

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.)*

Maggie

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.)*

Rose