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# Dancing at Lughnasa

By Frank McGuinness

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.  
We called it "Lugh" after  
the old pagan god of the harvest.  
His festival was Lughnasa,  
a time of music and dance.  
Then my mother's brother,  
my Uncle Jack...  
came home from Africa for  
the first time in 25 years.  
He was the oldest of the family,  
and the only boy.  
That was my mother.  
She was the baby  
of the family.  
I'm gonna throw  
this old cracked thing out.  
You are not.  
I broke it.  
The only way to avoid seven years'  
bad luck is to keep usin' it.  
You know, I think I might  
just start to wear lipstick.  
Steady on there. Today, it's lipstick.  
Tomorrow it's the gin bottle.  
Oh, dear, a wild Woodbine.  
It's better than any man.  
Not that I'd know.  
Better not let Kate  
hear that kind of chat.  
If Aunt Maggie smoked  
and took life lightly...  
Aunt Kate did not.  
She was a schoolteacher,  
and a strict one.  
- What are you doing up there?  
- I'm putting the finishing touches on.  
- You should've done that yesterday.

- I want it to look nice for Jack.

Get yourself ready. Do you want  
the whole place laughing at us?

- I've only to put on a skirt.

- Do so, please.

And do something with your hair  
as well. Where's Rose?

Feeding the chickens.

I suppose she looks like  
a mad woman as well.

My mother used to whisper,

"Agnes is deep. "

She says little.

That's Aunt Rose.

Rose was a bit slow.

Simple. "

That's the word we used.

Mussolini will be there  
with his airplanes in the air

Will you come to Abyssinia

Will you come

Mussolini is many miles away.

Father Jack, your only brother,  
will be in Ballybeg in one hour.

Would you please

make yourself presentable?

Don't mind her.

She's only an old gander.

Gander!

And so we set out

to meet my Uncle Jack.

Little did I know it...

child as I was...

that this was the beginning  
of things changing.

Changing so quickly.

Too quickly.

- Excited?

- I am, Mammy.

Come on.

Good day, Miss Mundy.

Well, Miss Mundy.

Big day for youse all.

Father Jack,

back at long last.  
It is indeed.  
Thank you very much.  
Something for youse all  
to be proud of.  
All that time amongst the lepers.  
The man's a saint.  
Thank you. Bus'll be in soon.  
If you'll excuse us.  
Give him our best wishes.  
Give him your arse  
and say it's parsley.  
That's enough, Margaret,  
thank you very much.  
- Look, it's Danny Bradley.  
- Hold your tongue.  
Will I run over to say hello?  
You'll stay right here  
beside me.  
He's a scut.  
With three children.  
The whole town knows it.  
You're a fine one to talk,  
Christina Mundy.  
You're jealous!  
That's what's wrong with  
the whole lot of youse!  
- You're jealous of me!  
- Just try to control yourself, please.  
His wife left him.  
She did the runner.  
She may have had her reasons.  
It's coming!  
The bus, it's coming!  
Oh, Jack.  
Oh, thank God, Jack.  
Ballybeg. Ten minutes.  
Father.  
- Is this...  
- Ballybeg.  
- Is this the name of where...  
- It's where you come from.  
- Am I home?  
- You're home, Jack.

Mother is dead.  
She's not here.  
She's dead.  
Come on.  
Come and say hello to Maggie.  
- Maggie.  
- He's an old man, Mammy.  
Come on, Michael.  
Stop it, Aunt Maggie.  
His sisters loved Jack  
with all their hearts...  
sending what pennies they had  
to him in Africa.  
Rose and Agnes knitting gloves  
for a living.  
All the women trying  
to keep house and home together.  
A miracle.  
That's no miracle.  
It is science.  
It's not science.  
It's the god of Lughnasa.  
Pagan nonsense celebrating  
the feast of Lughnasa.  
This is the month of August, the feast  
of Our Lady's Assumption Into Heaven.  
A goddess, rising through  
the sky and the stars...  
in search for her dear son.  
Where is Michael's father?  
He's not here.  
They're not married.  
So Michael is a love child.  
A son conceived in love.  
I'm glad you have a child  
conceived in love.  
He's not mine.  
He's Christina's.  
- He's mine.  
- All of you.  
You all love him.  
He belongs to all of you.  
Michael, go outside and play.  
Danny Bradley

wants to marry me.  
He wants to take me up to  
the back hills one day to Lough Anna.  
Will you marry us?  
Danny Bradley can't marry you.  
He's married already.  
You know that.  
But he loves me, and I love him.  
- And his wife's left him.  
- That's not our business.  
You must be tired.  
Have a wee sleep before you eat.  
- It'll build up an appetite.  
- In Africa, we sleep and dream.  
- In the dream, we sacrifice to the gods.  
- This is not Africa.  
This is Ballybeg.  
Your home.  
This is Donegal.  
This is Ireland.  
Another miracle.  
It is not a miracle.  
It is science.  
It's music.  
Dance with me, Mother.  
No... Look, turn that off.  
I'll do it myself.  
I am not your mother.  
I am Kate, your eldest sister, and  
you're going to bed for a short while.  
The only miracles  
are those God ordains.  
And you are an ordained priest.  
You do not dance.  
Maggie, see Jack to his rest,  
if you please.  
My rest, yeah.  
Many women in Africa have love children.  
And they are loved.  
- As they are here.  
- Yes, as they are here.  
I didn't mean to upset you.  
I would like you all  
to have a love child.

His Holiness, the Pope, would have  
something to say against that.  
Yes, he would.  
But he's never lived in Africa.  
I'll put you to your bed.  
You need the rest.  
If His Holiness, the Pope,  
doesn't fancy his stay in Africa...  
I could take his place.  
The sisters here will tell ya I've been  
looking for a beautiful black man.  
Come on, Jack. Bed.  
A wee rest.  
I have to laugh at you,  
Christina Mundy.  
Whenever you say you've to laugh at me,  
I know you're not laughing.  
And I've to say I have  
to laugh at you, Rose Mundy.  
A brother home  
from the foreign missions.  
A priest,  
confronted by one sister...  
who's given birth  
to an illegitimate child.  
And Rose...  
talkin' about men  
separated from their wives.  
I was talkin' about Danny Bradley.  
He loves me, Kate!  
Love?  
Gander! Gander!  
That's what you're called  
in your classroom.  
You're not even a woman.  
You're called a gander.  
I am woman enough  
to know what modesty is.  
A woman's modesty is everything.  
Thank you, Okawa.  
Who is Okawa?  
You are.  
She's right, you know. Kate's right.  
I brought shame on this family.

- Deep shame.  
- You brought Michael to this family.  
And he is not shame.  
You know that, as does Kate.  
What's wrong with Jack?  
- His nerves.  
- Oh, aye, nerves.  
We were so proud of him.  
To have a priest in the family was  
a great honor. Poor Jack. God help him.  
Maybe Michael will become a priest.  
Maybe.  
You could love Uganda, Maggie.  
As I lie myself down to sleep...  
I pray to God my soul to keep.  
If I should die before I wake...  
I pray to God my soul to take.  
I think I've come home to die.  
Jesus, don't.  
We can't afford to bury ya.  
I'm glad you're home.  
Watch yourself.  
- Go to sleep.  
- Aye.  
Watch yourself.  
Go to sleep, Okawa.  
What does Okawa mean?  
Okawa is my houseboy  
in Uganda.  
He is Okawa.  
Damn it. I thought  
it was Swahili for "gorgeous. "  
Am I called 'the gander"?  
No, Aunt Kate.  
Who calls me "'the gander"?  
The big fellas do.  
And you let 'em.  
Why have you no friends?  
You're another gander.  
Aren't you, son?  
I've brought you this.  
I was saving it for your birth day...  
but you might as well have it now.  
Do you know how it goes?



Here. You pump it.  
Push it down.  
Push it.  
That's it.  
Sacred Heart of Jesus!  
I don't believe it.  
What's wrong?  
That's him. That's Christina's man!  
That's Gerry.  
It's Gerry Evans!  
He's not coming in this house.  
When are we gonna get a decent mirror  
to see ourselves in?  
- You can see enough to do you.  
- You're not going to meet that blaggard!  
I couldn't look that man  
in the face.  
I hate him.  
I hate him!  
Look at my hands shakin'.  
No, you're not...  
You're not shaking.  
You're perfectly calm.  
You're looking beautiful.  
And what you're gonna do is this:  
You'll meet him outside. Tell him  
that his son is healthy and happy.  
- Then you'll send him packing.  
- No.  
He can stay the night.  
In the shed, outside.  
Alone.  
Come on.  
Oh, look at her.  
Hello, Chrissie.  
Hello, Gerry.  
How have you been  
over the past 18 months?  
Eighteen? Never.  
March, last year.  
March the sixth.  
Where does the time go?  
- Well, you're here now.  
- Here I am.

Wonderful luck.

Is that himself?

- He's a big boy.

- He's grown well.

- Does he like school?

- He doesn't say much.

Like his Aunt Kate.

Yes, indeed.

Will someone please tell me  
what they have to say to each other?

He's Michael's father.

That's a responsibility  
never burdened Mr. Evans.

A commercial traveler called in  
to Kate's school last Easter.

Met you in Dublin.

Had some stupid story...  
about you givin'  
dancing lessons up there.

He was right.

- He was not.

- Cross the old ticker.

All last winter.

Strictly ballroom.

Millions of pupils.

- Everybody wants to dance.

- Millions of pupils?

Fifty-three.

I'm a liar. Fifty-one.

When the good weather came,  
they all drifted away.

You're the one should've been  
giving dance lessons.

You were far better  
than me, remember?

'Twas on the Isle of Capri

that he found her

Beneath the shade

of an old walnut tree

And, oh, how the flowers

bloomed around her

Where they met

on the Isle of Capri

All he could ever do was dance.

Her whole face alters  
when she's happy.  
Though he left  
with the tide in the morning  
Still his heart's  
in the Isle of Capri  
What brings you  
to these parts now?  
To say good-bye.  
Where are you heading for?  
- You'd like to know?  
- I would.  
Want a spin on this bike?  
- I might.  
- Get on.  
- See you soon, Michael.  
- Bye, son.  
Where are you going next?  
You'll never believe this.  
I'm gonna do a spot of fighting.  
- What do you know about fightin'?  
- I'm a Welshman. We're always fighting.  
You're as soft as butter.  
- I'm going off to Spain.  
- Spain?  
The International Brigade.  
I'm joining up.  
I'm gonna fight against Franco.  
There's a company leaves  
in a couple of weeks.  
I'm gonna fight for democracy.  
Democracy? Spain?  
What do you know about Spain?  
A little.  
Enough, maybe.  
- Why exactly are you going to Spain?  
- Because I want to do something.  
I want to do anything...  
with my life.  
I have to.  
Well, then do it.  
"Then do it. "  
"Then do it!"  
- Morning, Miss Mundy.

- Morning.

Thank you, Austin.

Thank you, Mrs. Mac.

Mrs. McLoughlin.

And how are you?

I'm well. I've brought  
some more wool for Agnes and Rose.

This might be the last batch

I give 'em, God help us all.

Dear me, Vera.

What's wrong?

Isn't Agnes the quickest knitter  
in Ballybeg?

You've not heard the word?

There's a woolen factory opening up  
in Donegal Town, they say.

It'll be all machine knittin'  
from now on.

- Machines? A factory?

- That's right.

You're a lucky woman  
to have your teachin' job.

There's our Sophia waving to you.

You were her favorite teacher.

That old bitch, the gander.

Sophia always knew her own mind.

Who are you tellin'?

Didn't she walk into the house a week  
ago and told me she was gettin' married.

Married?

Well, she's barely 16.

Married. And I'll let her.

She'll need a man to keep her.

I'll say nothin' to Agnes  
about the factory.

- Good morning.

- Good morning.

- Two pounds of flour.

- Thank you.

I better not forget

the cigarettes...

or a certain sister of mine

will not speak to me for a week.

Maggie enjoys her wild Woodbine.

- Does she not?

- She does indeed.

But God forgive me, I do not think  
it's a nice habit in a woman.

Harmless enough pleasure.

Now, have you got everything?

Sugar, salt, tapioca... I'm sorry,  
the tapioca's gone up a penny.

That's hardly your fault.

Your battery,

that's come in from Letterkenny.

Oh, yes. Not much good it'll do  
in that old set, though.

Will you be going to  
the harvest dance this year?

- I hardly think so at my age.

- But you should.

It'll be supreme this year.

Supreme.

Will it be?

Will it really be supreme?

Tea, soap, Indian meal, jelly.

- How much do I owe you?

- Two and six.

Mr. Bradley.

Miss Mundy.

How are you?

Very well.

And how are you and yours?

How is your wife?

- I no longer have a wife.

- I hadn't heard she passed away.

She's gone away... to England.

- You should have followed her there.

- Ten Woodbine.

All kinds of things can happen  
to a body in England.

They're not respectable people there  
as we are in Ballybeg.

Will your sisters be going  
to the dance?

Agnes and Rose.

Will they go?

If you'll excuse me, I have a family

and responsibilities to attend to.  
Will you be going yourself  
to the harvest dance?  
Will you be looking  
for a new wife?  
Do you know what you are?  
A dirty, cruel little bitch.  
Father Carlin.  
- Miss Mundy.  
- I'm so glad you asked to see me.  
Father Jack is waiting  
to meet up with you soon.  
I didn't ask to see you  
about your brother.  
Well, I was just wonderin'  
when you would call out to see him.  
- He's not well, I hear.  
- He's just grand, thank God.  
Good feeding, plenty of exercise,  
he'll be right as rain.  
The rain.  
Aye, that's what he needs.  
Rain?  
The sun in Africa, you know...  
it would affect anybody.  
He needs the rain.  
That'll heal him.  
- He's going to say Mass soon.  
- I don't think so.  
When he's fit to see people,  
I'll call out.  
He's fit to see anybody.  
- Jack is...  
- Not well.  
I know.  
I know everything about him.  
- There is nothin' to know.  
- I think there is. So do you.  
You're a bright enough woman.  
You must notice things.  
Haven't you noticed the numbers  
in the school are falling?  
- To be honest, I haven't.  
- Well, they have.

They have.  
So I might need  
to let a teacher go.  
Of course,  
that could be all for the best.  
I'm sure you could do  
with the extra time...  
now you have Father Jack  
on your hands.  
Good-bye to you now.  
But I am a teacher.  
What'll I do  
if I stop teaching?  
What'll become of us?  
Good day to you, ma'am.  
That's a fine hat.  
It was a present  
from the District Commissioner.  
He's a stubborn man.  
He and I fight a lot, but I like him.  
He calls me "The Irish Outcast. "  
When I was leaving,  
he gave me a present...  
of the last governor's  
ceremonial hat.  
Well, you must show it to Michael.  
I will later.  
He's watching you.  
He's shy of you.  
He'll grow out of it.  
Are you gonna be here long enough  
to give him time to grow out of it?  
I'm gonna buy him a bike.  
You trying to break the child's heart?  
A bike's what he's always wanted.  
- I will buy him a bike.  
- Don't lie to him.  
Can I talk to you?  
I need to ask you a question.  
Will you answer me?  
I'll ask you anyway.  
What color do you like best?  
Black or blue?  
I need to know if I should buy you

a black or a blue bike.

Black!

Does Mr. Evans ever wonder how  
Christina clothes and feeds Michael?

Does he ask her?

Does Mr. Evans care?

Beasts of the field have more concern  
for their young than that creature has.

Do you ever listen to yourself?

You are such a damned,  
righteous bitch!

And his name is Gerry.

Don't I know his name is Gerry.

What am I calling him, Saint Patrick?

What was that all about?

Who's to say?

'Twas on the Isle of Capri  
that he found her  
Beneath the shade  
of the old walnut tree  
Oh, I can still see  
the flowers blooming 'round her  
As they met on the Isle of Capri  
If you knew your prayers as well  
as you knew those old pagan songs...

I am a righteous bitch,  
aren't I?

She was as sweet  
as a rose at the dawning

But somehow fate  
hadn't meant it to be

And as he sailed  
with the tide in the morning

Still his heart's  
in the Isle of Capri

- What have you got to sing about?

- Just practicing the fox-trot.

- Where is Gerry?

- He's with Michael.

What are they doing?

His daddy's giving him a ride  
on his motorbike.

Motorbike!

Motor...



He'll kill the child!  
He'll be all right.  
He's with his daddy.  
What's wrong? Don't you like  
your daddy to kiss you?  
- Are you really my daddy?  
- You know I am.  
You've seen me five or six times.  
Don't you remember?  
- I've never seen you before this week.  
- Yes, you have.  
Five or six times.  
You've forgotten.  
Maybe so.  
Look at those strange animals  
over there.  
What's strange about them?  
They've got horns in  
the middle of their foreheads.  
Do you think they might be unicorns?  
Unicorns are horses. Those are sheep.  
And there's no horns there.  
Can we go home now?  
I'm hungry.  
All right.  
- What was that for?  
- I don't know.  
I do beg your pardon.  
My...  
My mind was...  
- What are those?  
- They're roses. Flowers.  
They won't bite ya.  
They're just flowers.  
Yes, flowers.  
We'll put some in your room  
for you with a card...  
under them saying "roses"  
so you know what they are.  
Have you taken your medicine yet?  
You're supposed to take it  
three times a day, you know that.  
One of our priests  
took too much quinine.

He was addicted.  
He almost died.  
The local medicine man  
made him better.  
There's a strange white bird  
on my windowsill.  
That's Rosie's pet rooster.  
- Keep away from that thing.  
- One day I'm gonna wring its neck.  
In Africa,  
when we want to please spirits...  
we kill a rooster or a small goat.  
What's the word for that called?  
A ritual...  
No, ceremony. That's the word  
I was searching for.  
I'm glad I got that.  
Spirits, medicine men,  
ritual sacrifices.  
His head's completely turned.  
Here's a special bit for you.  
Are youse not hungry?  
- Is Gerry eatin' with us?  
- He is, I'm sure.  
We've only a few eggs left  
and some apples.  
We'll manage.  
You can smell tea  
being made a mile away.  
I can indeed. I saw Michael and Gerry  
on the motorbike.  
I'm gonna ask Gerry  
to give me a run on it.  
You'll do no such thing.  
And why aren't they home yet?  
They'll be safe.  
Is Gerry all right  
staying in the barn?  
- He's safe staying there.  
- Nobody's safe these days.  
Somebody's landed Austin Morgan.  
He's getting married next month.  
Our Kate was very mad  
about Austin Morgan. Look at her.

She's blushin'.

- That's enough.

- And Sofia McLoughlin.

She's to be married.

That'll put an end  
to her dancin' days.

The other day she had the cheek to ask  
if I were going to the harvest dance.

She said it would be  
supreme this year.

Supreme. Think I'm gettin'  
corns on this foot.

Hope to God I don't end up crippled  
like poor Mother, may she rest in peace.

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

- Went where?

- To the harvest dance.

All dressed up.

I think we should all go.

Have you no idea  
what it will be like?

Crawling with cheeky young brats  
that I taught years ago.

I'm game.

- You know how I love dancing.

- You have an eight-year-old child.

- Have you forgotten that?

- You can wear that green dress of mine.

You've the figure for it, and it  
brings out the color of your eyes.

And you look great in that cotton dress  
you got for confirmation last year.

You're beautiful in it.

This is silly talk.

We can't. How can we?

Will you go with us?

- Will Maggie what? Try and stop me.

- Oh, God, Agnes. What do you think?

- We're going!

- We're off. We're away!

- It cost four and six to get in.

- I've five pounds saved.

I'll take you.

I'll take us all.  
How many years has it been since  
we were at a dance in the village?  
And I don't care  
how young they are.  
How drunk and dirty and sweaty they are.  
I want to dance.  
It's the festival of Lughnasa.  
I want to dance.  
I know. I know.  
It's settled. We're going.  
Like we used to.  
I love you, Aggie.  
I love you.  
Will you come to Abyssinia  
Will you come  
Bring your own cup  
and a saucer and a bun  
Mussolini will be there  
with his airplanes in the air  
Will you come to Abyssinia  
Will you come  
We're going nowhere.  
Look at yourselves, will ya?  
Mature women... dancing?  
What's come over you all?  
We're going to no harvest dance.  
And you were going to pay for us all  
out of five pounds you saved?  
I don't see any of that being  
offered up for the housekeeping.  
That's more than I have!  
This isn't your classroom.  
Maybe I should start  
knittin' gloves.  
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

are two unpaid servants.  
And if you will now  
keep your mouth shut...  
this unpaid servant  
will make your tea.  
Mr. Evans'll be off again...  
for another 12 months.  
Christina will sob and lament  
in the middle of the night.  
I don't think I could go through  
another winter like that.  
You work hard at your job.  
You try to keep the home together.  
Suddenly, you realize  
the cracks are appearing everywhere.  
- It's all about to collapse.  
- Nothing's about to collapse.  
But what I'm most worried about  
is Rose.  
If I lose my job,  
if this house is broken up...  
what'll become of our Rosie?  
Evening, ladies.  
Look at me, everybody,  
on my dad's motorbike!  
Okawa, I'm coming home.  
I'm coming home.  
You're dreamin'.  
Come. We'll go for our walk now.  
What were you doing  
with the wooden sticks, Uncle Jack?  
- Anybody want more tea?  
- I'm your man.  
I was talking to Obi...  
the Great Goddess of the Earth.  
Is she now?  
At this time of year...  
harvesttime in Africa...  
we celebrate the festival  
of the New Yam...  
and the festival  
of the Sweet Casava.  
They're both dedicated to Obi,  
the Great Goddess of the Earth.

Is there a Saint Obi?  
If there is,  
she's not in my prayer book.  
How do you celebrate it?  
Well, we cut...  
cut and anoint...  
the new yam  
and the new casava.  
And then we pass the bowl  
around the table...  
and each takes one.  
We light fires  
and we paint our faces.  
And then we sing  
and drink palm wine.  
And we dance, and we dance,  
and we dance.  
Men, women and children,  
and even lepers with limbs missing.  
For days on end, dancing.  
You lose all sense of time.  
A clatter of lepers  
doing the Military Two-Step.  
- God forgive you.  
- They have a great capacity...  
for fun and laughing.  
You'd love them.  
You must come back with me.  
I don't think I'd be too keen  
on the yams.  
Think I'd miss the old spud.  
These festivals, they're not  
Christian ceremonies, are they?  
The Ryangans are faithful  
to their own religion.  
Will you say Mass soon?  
In the house, maybe?  
I will, yes.  
Monday, maybe.  
- Shall I put the wireless on?  
- Marconi's in one of his moods.  
You might have a look at the aerial  
one of these days.  
Bit of music

would do us all nicely.  
No. We must all be worn out.  
Good night.  
Good night, all.  
Can I stay with Daddy  
in the barn?  
Please, Mum, I want to.  
Tonight, we will all sleep  
in our own beds.  
And that is final.  
I'll see you in the morning.  
Come on.  
I'll put you to your bed.  
I'll be in to read to you  
in five minutes.  
No. He'll go straight to sleep tonight.  
And that too is final.  
Gypsy, play your violin  
The moon is high above  
I'll fly to you  
on silver wings  
The serenade I love  
What's the matter?  
Do you ever want to go away?  
Why?  
Just wanted away?  
Danny Bradley's asked me  
to go away.  
To America.  
Danny Bradley is no good for you.  
He wants to take me to a picnic,  
out at Lough Anna. Look...  
what he gave me.  
I haven't worn it yet.  
I'm keeping it for when we go  
out on the boat.  
You're not going.  
Promise me you're not.  
Do you hear me?  
I hear ya.  
I love you. I love you  
more than chocolate biscuits.  
I love you too.  
If you ever do go away,

you'll take me with you, won't you?  
I promise.  
But it's to be our secret.  
Promise?  
That lovely summer  
I thought would never end.  
We laughed and played  
to our heart's content.  
And I was king of the castle,  
surrounded by all who loved me.  
Come on, then. Catch.  
Jesus, look at me.  
Look at the cut of me.  
I thought my hair was lovely.  
It's like a whin bush.  
- You were lovely.  
- God forgive you for mocking.  
- Who's that?  
- Curly McDaid, God rest him.  
Curly? He hasn't a hair  
on his head.  
Bald at 17.  
That's why we called him Curly.  
Your sister could tell you  
a thing or two about him.  
- Tell all.  
- My lips are sealed.  
Mine are not. He had a few  
wild notions about our Kate.  
I had no more interest in Curly McDaid  
than the man in the moon.  
- He was fair mad about her.  
- If we're talking about wild notions...  
What about him?  
Brian McGuinness.  
- He's gorgeous.  
- Your sister thought so too.  
He was a bit like Gerry.  
The loveliest dancer.  
Do you mind the time  
you were robbed?  
- That dance competition?  
- You were there.  
I do remember that night.



They had a waltz competition.  
I was looking down  
at Curly McDaid's bald head.  
But Maggie and Brian  
were so beautiful.  
Of course, they gave the cup  
to the two old ones.  
You should have won,  
you and Brian.

- What happened to him?

- Brian went to Australia.

He wrote. I answered.

Australia's far away.

The way things go.

So that's that.

Will somebody give us a song?

Rose Mundy, I call on you.

Down By The Salley Gardens. "

Down by the Salley Gardens

My love and I did meet

She passed the Salley Gardens

With little snow-white feet

She bid me take love easy

As the leaves grow on a tree

But I being young and foolish

With her could not agree

In a field down by the river

My love and I did stand

And on my leaning shoulder

She laid her snow-white hand

She bid me take life easy

As the grass grows on the weir

But I was young and foolish

And now I'm full of tear

Good morning.

- Do you fancy a stroll by the river?

- I'll be right after you.

Where's your mammy?

She's not up yet.

She's wild tired.

Are you getting something

ready for school?

I'm not listenin'.

Gypsy, play your violin

The moon is high above  
I'll fly to you  
on silver wings  
That serenade our love  
Look what you've made me do.  
You've ruined my letter.  
Whoever you're writing to, he'd need  
to be smart to read that scrawl.  
Santa Claus.  
In August?  
At the feast of Lughnasa?  
Nothing like gettin' him  
before the rush.  
- What are you asking for?  
- A bell.  
- A bell?  
- For my bicycle.  
Bicycle?  
The one my daddy's buying me  
in Kilkenny.  
He promised me.  
Well, if he promised you,  
aren't you the lucky boy?  
Away and write to Santa Claus  
some other time. Go on.  
A day like today, you should be running  
about the fields like a young calf.  
I'm not a calf.  
I'm Michael, Michael Evans.  
That's a fine hat.  
Your own is very impressive as well.  
We must do a swap  
before I go back to Africa.  
- You're going back?  
- I may. Soon.  
- God, I enjoyed that sleep.  
- Aren't you the lucky one?  
Where's Michael?  
Outside, dreaming  
he's on his new bicycle.  
You never know.  
Gerry might buy it.  
It's a good thing Michael is blessed  
with a great imagination.

- Is there water boiling for tea?

- There will be.

And soda bread.

If Agnes and Rose...

have luck with the blackberries,  
we should have some beautiful jam.

- They're pickin' blackberries?

- They are.

Rose in her Sunday best  
for some reason.

- Did you hear what I said to Maggie?

- I did.

She said, "Well, you're a fine lady  
to go out pickin' blackberries. "

And you said, "I'm some toff, Maggie.

I'm some toff. "

Well, stop bein' such a toff  
and give me a hand.

All right.

Is that all the sympathy I get?

Now pull me out.

Look at me hands,  
all scabbed with briars.

What's that?

It's a church bell, I think.

You should know.

Yes, I should.

Now, what's our direction?

I want to know exactly where I'm going,  
then Kate won't have to nag.

- Nag. That's not a word, is it?

- Nag? Yes. To keep on at somebody.

Oh, good. Nag.

My English is coming back.

- Do you speak Spanish?

- Spanish?

- For Spain.

- No. Not a word.

I can ride a motorbike.

That'll be enough to get me signed on.

I take it you don't approve.

Why?

I'm going to fight against Franco,  
the Catholic Church and all that.

The Catholic Church.

- Are they for Franco?

- Yes.

They would be.

You're sharper than you seem.

Am I?

Those church bells?

Were they ringing tor a wedding?

Will they ever ring

for you and Christina?

Good.

Better to leave her single

than to leave her married.

I've a wild pain in my stomach,

and my head's splittin'.

That's hit you very sudden.

Must be that hot sun.

Maybe you should go home

and have a wee rest.

Aye. I think I will.

- Go straight home.

- I will! Aye.

Rosebud.

You'll never go away, will ya?

Did you bring anything to eat?

You said we'd have a picnic,

and I could eat a horse.

Chocolate biscuits.

The very boys.

I don't know why

I'm goin' to Spain.

Everybody says

it'll be over by Christmas.

They said the Great War

would be over by Christmas.

They say that about all wars.

Never are though.

It's for the cause.

There's bound to be something

right about the cause.

It's somewhere to go.

Spain.

Isn't it?

There's Agnes over there.

You're an eejit of a man,  
Gerry Evans.  
There now.  
You're even more beautiful.  
A right glamour girl.  
Pretty milkmaid,  
put down your pails...  
and dance with me.  
- Would you have a bit of sense?  
- Dance with me, please. Come on.  
Give me your hand.  
In olden days  
a glimpse of stocking  
Was looked at  
as something shocking  
And heaven knows  
Anything goes  
Good authors too  
who once knew better words  
Now only use four-letter words  
writing prose  
Anything goes  
But I know you're not responsible  
for Gerry's decisions...  
but I just feel it would be on  
my consciousness if I didn't tell ya...  
how strongly I disapprove of this whole  
International Brigade caper in Spain.  
Would it?  
Its a sorry day in Ireland when we send  
men off to fight for godless Communism.  
And I know he would say  
it's for democracy.  
- Would he?  
- I'm not going to argue.  
- I just want to clear my conscience.  
- Now you've cleared it.  
Good for you.  
Did you enjoy them biscuits, Rose?  
I did, Danny. Thank you.  
Is that all I'm going to get?  
It is, yes.  
When my wife left me,  
I came out here to Lough Anna.

To go out in the boat?  
No. To the water.  
To throw myself in.  
But I didn't.  
There's a dance tonight in  
the back hills. Will you come with me?  
I have to go home.  
They'll be worried.  
Are you worried?  
Are you?  
Will you come with me  
to the dance tonight?  
Yes, I will.  
Please, will you stop this?  
I'll get back to dry land.  
And you won't leave me.  
You won't.  
Is that a purple stain  
on your gansey?  
I fell into a bush.  
Rosie nearly died laughin' at me.  
How is she now?  
Is she still in bed?  
Bed?  
She's here, isn't she?  
She left me and went home to lie down.  
She said she wasn't feeling well.  
Have you seen Rose?  
When did she leave you?  
Three hours ago.  
She said she felt out of sorts.  
And she set off on her own  
to come home?  
That's what she said.  
Start at the beginning, Agnes.  
What exactly happened?  
Nothing happened. Nothing at all.  
We walked to the bushes  
and out of the blue she said...  
- I've forgotten what she said.  
- Think.  
She said something  
about the warm sun...  
and she had a sore head

and a sick stomach.

She'd go home and sleep for a while.

Are you sure she's not in her bed?

Where is she?

What's happening to our Rosie?

Stop sniveling.

Did she go towards home?

I think so. Yes.

- She may have gone into the town.

- Not wearing Wellingtons.

She was wearing

her good shoes...

and her blue cardigan

and her good skirt.

- Danny Bradley.

- What?

- Oh, God, no.

- Danny. Lough Anna. The back hills.

What about the back hills? What do you know about this Bradley business?

- I know no more than any of you!

- You and Rose always whisper together.

What plot has been hatched between Rose and Mr. Bradley?

- No plot, Kate, please!

- You're lyin' to me, Agnes!

- You're withholdin'. I want the truth.

- All I know is what I have...

- I want to know everything you know!

- That'll do, Kate!

Will you stop that at once?

She may well be in the town.

She may be on her way home.

She may have fainted

if she wasn't feelin' well.

We're going to find her.

You search the fields

on the upper side of the lane.

You take the lower side

down as far as the main road.

Kate, you go to the old well

and search all around there.

- What are you calling him for?

- He has a motorbike. We need him.

I may go home soon, Kate,  
see if the others have found her.  
She might be in the kitchen,  
havin' a cup of tea.  
I wonder if we'll  
soon have tea to drink.  
I've had a letter from Father Carlin.  
And I'm not a teacher anymore.  
- What?  
- Decline in numbers, he said.  
A lie.  
He thanked me.  
A lie.  
A lie, a lie, a lie, a lie.  
What is that?  
The Lughnasa fires.  
People light them  
and dance and jump over them.  
A fellow called Sweeney  
fell into a fire.  
He was almost burnt to death.  
Lugh, god of light,  
god of music.  
I remember.  
Uncle Jack, where are you goin'?  
I'm supposed to be mindin' ya.  
Uncle Jack! Come back!  
You're not even a real priest.  
Welcome to the Lughnasa fires,  
Father Jack!  
Is this Africa? Rose?  
We're gettin' married. I'm Danny  
Bradley, and I'm gonna marry Rose.  
I wanna go home!  
Are these our relations?  
Is this your wedding?  
No, they're savages! Pagans!  
They're no connection to us!  
Will you marry us, Father?  
Marry me and Rose!  
I won't marry you, Danny.  
You're married already!  
No, look, Rose! Look! Look!  
Look what I'll do for you.



- I'm goin' away!  
- Where?  
It's a secret! Good-bye!  
We must go home!  
These are not our people!  
- Where are you goin'?  
- I don't know where!  
- We're just going home.  
- I'll follow you.  
I'll get ya.  
Are you comin' home?  
You got loads.  
They're nice.  
They're sweet.  
Rose love, we were wild  
worried about you.  
You said you were  
coming home to lie down.  
- But you didn't come home.  
- Were ya in the town?  
That's why you're all  
dressed up, isn't it?  
You went into Ballybeg, didn't ya?  
We'll go and pick some more  
blackberries next week.  
All right. I'll lie down  
for a few hours...  
but I'll be up to fetch turf  
in the morning.  
I want to know  
where you've been.  
- Later, after she sleeps.  
- Where you have been!  
- Lough Anna.  
- Where?  
- Lough Anna.  
- Kate, just leave her.  
- You walked to Lough Anna?  
- Yes.  
Did you meet someone there?  
Had you arranged  
to meet someone there?  
I had arranged to meet  
Danny Bradley there.

He brought me out in  
his father's blue boat.  
It's a very peaceful place  
up there.  
He calls me his Rosebud, Aggie.  
Oh, I told you, didn't I?  
Then the two of us went up  
through the back hills.  
We must have seen the last  
of the Lughnasa fires.  
They are pagans.  
I came home with Jack...  
and I said good-bye to Danny.  
And that's all I'm gonna tell ya.  
That's all any of youse  
are gonna hear!  
What's happened to this house?  
Mother of God,  
what has happened to this house?  
We should get some sleep.  
Come on, Katie dear,  
to your bed.  
Maggie'll kill you.  
- Where's Gerry?  
- He's trying to fix the aerial.  
That bloody set  
was never any good.  
Never any damned good,  
that bloody set!  
- He knows what he's doing.  
- Never any damned good, that bloody set.  
You've already offered us  
that bit of wisdom.  
Come on. Come and join me.  
Come on.  
Come on.  
Will you and Michael  
come away with me?  
I know.  
Is there nothing I can do?  
Nothing.  
I could leave you alone.  
You could.  
Soon.

Don't leave me just yet.  
Come on. Keep up.  
Come on, Daddy.  
Give it to me.  
Soccer's no game for a man.  
Rugby! That's what Welshmen play.  
If I had time,  
I'd teach you to play rugby.  
You know I'm goin' away  
tomorrow, don't you?  
Will you miss me?  
Will you miss me?  
And Mammy? Will you miss her?  
I will.  
Then don't go, Daddy.  
I'm a soldier now, Michael.  
I have to fight.  
Look, there's your Uncle Jack.  
What's he doin' in that regalia?  
Gerry, my dear friend.  
We must now make  
our formal farewells.  
I hope all goes well in Spain,  
you old rogue.  
- You're off tomorrow?  
- I am, comrade.  
That's a wonderful uniform.  
I could do with that for Spain.  
It was my uniform when I was chaplain  
to the British Army in the Great War.  
There was a time when it fitted.  
There was a time when it was splendid.  
It still is splendid.  
We must now make the exchange  
the way they do in Africa.  
Now, I place my possession  
on the ground.  
And take three steps away.  
Then I turn round once.  
Now, you come to where I was, and  
I move over to where you were standing.  
The exchange is now formally  
and irrevocably complete.  
This is my straw hat.

And that is your ceremonial hat.  
Put it on.  
Splendid! It suits ya.  
Splendid.  
I'm broke to the bone arrivin' so late  
but I had to tell youse...  
it's definite.  
I have to pay youse off.  
There'll be no more need  
for home knit gloves.  
The factory's definitely  
startin' in Donegal Town.  
How are we going to live, Vera?  
Youse may apply for a job in it.  
I wish youse better luck  
than I had.  
They told me I was too old.  
I'm 41.  
They said I was too old.  
It was good of you  
to come and tell us.  
I only wish it was better news.  
- Good night to youse.  
- Good night.  
Good night.  
I'll make us all  
a nice cup of tea.  
Sit down.  
Right.  
Right you be.  
For there's no places  
on Earth just like  
The homes of Donegal  
I can't stick that song.  
- We might get another rooster for ya.  
- It doesn't matter.  
- And I'll put manners on him early.  
- I don't want another.  
Where's Jack?  
He's out lookin' up  
at the moon and stars.  
He's conducting his own  
distinctive spiritual search.  
Let him.

Do you know what I'm thinkin'?

What has Ballybeg not got  
that Ballybeg needs?

- What?

- A dressmaker.

So why doesn't Agnes Mundy  
who has such clever hands...  
why doesn't she dressmake?

- Clever hands?

- You'd get a pile of work.

- You'd make a fortune.

- Some fortune in Ballybeg.

Stitching shrouds.

- Then how you gonna manage?

- She'll manage.

We'll pull together.

The family will always manage.

We will manage.

We always do.

- And you know how, don't you?

- How?

Our secret. Don't you remember?

That's right. Our secret.

We never saw them again.

They vanished without a trace.

Years later I learned that they ended  
as shadows on the streets of London...  
scraping a living together,  
dying alone.

My Uncle Jack

lasted as long as he could...

believing to the end

in the Earth and the stars.

My father did go to Spain

and was wounded.

My Aunt Kate said it would  
put an end to his dancing days.

Maybe it did.

My mother got a job at the factory.

She hated it all her life.

And my father wrote to her  
occasionally.

Through it all, Aunt Maggie  
tried to keep the house going.

She tried to pretend  
that nothin' had happened...  
but the family had changed.  
It had changed forever.  
And my Aunt Kate  
was inconsolable.  
Inconsolable.  
Me... I was waitin'  
to become a man...  
waitin' to get away.  
Just to go away.  
But the memory of that summer  
is like a dream to me...  
a dream of music that is  
both heard and imagined...  
that seems to be both itself  
and its own echo.  
When I remember it,  
I think of it as dancing...  
dancing as if language  
had surrendered to movement...  
dancing as if language  
no longer existed...  
because words were  
no longer necessary.