

LAST DRINKS

by Duncan Ley

-SCENE EXCERPT-

THE PLAYERS:

All together in a nameless East-End pub. STOUT and PORTOZ sit together on high bar stools, at a high table, downstage. STOUT is sitting on the stage right stool, PORTOZ on the stage left stool.

To stage right is DRAM and stage left is MEAD, both sitting at low tables, with three other empty chairs around them. VENUS is behind the bar. Stage right there is a door. That leads to the toilet. Stage left is a door. That leads outside.

Tables are generally bare (although scratched and worn) except for the odd nondescript coaster and glass ashtray.

PORTOZ is wearing a peaked cap, an old army jacket, dirty shirt and stained tie, old pants and shoes. At the start of the play he has a drink glass with a swig of beer left in it. As does STOUT.

STOUT is dressed in every detail exactly the same as PORTOZ.

STOUT is missing his right arm. PORTOZ is missing his left arm.

DRAM is a small, mousy man, and wears circular glasses, a bowtie, old-fashioned faded checkered or pinstripe suit and waistcoat, and a skullcap. At the start of the play he has a wine glass half-empty of sherry. He is reading a massive book, methodically, using his finger as a trace for each line. All the pages are blank.

MEAD is a tall lean old man, and wears an old grey dirty overcoat, a woollen jumper, a woollen beanie, dirty trousers and Wellington boots. He is grizzled and grey. Two large canvas bags sit on either side.

VENUS, the middle-aged weathered gaudy barmaid has a beehive hairdo, vivid makeup with smeared red lipstick shaped almost like a clown's smile, bright pink skin-tight low cut top on. We do not see what she is wearing below this, as she never moves away from behind the bar. When she is not pouring a drink, she sits at the bar on a bar stool, reading a faded dated women's magazine, drinking from a hip flask. She never looks up when she is reading, even if speaking.

THE PLAY:

A clock ticks loudly. The ticking sound is gradually taken over by the sound of wind, which fades over time as the lights come up, but does not die completely. VENUS is finishing pulling a half-pint. She puts it on the bar. MEAD gets up slowly. Shuffles to the bar. Picks up half-pint. Takes a sip. Returns with drink to table. Puts down glass. Sits. Picks up glass. Has a good swig. Puts down glass. Stands up and shuffles to toilet. Goes in. Door closes. Pause. There is the sound of urinating. Pause. There is a sound of a urinal flushing. Pause. He comes out. Shuffles over and sits back down. Picks up glass. Has another good swig. Puts down glass. Stands up and shuffles to toilet. Goes in. Door closes. Pause. There is the sound of urinating. Pause. There is a sound of a urinal flushing. Pause. He comes out. Shuffles over and sits back down. Picks up glass. Has yet another good swig, which should finish off the half-pint. Puts down glass. Stands up and shuffles to toilet. Goes in. Door closes. Pause. There is the sound of urinating. Pause. There is a sound of a urinal flushing. Pause. He comes out. Shuffles over and sits back down.

PORTOZ Now, did he take two swigs, or three?

STOUT Three. Definitely three.

PORTOZ You were counting.

STOUT No. Thought you were.

PORTOZ I counted two.

STOUT Wonder where I got the third from.

PORTOZ Maybe you carried one over from the last time.

STOUT Don't see how I could have done that.

PORTOZ It's possible.

STOUT I don't remember the last time.

PORTOZ Maybe we should ask Old Man Mead.

STOUT About the last time?

PORTOZ About this time.

STOUT That was the last time.

BOTH Right. *(they drink – in unison, as they always do and always have done. Their glasses are now empty)*

PORTOZ Old Man Mead? *(not getting his attention)* Old Man Mead!

MEAD Eh? What time is it? Is it last drinks yet?

VENUS *(reading her magazine, not looking up)* Not yet, love.

PORTOZ How many swigs was that? Two?

STOUT Or Three?

MEAD Four.

PORTOZ Four? I don't remember four.

MEAD Had sip at bar.

STOUT He's right there. He did have a sip.

PORTOZ At bar.

STOUT Before he sat down.

PORTOZ That makes four.

STOUT He's getting better then.

PORTOZ He could aim for two, you know. Then settle for three.

MEAD Are you sure it's not last drinks yet? Seems like it should be last drinks.
Something in the air.

VENUS (*not looking up from her book*) Not yet, nothing in the air, love, sorry.

MEAD (*fading out*) Can't remember last time it was last drinks. Can't remember. I
should remember something like that... it was before the wind... the wind... there's only
wind left now. (*pause*) I'm going dotty.

STOUT It's your shout.

PORTOZ I got the last one.

STOUT Did you?

PORTOZ (*thinks*) No. You did.

STOUT So it's my shout, then?

PORTOZ I think so.

STOUT You're sure that's the way it works? Don't seem right somehow.

PORTOZ Nothing seems right somehow.

STOUT Right.

PORTOZ My shout then.

STOUT Right. And don't forget smokes.

PORTOZ You don't smoke.

STOUT No, but you do.

PORTOZ Do I really?

STOUT So I remember.

PORTOZ Oh yes. Look. There's a butt in the ashtray.

STOUT Oh that. Could be anyone's.

PORTOZ (*picking it up gingerly and holding it so they can examine it*) Hard to tell
whose it is.

STOUT It looks...

PORTOZ Yes...

STOUT It looks...

PORTOZ Sucked?

STOUT Chewed.

PORTOZ It's yours then. (*gives it to him*)

STOUT Thank you. (*puts it back in the ashtray*)

PORTOZ What will you have?

STOUT Oh, the usual. What will you have?

PORTOZ The usual. (*goes to the bar*)

VENUS What will it be, love?

PORTOZ The usual.

VENUS Right you are. (*starts pulling two beers*)

PORTOZ So do you know when last drinks will be, Venus?

VENUS Hard to say. It's the last barrel. Why do you ask, love?

PORTOZ I don't have much left.

VENUS How much have you got left?

PORTOZ (*checks his pockets, finds nothing*) Nothing.

VENUS That'll do.

PORTOZ (*trying to see behind the bar*) How much is left then?

VENUS Oh, still a long way to go before it's finished.

PORTOZ I feel like crying now, you realise.

VENUS Don't we all, love. No good, though, is it? Never changes anything.

MEAD Nothing changes anything.

DRAM (*stops reading, looks up*) What was that, Old Man Mead?

MEAD Nothing changes anything.

DRAM You should say anything changes nothing.

MEAD Nothing changes anything, I say!

DRAM Anything changes nothing, I say!

MEAD Perhaps you're right.

DRAM You have a point there. Let me think about it.

MEAD I'll do the same. (*DRAM goes back to reading*)

VENUS (*presenting the two drinks*) Two of the usual.

PORTOZ (*picks up drink, returns to STOUT and puts the drink before him. Returns to the bar, gets his drink and returns to the table, puts his drink before him and sits down*) Here we are. Two of the usual.

STOUT Something has just occurred to me.

PORTOZ You're not injured, are you?

STOUT What is the usual?

PORTOZ Venus? What's the usual?

VENUS Harps.

PORTOZ Harps.

STOUT Don't like Harps.

PORTOZ But you like the usual.

STOUT Oh yes, I've always gone for the usual.

PORTOZ Right. (*they drink*) Anyway, it's the only one left.

STOUT Who said that?

PORTOZ Venus.

STOUT (*whispering*) Can we trust her?

PORTOZ You can always trust a publican. And she said it was the last barrel.

STOUT Have we been here that long? Don't seem like it somehow. Mind you, hard to tell these days. My watch stopped working years ago. Along with everything else.

PORTOZ If the wind stopped, and you could remember when it stopped, then if it started again and you counted how long it went for before it stopped again, assuming it will stop again, then you might be closer to having an understanding of how long it's been since your watch stopped, armed with such a strong basis of comparison.

STOUT (*pause*) I don't follow.

PORTOZ Me neither. (*they drink*)

STOUT How's your wife then?

PORTOZ Don't be stupid, I haven't got a wife.

STOUT Yes you do. Velma.

PORTOZ Thought she was your wife.

STOUT Was she? I can't remember.

PORTOZ She was a bit of alright, as I recall.

STOUT Clean hair.

PORTOZ Spotless skin.

STOUT Tailored clothes.

PORTOZ Gorgeous breath.

STOUT Steady on. You're talking about my wife.

PORTOZ Sorry. Do you remember her now?

STOUT No. (*pause*) But she sounds nice.

PORTOZ She was beautiful. In an abstract way.

DRAM Like a lobster using a telephone.

VENUS I had prawns once. They didn't agree with me.

MEAD My old mum did a nice fish n' chip.

STOUT Now there was a beautiful food. The spud.

PORTOZ We've come full circle.

STOUT So it would seem.

PORTOZ Shame your memory's not what it was. It'll be hard going on from here.

STOUT Shouldn't stop us, you know.

PORTOZ Yes, we'll always have something to talk about.

STOUT Even if it's nothing.

BOTH Right. (*they drink*)

STOUT Portoz.

PORTOZ Yes, Stout?

STOUT It's funny, that is, Portoz.

PORTOZ What's funny, Stout?

STOUT I never managed to hold a conversation with women. I tire too easily. My concentration has never been worth the price of conversation, so to speak. But in here I have no problem. Talking to you I have no problem. Now why is that, I wonder?

PORTOZ You could test that. All we need is a woman. (*they both look round. At this point VENUS looks up*) No luck. (*VENUS looks back down at her book*) One's bound to turn up sooner or later.

STOUT (*emphatic*) I think not!

PORTOZ Why not? I want a woman to turn up sooner or later. It's important. And I don't care if it be woman or man. Or dog. Or cat. But Stout, we need someone – something – to come through that door!

STOUT Don't see why. Where would they sit?

PORTOZ Someone coming through that door means many things, so very many things.

STOUT Right.

PORTOZ Would change everything. I'm telling you, something would happen. There would be six of us. And if six, why not a seventh? Or an eighth?

STOUT Or a ninth?

PORTOZ Exactly! To think of a ninth! It would set the whole thing in motion. Once the thing's in motion... well... well, it's downhill from there. It stands to reason.

DRAM There is no reason.

MEAD I'm going dotty.

STOUT But Portoz. No-one's coming through that door.

PORTOZ Why not?

STOUT Because no-one's on the other side.

MEAD They've all gone dotty.

DRAM No-one left.

VENUS Only us.

PORTOZ But how do we know that, Stout, how do we know?

STOUT Listen to the wind. (*they listen*)

PORTOZ Right. (*they drink*)

DRAM (*stops reading, gets a pencil out from his jacket and is about to write in his book*) I worked for a fishmonger once, but developed an allergy to trout. (*he makes to write this down, but changes his mind and puts the pencil away and continues reading. He will replay this action numerous times in the future*)

STOUT Shall I have that smoke now?

PORTOZ I didn't get you any.

STOUT Got some here, in my pocket.

PORTOZ You might as well, then. (*STOUT takes a packet of smokes from his jacket*) I think I'll have a smoke as well.

STOUT There's only one left. (*he takes the smoke and puts it in his mouth*) Need a match.

PORTOZ (*takes out a matchbox*) Only one left.

BOTH Right. (*STOUT takes the cigarette out of his mouth. They both drink*)

STOUT Didn't think we'd reach an impediment so soon.

PORTOZ We were unlucky.

STOUT Always been unlucky, I have.

PORTOZ So have I.

STOUT I mean, look where we are.

PORTOZ Yes.

STOUT We're here.

PORTOZ Yes.

STOUT That says something.

PORTOZ Yes. (*pause*) What?

STOUT I've forgotten.

PORTOZ Right. (*they both drink*) Stout.

STOUT Yes, Portoz?

PORTOZ Why are we sitting here? Why not somewhere else?

STOUT You're not comfortable?

PORTOZ We could swap places.

STOUT That wouldn't change things.

PORTOZ It would. It would, you know!

STOUT That what you want to do then?

PORTOZ Yes.

STOUT When?

PORTOZ Whenever.
BOTH Right. (*they both drink*)
PORTOZ (*sadly*) It wouldn't work, you know. When we get up someone could take our seats.
STOUT Who would take our seats?
PORTOZ Someone could come in and take them. It's happened before.
STOUT Has it?
PORTOZ No. But it could.
STOUT But there's no-one.
PORTOZ Right. (*they both drink*) Shall we do it then?
STOUT Are you ready to? Do you want to?
PORTOZ Yes.
STOUT It won't change anything.
PORTOZ Still, I'd like to try.
STOUT Right then. Now?
PORTOZ Don't see why not. Now or never.
STOUT Who said that?
PORTOZ Someone.
STOUT No-one says it now.
PORTOZ I just did.
STOUT Did what?
PORTOZ Never mind. You ready?
STOUT Why, what's happening?
PORTOZ Changing seats, remember?
STOUT Really? Thought we done that already.
PORTOZ I don't think so.
STOUT Maybe we just talked about it, then decided against it.
PORTOZ Thought we decided for it.
STOUT We did? Good.
PORTOZ Good.
BOTH Right. (*they both drink. Their drinks are now gone*)
PORTOZ It's your shout.
STOUT Is it?
PORTOZ Think so.
STOUT Didn't I shout last time?
PORTOZ No, it was definitely me.
STOUT So long ago now. How can you be sure?
PORTOZ It's not something you forget.
STOUT I forgot. So, your shout, is it?
PORTOZ Yes. (*pause*) That don't seem right.
STOUT Maybe you could ask Venus.
PORTOZ Good idea. Something might happen then. (*he stands, picks up glasses, goes to bar*) Whose shout is it, Venus?
VENUS Yours, Portoz love.

PORTOZ Is it always my shout?
VENUS Don't ask me, love. I only work here.
PORTOZ Two of the usual, then. (VENUS *begins pulling two drinks*) Bugger me, you're a woman. How did we miss that?
VENUS I was reading, love. Had my head down. Hard to tell.
DRAM (*as before with the pencil*) I worked in a dairy once. Then I remembered I was lactose-intolerant.
VENUS Old Man Mead? Old Man Mead? Will you have another drink?
MEAD (*to himself*) Old Man Mead sits in his chair,
Sits in his chair, sits in his chair.
Old Man Mead sits in his chair,
All this Monday morning.
PORTOZ Monday? Is it Monday? Old Man Mead, is it Monday?
MEAD I'm going dotty.
PORTOZ I hope it's Monday.
VENUS How's that, love?
PORTOZ Then tomorrow would be Tuesday. Then Wednesday. And so on.
VENUS Doesn't feel like Monday to me.
PORTOZ Why not?
VENUS Deliveries used to come on a Monday. Haven't had a delivery for years. So, can't be Monday really, can it?
DRAM (*without stopping his reading*) I would have a fiddle on a Monday, but then mother complained about the sheets.
VENUS (*melancholic*) Haven't had a delivery for years. He was a nice lad. With his big, clean, white... van. He had the most beautiful legs of all men. Tanned and long and thick, with crisp black hairs. His kneecaps were bald, though. And his front teeth were missing. But he was my Adonis. We made love in the back of his van, in between the freezer and the complimentary beer mats. He smiled throughout the whole ordeal, even though it was his first time. And it was my last time. And his last delivery.
MEAD Is it last drinks yet?
VENUS Not yet, love. A way to go. But don't worry, it's the last barrel.
MEAD Thank God for small mercies.
DRAM (*as before*) As a youngster I took to wearing Harris Tweed. In the end my skin developed blisters and I had to take it off.
VENUS How about you, Dram? You've been sitting on that sherry for days.
DRAM I never drink when composing.
VENUS (*without rancor*) You lying sod! You finished the best of a Buccaneer's not half hour ago.
DRAM I was feeling vulgar then.
VENUS Don't we all, love? That's almost gone though. Vulgarity. Along with the rest of our vices. I miss a nice bit of vulgarity. It was always so... clean, somehow. Oiy, Dram. You going to tell us what it is?
DRAM When I'm finished, I tell you.
VENUS Not far away?

DRAM No, not far away. Not far at all.
 VENUS (*presenting two drinks*) Two of the usual, Portoz love.
 PORTOZ How much?
 VENUS What have you got?
 PORTOZ Still nothing.
 VENUS That'll do.
 PORTOZ (*picks up drink, returns to STOUT and puts the drink before him. Returns to the bar, gets his drink and returns to the table, puts his drink before him and sits down*) Two of the usual.
 STOUT What's the usual this time?
 PORTOZ Still Harps, I believe.
 STOUT Oh well. Least it's the usual. (*they both drink*)
 PORTOZ Stout?
 STOUT Yes Portoz?
 PORTOZ Nothing. (*pause*) Stout?
 STOUT Yes Portoz?
 PORTOZ What's real?
 STOUT I'll pretend I didn't hear that.
 MEAD (*to himself*) Oranges and Lemons
 Say the bells of St. Clement's. (*pause*)
 DRAM (*to himself*) You owe me five farthings
 Said the bells of St. Martin's. (*pause*)
 VENUS (*to herself*) When will you pay me?
 Said the bells of Old Bailey. (*pause*)
 MEAD & DRAM When I grow rich
 Said the bells of Shoreditch.
 DRAM, MEAD & VENUS When will that be?
 Said the bells of Stepney.
 PORTOZ I'm not sure I know
 Said the great bell of Bow.
 STOUT Here comes a candle - (*pause*)
 I've forgotten the rest.
 MEAD (*sad and quiet*) I'm not sure I know, said the great bell of Bow.
 PORTOZ Oh well. Couldn't be helped. Don't make any sense now.
 STOUT I've thought of something.
 PORTOZ Head isn't aching, I hope.
 STOUT Yeah, but it's a dull ache. Quite nice, actually.
 PORTOZ Mine's sharper. More like a stab.
 STOUT A sting?
 PORTOZ No, a stab.
 STOUT In your head.
 PORTOZ Yes.
 STOUT That's where mine is too.
 PORTOZ Maybe we should take something.

BOTH Right. (*they both drink*)
STOUT Portoz.
PORTOZ Yes, Stout?
STOUT It's still there.
PORTOZ The ache?
STOUT The thought.
PORTOZ Better have it out then.
STOUT Why do we call her Venus?
PORTOZ Because there's something wrong with her lipstick.
STOUT I don't quite see the connection.
PORTOZ There isn't one.
BOTH Right. (*they both drink*)
PORTOZ We've known each other for how long?
STOUT Hours. Days. Weeks. Months.
PORTOZ Years.
STOUT Years. Yes.
PORTOZ I wonder if we'll ever stop.
STOUT Don't see how.
PORTOZ We could go outside.
STOUT What would be the point of that?
PORTOZ We'd stop then.
STOUT As I say, what would be the point?
PORTOZ The point is that it's all pointless, so one might as well stop.
STOUT But if one stops, what then is the point? You'll just be as pointless as before.
So why bother stopping?
PORTOZ I see your point.
BOTH Right. (*they both drink*)

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