly, you know. I'm sure he's jouncing about out there somewhere, watching us. Michael!

(ROSE sits on the garden seat.)

MAGGIE: All right, girls, what's missing? Knives, forks, plates –

(She sees JACK coming through the kitchen.)

Jesus, Mary and Joseph!

(JACK is wearing a very soiled, very crumpled white uniform – a version of the uniform we saw him in at the very beginning of the play. One of the epaulettes is hanging by a thread and the gold buttons are tarnished. The uniform is so large that it looks as if it were made for a much larger man: his hands are lost in the sleeves and the trousers trail on the ground. On his head he wears a tricorne, ceremonial hat; once white like the uniform but now grubby, the plume broken and tatty. He carries himself in military style, his army cane under his arm.)

JACK: Gerry, my friend, where are you?

GERRY: Out here, Jack.

JACK: There you are. *(To all)* I put on my ceremonial clothes for the formal exchange. There was a time when it fitted me – believe it or not. Wonderful uniform, isn't it?

GERRY: Unbelievable. I could do with that for Spain.

JACK: It was my uniform when I was chaplain to the British army during the Great War.

KATE: We know only too well what it is, Jack.

JACK: Isn't it splendid? Well, it was splendid. Needs a bit of a clean up. Okawa's always dressing up in it. I really must give it to him to keep.

KATE: It's not at all suitable for this climate, Jack. ☺

JACK: You're right, Kate. Just for the ceremony – then I'll change back. Now, if I were at home, what we do when we swap or barter is this. I place my possession on the ground – *(He and GERRY enact this ritual.)*

BEAT 15, ACT II

- ◆ Literal action: Rose comes out with her dead rooster; her sisters comfort her
- ◆ Objective: to be a part of the family
- ◆ Essential action: to soothe

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110

BEAT 16, ACT II

- ◆ Literal action: Jack comes out in uniform; Kate tries to get him to change; Jack refuses
- ◆ Objective: I want my big brother to go to heaven
- ◆ Essential action: to back seat drive a friend's decisions
- ◆ Action list:
 1. to roll my eyes
 2. to throw it out there

Go ahead. (*Of hat*) Put it on the grass - anywhere - just at your feet. Now take three steps away from it - yes? - a symbolic distancing of yourself from what you once possessed. Good. Now turn round once - like this - yes, a complete circle - and that's the formal rejection of what you once had - you no longer lay claim to it. Now I cross over to where you stand - right? And you come over to the position I have left. So. Excellent. The exchange is now formally and irrevocably complete. This is my straw hat. And that is your tricorn hat. Put it on. Splendid! And it suits you! Doesn't it suit him?

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CHRIS: His head's too big.

GERRY: (*Adjusting hat*) What about that? (*To AGNES*) is that better, Agnes?

AGNES: You're lovely.

(*GERRY does a Charlie Chaplin walk across the garden, his feet spread, his cane twirling. As he does he sings:*)

GERRY: 'In olden times a glimpse of stocking
Was looked on as something shocking . . .'

JACK: (*Adjusting his hat*) And what about this? Or like this? Or further back on my head?

MAGGIE: Would you look at them! Strutting about like a pair of peacocks! Now - teatime!

AGNES: I'll make the tea.

MAGGIE: You can start again tomorrow. Let me finish off Lughnasa. Chrissie, put on Marconi.

CHRIS: I think it's broken again.

AGNES: Gerry fixed it. Didn't you?

GERRY: Then Chrissie got at it again.

CHRIS: Possessed that thing, if you ask me.

KATE: I wish you wouldn't use words like that, Christina. There's still great heat in that sun.

MAGGIE: Great harvest weather.

KATE: I love September. ³

MAGGIE: (*Not moving*) Cooking time, girls. ⁴

KATE: Wait a while, Maggie. Enjoy the bit of heat that's left. (*AGNES moves beside ROSE.*)

AGNES: Next Sunday, then. Is that all right?

ROSE: What's next Sunday?

AGNES: We'll get some more bilberries.

ROSE: Yes. Yes. Whatever you say, Aggie.

(GERRY examines the kites.)

GERRY: Not bad for a kid of seven. Very neatly made.

KATE: Look at the artwork. \$

GERRY: Wow-wow-wow-wow! That is unbelievable!

KATE: I keep telling his mother – she has a very talented son. ♪

CHRIS: So there, Mr Evans.

GERRY: Have you all seen these?

MAGGIE: I hate them.

GERRY: I think they're just wonderful. Look, Jack.

(For the first time we all see the images. On each kite is painted a crude, cruel, grinning face, primitively drawn, garishly painted.)
I'll tell you something: this boy isn't going to end up selling gramophones.

CHRIS: Michael! He always vanishes when there's work to be done.

MAGGIE: I've a riddle for you. Why is a gramophone like a parrot?

KATE: Maggie! ♪

MAGGIE: Because it . . . because it always . . . because a parrot . . . God, I've forgotten!

(MAGGIE moves into the kitchen. MICHAEL enters. The characters are now in positions similar to their positions at the beginning of the play – with some changes: AGNES and GERRY are on the garden seat. JACK stands stiffly to attention at Agnes's elbow. One kite, facing boldly out front, stands between GERRY and AGNES; the other between AGNES and JACK. ROSE is upstage left. MAGGIE is at the kitchen window. KATE is downstage right. CHRIS is at the front door. During MICHAEL's speech KATE cries quietly. As MICHAEL begins to speak the stage is lit in a very soft, golden light so that the tableau we see is almost, but not quite, in a haze.)

MICHAEL: As I said, Father Jack was dead within twelve months. And with him and Agnes and Rose all gone, the heart seemed to go out of the house.

Maggie took on the tasks Rose and Agnes had done and pretended to believe that nothing had changed. My mother spent the rest of her life in the knitting factory – and hated every day of it. And after a few years doing nothing Kate got

BEAT 17, ACT II

◆ Literal action: Jack and Gerry win everyone over with the ceremony; everyone jokes and laughs and enjoys the sun

◆ Objective: I want to let go

◆ Essential action: To bask in the warmth of it all

◆ Action list:

1. to flutter
2. to enjoy
3. to savor
4. to laze about
5. to beam
6. to gush
7. to play along

the job of tutoring the young family of Austin Morgan of the Arcade. But much of the spirit and fun had gone out of their lives; and when my time came to go away, in the selfish way of young men I was happy to escape.

(Now fade in very softly, just audible, the music - It is Time to Say Goodnight (not from the radio speaker).)

And as MICHAEL continues everybody sways very slightly from side to side - even the grinning kites. The movement is so minimal that we cannot be quite certain if it is happening or if we imagine it.)

And so, when I cast my mind back to that summer of 1936, different kinds of memories offer themselves to me.

But there is one memory of that Lughnasa time that visits me most often; and what fascinates me about that memory is that it owes nothing to fact. In that memory atmosphere is more real than incident and everything is simultaneously actual and illusory. In that memory, too, the air is nostalgic with the music of the thirties. It drifts in from somewhere far away - a mirage of sound - a dream music that is both heard and imagined; that seems to be both itself and its own echo; a sound so alluring and so mesmeric that the afternoon is bewitched, maybe haunted, by it. And what is so strange about that memory is that everybody seems to be floating on those sweet sounds, moving rhythmically, languorously, in complete isolation; responding more to the mood of the music than to its beat. When I remember it, I think of it as dancing. Dancing with eyes half closed because to open them would break the spell. Dancing as if language had surrendered to movement - as if this ritual, this wordless ceremony, was now the way to speak, to whisper private and sacred things, to be in touch with some otherness. Dancing as if the very heart of life and all its hopes might be found in those assuaging notes and those hushed rhythms and in those silent and hypnotic movements. Dancing as if language no longer existed because words were no longer necessary . . .

(Slowly bring up the music. Slowly bring down the lights.)

THE END

Vita

Kathleen Johnston was born on November 17, 1982 in the hills of Pennsylvania, not far from Philadelphia. At the age of five she moved with her family to Toledo, Ohio, where she happily spent her childhood. There, she attended Springfield High School. She was an active student, participating in theatre and competing on the tennis team, and in 2000 she graduated salutatorian. From there, she went on to double major in Theatre and Psychology with a minor in German at Muskingum College in New Concord Ohio. Aside from her challenging academic schedule, Kat was a very involved member of the theatre department, participated in music, and was a member of numerous scholarly and social organizations, including Theta Phi Alpha Fraternity and Sigma Alpha Iota sorority. In 2004 she graduated summa cum laude and moved to New Orleans, Louisiana to pursue a Masters of Fine Arts in Acting from the University of New Orleans. In life outside of school, Kat hopes to continue to grow and work as an actor and plans to go wherever that path might take her.