

# **LAST ORDERS**

by

**Sean and Keith**

(See Five)

Hydebank Wood College, Belfast

Submitted to the Koestler Arts Awards 2017

## **CHARACTERS**

**Christy McGuigan** – 24 years old, from outside Dublin

**Joe McGuigan** – Christy's younger brother, 18 years old

**Seamus** – an older man and IRB member

**Trevor Gibson** – a British Army recruiting officer

**William** – a young soldier in the British Army

**Eamon** – a young Irish Republican Brotherhood member, Joe's friend

**Sergeant 'Timebomb' Taylor** – a British Army officer

**Paudie (young)** – an Irishman serving in the British Army, Christy's friend

**Paudie (old)** – as above, 50 years later

**Barman** – tends behind the bar in the 1966 scenes

## **NOTES**

The play is set in two main periods – 1966 and 1916. There is also a flashback to earlier fighting in the trenches on the Western Front in Scene 5. The same young actors in both the 1916 and the 1966 scenes should play the roles of Christy and Joe. Their identity and the fact that they are ghosts only gradually emerges and is not fully revealed until the end of the play. The 1966 scenes are set in the same bar, whereas the 1916 scenes take place in a variety of different locations.

**SCENE 1**

*1966. Christy & Joe are drinking in a bar. Noise of crowd & 1960s music plays on the juke box.*

Christy: What are you having?

Joe: You should know. A pint of the black stuff.

Christy: A pint of the black stuff. Always the bar stool patriot.

Joe: What d'you expect? I suppose you're having a pint of English bitter!

Christy: There you are.

Joe: Perfect! Nothing beats a good pint!

Christy: Always reliable.

Joe: More than I can say about you.

Christy: *(rolling a cigarette)* Smoke?

Joe: Nasty habit. I haven't smoked since...

Christy: I know, I know. I only picked it up to pass the time.

Joe: It'll be the death of you!

Christy: Like you can talk. Remember when you were caught round the back of ours with one in your mouth?

Joe: Oh Jesus, that's right.

Christy: What age were you then ...9 ...10?

Joe: 10! I was so shocked I nearly swallowed it in one! Look at yer man...

Christy: Who?

Joe: That auld boy over there!

Christy: Do I know him?

Joe: Tommy Murphy.

Christy: He hasn't aged too well?

Joe: No! By the look of things another clean shirt will do him.

Christy: Looks that way alright.

## SCENE 2

*1916. Starts with sound of rain and distant thunder. Then moves to a bar. Irish music is playing and the sound of conversation of punters in the bar is heard.*

Joe: Sunday evening. The night is dark and cold – miserable! I get talking to some men who are well-known in the area, men not to be messed with. Music is playing and the drinks are flowing. After a couple of hours talk about how things are going in Ireland, the men start to give off the impression they are members of the Irish Republican Brotherhood. The conversation takes a turn and they become more and more emotional about the IRB. They corner me and my friend, Eamon Murphy. They tell me they hear I am a well-driven lad, a lad who needs direction to get what I want – Ireland free from British rule. They give me a time and a place. Before I know it, I'm walking towards the old boxing club to meet Seamus. *(Sound of footsteps on gravel)* I ask myself, 'Why am I doing this?' The answer comes quickly; I'm doing it for those who have died for Ireland, for those who have given their whole life for Ireland, for my children ... for the future children of Ireland! Eamon is with me. There isn't much chat – this is serious. *(Sound of door creaking open and men mumbling secretively)* Inside the club, Seamus is standing with two other men who are not known to me, though I recognise their faces. My heart is beating out of my chest but there is no doubt I'm ready for this, ready to become a soldier. They ask me to step forward towards the tricolour. It's like slow motion. I think of my family and wonder what they would make of it. But this is Ireland. Who's right? Who's wrong? I place my hand on the flag and the process begins.

- Seamus: So son, are you sure? It's a big step, I know, but we've all taken it. It has to be done.
- Joe: I am, Seamus. I want to be free from English rule and oppression and I know you're the only men that are going to do it.
- Seamus: Before you take the oath of allegiance to the Brotherhood, you need to tell me you're fully aware what this means. This is no game, son. It's war, and with war comes death. You may die or see your comrades die.
- Joe: I'm willing to do whatever it takes.
- Seamus: Good man, Joe. I know you have it in you. You'll be a valuable member to the brotherhood. Now, repeat after me ...

### SCENE 3

*1916. Outside a church. Bells ring and you can hear birds singing.*

- Christy: Sunday morning, 11.30am. I walk out of Mass and take up my usual spot just outside the gate. There's myself, Mickey Clarke, John McGirr and Patrick Lynch. John Redmond's recruitment rally at 3.00pm is the hot topic of discussion. Mickey and I make plans to meet up and head down to Limerick to see what's to be said. It's a nice, calm day and we've not much else on the agenda, a typical Sunday. The craic is good with Mickey as he tells me the handlings from the weekend. The atmosphere is relaxed when Redmond makes his way onto the platform where he is surrounded by his loyal National Volunteers. *(Sounds of people applauding and audience chatting)* I am excited to hear what he's got to say. I have a lot of time for Redmond; he is a proper leader in my eyes. I like the way he has a vision and the way he sets about going for things. He is a very calculated man. He controls the platform. I take a look around to see that there are a lot of people in support of Redmond and I must admit, I am one! "We must join the British army in order to gain". These words keep ringing in my ears. I like what he says; he has a point. The British will give us what we want if we fight alongside them. It is simple; the obvious thing to do is to help them out now and seek reward later. Home Rule will be guaranteed. Redmond is on to something. I am with him. I look over to Mickey. He is usually a hard person to read, but the smile on his face tells me everything I need to know. I am not on my own. At 3.30, we make our way down to the hall in Limerick. Enough has been said; it is time to sign up and put our shoulder to the wheel in order to reap the benefits for our own country. I pull the door open. My eyes latch onto a uniform behind a desk. It's the first thing I notice in the hall. This looks good – these guys are serious about us. Redmond is right.

Gibson: Fill out that form with your details. Hand it back to me when you're done. I suppose you're one of Redmond's men?

Christy: Yes, I'm one of his men. You've had a few of us signing up then?

Gibson: It's been a busy day. He must have given a very convincing speech.

Christy: He did. We know what's got to be done. We help you boys with the Germans and, when it's all over and done with, Asquith will reward us with the freedom we want.

Gibson: I'm sure when we beat the Germans together he won't be long giving you lads your country back. In my opinion, this place is far more trouble than it's worth.

*Christy hands back the completed form.*

Gibson: Thanks son, it's good to have you on board. Here's all the information you need before you start your training.

Christy: How long will all that take then?

Gibson: Not long. We need you out on the front line as soon as possible to push the Germans back.

#### **SCENE 4**

*1966. Return to the bar where Christy and Joe are drinking their pints. 1960s music and the sound of a football match on the television.*

Christy: What's on?

Joe: Football talk. Loada rubbish!

Christy: Football and horses ... what more do ye want?

Joe: You wasted many a day at Fairyhouse.

Christy: You're right there. But I've a good feeling about this World Cup.

Joe: Who are you supporting?

Christy: England!

Joe: Course you are.

Christy: Who are you supporting? Don't tell me. Germany.

Joe: England.

Christy: What?

Joe: I can make a bittta coin off them.

Christy: Not even your politics stops you from making a bit of coin. Speaking of money, it's your round!

Joe: Y'don't let me away with too much, do you?

Christy: Y'always get away with too much, in my opinion.

Joe: And you always think you're right. Here, who's that?

Christy: Over there? Wee Bobby. Joe Donnelly's cub.

Joe: He's whistling that Beatles crap!

Christy: Crap?

Joe: Young fellas – they're getting soft.

Christy: Nothing wrong with a bit of taste.

Joe: I'm all for the Stones. Real man!

Christy: Give over.

Joe: I'll give wee Bobby a verse or two of the Stones and show him what proper music is.

Christy: Don't embarrass yourself. You can't sing. Never could. Just shut up and drink your pint.

**SCENE 5**

*Dublin, 1916. Christy is in an army barracks. Soldiers march past.*

Christy: Easter Monday, 9.00am and I'm starting my day's work. Mondays are usually dull, though today there's plenty of stories from the weekend. We sit back and listen; the telephone is ringing in the background. Sergeant Taylor is a joker, always has a story to tell – just what a Monday morning needs. Life is easier here than serving time on the Western Front. Here I can sit back for a couple of hours listening to a few men having a laugh. The only way it could be better was if I were at the races having a few drinks with my friends. Some of them are at Fairyhouse today, some are family men and will be at home; others have left the country for good. The telephone rings again. I am still half in a daydream as I watch Sergeant Taylor on the receiver. His face seems to fill with rage as his whole body tenses. He slams down the phone and roars; for a split second I am back on the Western Front, waiting for the call from my captain, the roar that sent shivers down my spine and pumped me full of adrenaline. *(Sound of cello music is heard in the background.)* The barracks does not look anything like the Front – no real mud, no wet, dirty uniforms, no tears, no horrific injuries. But I carry the scars inside me. I sense the same mayhem and in my mind I see once more the dead bodies and the ruined men. Please, not again.

*Earlier in 1916. The Western Front. Night time in the trenches. Machine gun fire and bombs exploding. Cries of wounded soldiers. William is sobbing and in distress.*

Christy: Shut up, William! You'll waken the other lads.

*The crying continues.*

Christy: Do something. Take your mind off it. It's the only way to survive out here. Write a letter home.

William: I've stopped. What can I tell them...?

Christy: Whatever's on your mind.

William: Dear mother, a new pair of boots would be great. My feet are that cold in the pair I have, it's hard to know where they end and the boots begin.

Christy: We're running short of bullets, but no matter, we can always fight them with our bare hands.

William: I'm half starved...

Christy: They promised us bully beef....

William: But we've only had biscuits and water since Monday.

Christy: The good news is we're making progress.

William: Everyday men are slaughtered for a few yards of blood soaked ground.

Christy: I wish I was back home on the farm. Times were hard, but nothing like this. I've seen a rat as big as a chap feasting on the flesh of my fellow countrymen.

*Sound of a nearby explosion and a whistle signaling orders to move*

Christy: Quick, your gas mask. Don't just stand there. This is it.

William: I can't.

Christy: Move. You stand a better chance with the Hun than Sergeant Taylor.

*Return to Easter Monday 1916 and the British army barracks in Dublin. Telephones ring and there are cries of soldiers preparing for action in the background.*

Christy: The barracks is now like the markets on a Saturday morning, soldiers running to get ready. It soon becomes clear that something is going on; there are men roaring about "the dirty Irish", others shouting about the GPO. It is just after twelve midday and the IRB has taken over the GPO. I pull myself together and board the lorry, the fear of the unknown looming in my mind. Who might be there? Will I know them? Will it be my friends?

*Sound of lorry driving along road and soldiers marching.*

We pull up some yards from the GPO. This is it. I'm going into battle again. I jump down from the lorry and turn to catch my sniper rifle from Paudie. As I take hold of it, I wonder how many friends I might kill this day. Will they still call me a friend at the end of it?

**SCENE 6**

*Dublin, 1916. Joe is in a lorry heading to the GPO. Sound of old lorry engine is heard.*

Joe: Easter Monday, 6am. Here I am, sitting in the back of an old cattle lorry, shivering from the cold and shaking with nerves and excitement. It's off to Dublin City we're going! This is the start of our fight for freedom. I'm feeling grand, surrounded by loyal men, men of their word. I can see Seamus and Eamon; you can tell they were born for this! As the lorry makes its way into the city and up O'Connell Street, I see things I've never seen before: Nelson's Pillar and the grand Imperial Hotel. I've come a long way in my short life, made some big decisions. I have no doubts, just some nerves before entering battle.

This is our day! I feel a slap on my shoulder - Seamus. "Snap out of it, lad!" He hands me a rifle. I'd say it's one from Germany. It looks as if it has seen plenty of action and I'm ready to give it some more! I spy through a hole in the side of the lorry to see us fast approaching the GPO. It's quietened down in the lorry. There's men praying softly to themselves, waiting until the shout comes to let us know we're at the soon-to-be battlefield. I jump off the lorry with Eamon hot on my heels. We grew up together, running around fields and carrying on with sticks.

*Sounds of soldiers shouting, running and attacking the building.*

Now we're marching into the GPO, part of an army, with German guns to support us. It's as if we had trained for this as kids without knowing it. "I'll be with you through thick and thin". It's what I told him all those years ago. I look around to see about forty comrades storming the GPO. There are a lot of hungry looking faces ... hungry for Irish freedom! This has to be done. I tell Eamon to stay tight to me. We would do anything for each other and that's the sort of comrade you need in war. Seamus calls out to us. He barks the order for us to find a good vantage point upstairs. The two of us set off to find the best place we can. This is it. No going back now.

*Sounds of men going up stairs – voices echo around the empty building.*

Eamon: Doesn't seem to be much happening out there, Joe. Hardly seen any Sasanaigh yet. Are they taking us seriously?

Joe: Not enough action for y', Eamon?

Eamon: No, sure that's not what I mean. I just haven't got to fire my gun yet. Have you?

- Joe: No, not yet. But I won't waste bullets shooting crows. I'll save them for the English.
- Eamon: Aye, me too. I hear Seamus has been shot. Have y'seen him?
- Joe: I haven't, no. Would y' get down and take cover and stop your gossiping. You're like an auld woman.
- Eamon: Ah, come on, Joe. Don't be so serious. You scared I'm going to get you into trouble? I saw Pearse earlier; he's a headmaster, you know?
- Joe: 'Course I know.
- Eamon: You haven't got on too well with headmasters in the past. Remember how y' pushed Mr Callaghan down the grassy bank and when he got up, he fell into the pond?
- Joe: Aye, but I didn't push him into the pond. I got in trouble for it.
- Eamon: You didn't sit down for weeks, just hovered over chairs like they were a cold toilet seat.

## SCENE 7

*Dublin, Easter Tuesday 1916. Outside the GPO.*

- Sgt Taylor: Right, young McGuigan, I need you and Gorman to take position on the roof directly opposite the GPO. Be careful and take good cover! These boys are heavily armed.
- Christy: Right sergeant. Come on, Paudie. Take extra supplies with you. We could be here a while.
- Paudie: You take the lead and I'll follow.

*The men go to vantage points.*

- Christy: This is pitiful. These boys won't last long.
- Paudie: I'm ashamed to call myself an Irishman, the way those boys are behaving today.

- Christy: Just keep watch and tell me if you spot any of them through the windows, Paudie. I can see one there bobbing up and down ... third floor, fourth window from the left. Got my sights trained on him. He doesn't have a clue, but when he went there he knew the risks. Can't see a head, just a shoulder. Should I take the shot?
- Paudie: Yep. If we pick them off, one by one, it'll weaken them. They won't know what's hit them when the Helga gets here.
- Christy: I'm going to take it.

*Christy breathes deeply. The sound of a gunshot rings out followed by the sound of reloading.*

- Paudie: Good shot! He's down.
- Christy: I caught a glimpse of him when he fell. Looked a bit like Eamon Murphy, one of Joe's friends. But I don't think the lad's ever been in the city in his life?
- Paudie: He wouldn't be up here with those eejits!

## SCENE 8

*Easter Tuesday, 1916. Inside the GPO. Sound of bullet striking body.*

- Eamon: I'm hit, Joe! A sniper's got me. Stay down!
- Joe: There's blood everywhere. Where'd they get you? Can you move?
- Eamon: In the shoulder. I need help. Get over here!
- Joe: I'm coming. Stay calm!
- Eamon: This is bad, Joe. I'm covered in blood. My jacket's ruined.
- Joe: Don't worry about the jacket, y' fool! I'll keep pressure on this wound for ye. I need you to stay calm.
- Eamon: I need a fag, Joe. If I'm going to die I want my last smoke now.

- Joe: You're not going to die. We didn't come here to die. Where are your fags?
- Eamon: My inside pocket. Covered in blood, knowing my luck.
- Joe: Got them. It must be your lucky day. They're dry as a bone. *(Sound of lighter)*  
Here, take this. It'll calm your nerves a bit.
- Eamon: Have one with me, Joe.
- Joe: Alright. But I need to keep pressure on this wound for y' until help comes.
- Eamon: Help's no use to me, Joe. I'm done for, but sure at least we tried.
- Joe: You're not done for. Stay with me, lad. I need you to get through this. Ireland needs you to get through it. We'll be heroes when we beat these bastards.
- Eamon: I hope you're right, Joe. I hope you're right.

## SCENE 9

*1966. Christy and Joe continue to drink in the bar. 1960s music plays in the background.*

- Christy: I saw De Valera heading back into Kilmainham Jail a few months back.
- Joe: The world's gone mad. I wouldn't be caught dead in there. Did you hear much?
- Christy: Not much. Kilmainham. A place of spooks, eh? The long fella was there was for the fifty year commemoration. Special guest.
- Joe: Still trooping around after eighty-four years.
- Christy: And he's been re-elected President.
- Joe: He's done a lot in that time.
- Christy: It could have been a lot different. Him using his American citizenship to get himself out of a spot of bother! He always was a dodgy fella.
- Joe: He's some lad. He'd be able to tell you a story or two.
- Christy: He's a scoundrel, in my opinion. Everyone knows he set Collins up. Now, Collins I respected!

- Joe: That's auld propaganda. Sure, didn't Collins fire English guns at his own countrymen?
- Christy: He did. But with good cause! Wouldn't Dublin have been wrecked for a second time?
- Joe: Wasn't it wrecked there earlier on when they blew Nelson up? I hear they took out more windows than any Rising!
- Christy: I heard that alright. It wouldn't be Dublin if something wasn't blowing up! Did you see they returned the tricolour?
- Joe: No! When was that?
- Christy: Knew that'd put a smile on your face. Wee while ago, the British sent it back as part of the commemoration thing.
- Joe: Will we have one more?
- Christy: Why not? I'm not going anywhere.
- Joe: Me neither!

## SCENE 10

*Dublin, 1916. Inside the GPO and then Kilmainham Jail. Eamon cries out in pain.*

- Joe: He bleeds out within minutes. He doesn't even get to finish his last smoke. Our boys fight on for days. (*Sounds of shooting and explosions.*) But in the end, we're forced to surrender and then taken to Richmond Barracks and on to Kilmainham. Each beating they give me only makes me stronger. My body gets used to that feeling: the sting, the blood, the ache. I'm tortured. We're all tortured for eight days of hell that I'm glad Eamon does not have to endure. When at the end of it they tell me that I am to be executed like many of my comrades, I am proud to know I am going to die for my country. I write to my mother. (*Cello music in the background*) I speak of what has happened and tell her that it was my choice to follow the route I have taken. It is important for her to know that I have no regrets. Every decision has been my own. No one forced me. They didn't have to. The letter is brief. I am about to be killed for what I believed in. I just hope she can understand and, maybe, when the grief subsides she will be proud of me. Just before dawn, the door opens. (*Sounds of bolts on cell door opening*) Time stops. For a man about to have eleven bullets put in him, I am not afraid.

**SCENE 11**

*1916. Kilmainham Jail. Outside atmosphere. Sounds of guns being loaded.*

Christy: Sergeant Taylor, that's my brother! I can't be a part of this.

Sgt Taylor: That's a Fenian who killed our comrade! This is the enemy and you are a soldier. This is what you signed up for.

Christy: I didn't join up to murder my own flesh!

Sgt Taylor: Are you refusing a direct order, McGuigan? I'm starting to doubt your loyalties.

Christy: I'd rather die than kill my own brother! I don't care what he's done.

Sgt Taylor: Then you'll die too!

Christy: I will ... but not at your hands!

A cold feeling comes over me. I'm trapped. I won't kill my own brother. It's clear what I have to do. I turn my rifle, not at my brother but right under my own chin. I feel the cold gun barrel graze the stubble on my face. I close my eyes. I'm deaf, numb. My mind goes blank. This is it. I squeeze the trigger with an eerie calmness. I suppose when you're about to die, what have you left to fear? I hear a click.

*The sound of trigger being pulled, but the gun doesn't fire.*

I must be dead, or nearly there. I'm conscious but I wonder if this is what death is? My eyes are tightly shut. I'm on the ground lifeless, but then it hits me. It was a blank. What have I done? One in twelve and the blank was in my gun. I lie there on the ground, knowing what will come next. I feel a kick straight to my chest from what can only be Sergeant Taylor's boot. (*Sound of the kick and a few soldiers walking around.*) A few men then drag me to my feet and place me next to Joe. They're arguing, but from what I know of Sergeant Taylor, or as we used to call him, Timebomb Taylor, he will kill me with immediate effect. There will be no court martial here. Just like me, Timebomb is scarred, he's seen it all. When he's attacked, especially when his power's threatened, he'll hit back twice as hard. That's the nature of this animal. I think about the cruel irony. Joe and I both took separate routes, each thinking he knew what was the right thing to do, only to end up shoulder-to-shoulder waiting to die. I look at him briefly and he looks at me. I think of what might have been. Instead, we are both looking down the barrels of eleven guns, all held by men I once called friends. I hear Sergeant Taylor give his command and I can sense it's an order he's delighted to give. He roars and then it comes ...

*Volley of shots is heard.*

## SCENE 12

*1966. Closing time in the bar. Paudie, now in his seventies, and the barman are the only two left. Sound of glasses being washed and set back on the shelves.*

Paudie: And they were brothers. Their mother was in pieces after that, never recovered.

Barman: That right?

Paudie: Aye. I'll never forget saying 'good luck' to Christy as he went off. Fifty years ago. Where does the time go?

Barman: Ancient history. All behind us. Everything's settled now.

Paudie: Nothing's ever settled here. The UVF's back in action. 1966 and here we go again.

Barman: Last orders. I'm closing up.

Paudie: A whiskey and a couple of pints of black for my two friends over there.

Barman: What are you on about? We're the only ones here.

Paudie: What? They're for those two fellas sitting over there.

Barman: Paudie, you're drunk. Time you went home.

**THE END**