**‘Too Much to Lose’- Essential information**

‘Too Much to Lose’ tells the story of the civil unrest in Ireland from 1914 to 1923 through the eyes and experience of Cork woman and republican activist Muriel MacSwiney.

Muriel was born into a wealthy Cork brewing family but eschewed her background to take up the Republican cause. She became well known when her husband Terence, Lord Mayor of Cork, undertook a hunger strike in Brixton Prison, South London. Terence died in October 1920 after 74 days without food and water.

**‘Too Much to Lose’** is an ensemble piece for which we require six actors. Four of whom will play more than one role. The other two actors will play Muriel at different stages of her life.

You will find the audition pieces below. We would like you to record the pieces on your smart phone and email the voice tape to [anne@greencurtaintheatre.co.uk](mailto:anne@greencurtaintheatre.co.uk). If you are interested in Actor 5 or 6 please send us a selfie as it is important that the actors playing these parts resemble the historical Muriel.

Please **do not** send us video self-tapes for the other parts as we are more interested in what you can do with your voice. We get back to you if we would like to see you for an audition or let you know if we won’t be taking things any further.

The play will be staged in London in May of 2024. The rehearsals will take place during evenings and weekends in March/ April/May in London with the earlier rehearsals taking place over Zoom. Full day rehearsals will be on Sundays.

Remuneration – The actors will be remunerated in a ‘profit share basis’. However the directors guarantee a payment of £40 per performance to each actor. This will be payable on completion of the project. Please note that we are not in a position to pay for rehearsals or expenses.

Closing date for self-tapes. Wednesday 5th March 2024.

**Parts**

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Actor 1** | Female. Playing age 50-60 | **Mary Murphy- Muriel’s mother. The daughter of a regional bank manager Mary married into the wealthy Murphy Brewing family. She is well spoken with an Irish accent.**  **Minnie MacSwiney- sister of Terence. A school teacher and republican activist. She speaks with a Cork accent.** |
| **Actor 2** | Female. Playing age 20-30  Male | **Josephine – Muriel’s friend who comes from a large well to do family. She has republican sympathies. Well spoken Irish accent.**  **Clive Standfordham- Private Secretary to George V. Well-spoken upper middle-class English accent.** |
| **Actor 3** | Male. Playing age 30-50 | **George Lansbury- Labour M.P- Northern accent.**  **Mossie- injured soldier- Cork accent.**  **Sean Newspaper Vendor- Cork accent.**  **Ted- Prison officer- Yorkshire or other Northern accent.**  **George V- King of England. Well spoken English accent.** |
| **Actor 4** | Male. Playing age 30-45 | **Dessie- injured soldier- Cork accent.**  **Christy Irish nationalistCork accent.**  **Terence MacSwiney -Irish playwright, author and politician. Cork accent.**  **Robert MacLean- Scottish clergyman** |
| **Actor 5** | Female. Playing age 20-30 | **Muriel- Murphy/McSwiney- Republican activist who married Terence** |
| **Actor 6** | Female. Playing age 50-65 | **Lady Muriel**  **MacSwiney- widow of Terence MacSwiney** |

# Actor 1

**Minnie MacSwiney. Terry’s sister replying to Josephine after they have just found out that Terry’s hunger strike will not be called off.**

I’ve worked day and night to keep our story – our story - not the Brits’ story on the front page of the papers. And I’ll not have her ruining it. Haven’t you seen the photographers hanging round outside the hotel and prison? Waiting - just waiting to pounce with their flashlights the moment they see any sign of distress. ***(Taking on the persona of a reporter)*** *“You look a bit strained Lady MacSwiney. Did you sleep alright? This must be very trying for you both. How is your little daughter? Is she missing her dada?”* It will be unbearable for my brother.

**Mary Murphy -Muriel’s Mother displeased that her daughter wants to marry Terrence MacSwiney**

Child, the man is a dedicated republican, a terrorist who was probably in cahoots with those men who destroyed Dublin Easter last. And would have done the same to Cork if they’d been given half a chance. Have you any idea what might happen to him? Men like MacSwiney revel in the expectation of danger.

Don’t you think poor Isabella Gifford didn’t have the same conversation with Grace when she announced her marriage to Joseph Plunkett? Or Muriel when she teamed up with that McDonagh man?

Neither yet thirty and both widows. Joseph Plunkett executed just four hours after the ring was placed on Grace’s finger. Is that what you want? Yes? Then that shows how little you both know about love or the pain of losing it.

I cannot pretend that I have any time for Mr. MacSwiney’s philosophy or politics, but I did have some respect for the man when he vowed to remain single. At least that showed some feeling for women. That is more than I can say for those who took up arms last Easter. But now.

Darling, do you think I would be so concerned if writing was his only occupation? Marry a penniless writer or poet if you wish. With your father’s settlement you’ll hardly starve.

Why won’t you understand? I want you to be happy, to have a husband who puts you first, who will come home to you and your children each evening. The lifestyle of those terrorists is well known. Constantly on the move, sleeping in different houses each night. And you, of all my children, need a home where you can be safe. The only positive thing I can say is that at least your father is not alive to witness all this.

# Actor 2

**Clive Standfordham – Private Secretary to George V. Very well-spoken British accent replying to the King**

His republican activities have led to many breeches with the law Majesty. Arrested in the general sweep following the Easter Rising of 1916 - held in England. No charge. Released under the 1916 Christmas amnesty. Unfortunately, he was re-arrested in January 1917. A pattern much repeated.

**Josephine comforting her friend after she has been mocked by British soldiers.**

Muriel, my dear, sweet friend. You’ve been so protected. I’m afraid that your expensive education in England has taught you very little about the country you live in. Time to *‘cop on’* as we say here. Understand that not everyone agrees with John Redmond and the IPP taking the Empire’s line. Why not come along to a Gaelic League meeting with me? Complete your education. They organise lots of things in Cork: talks, theatre, music.   
Muriel, my dear friend – you have a choice. Either believe everything that your mother has told you all your life or make up your own mind about things. It’s up to you I’m not going to force you. Now time for tea, cake and gossip.

**Josephine speaking to Minnie MacSwiney. Terry’s sister after they have just found out that Terry’s hunger strike will not be called off. ( You can choose to do read just one or all three paragraphs)**

This isn’t what we joined the organisation for. The new Ireland was to be a place of freedom- not a place where one person dictated what others must think. And certainly not a place where a course of action, so clearly wrong, must be continued because no one can dissent.   
I support Irish freedom as much as you do. But try as I might, I can’t see how the loss of another husband and father by his own hand is going to make one iota of difference. Since when has strength in the face of such intolerable suffering been a virtue? If I thought that my sadness would save the man I loved, then the sheets in that prison cell would be soaked with my unashamed tears.

And since when have political principles taking priority over the running of a city? His duty is to Cork’s citizens - their housing, public health, transport, jobs. Things a city needs to make it work. And don’t try and tell me that the whole of Cork corporation is behind him because you know that is not true. Just whose arrogance is defining this. From the rumours I’m hearing that doesn’t include Michael Collins.

How about getting a different bus to the prison tomorrow? Go east instead of south. See how the effect of the last war ‘lingers on’ in London. Limbless men begging on the streets. The deranged gas-shocked fella trying to escape imaginary. battlefields. And if that doesn’t convince you; look through the window of one of the slum dwellings and watch the face of the war widow who has to tell her child yet again that there is nothing to eat. Those are the people that Labour wants to help.

# Actor 3

**George Lansbury- British Politician addressing a crowd. Northern Accent**

And that’s why comrades we simply cannot standby and do nothing. We cannot allow this injustice to continue. I repeat we must all fight for the release of our brave comrade Terence MacSwiney, Lord Mayor of Cork who by continuing to refuse food lies perilously close death on the other side of these walls. Wrongly accused. Wrongly imprisoned for a crime he didn’t commit. There can be no justification for his incarceration. So, what do we say? We say: ***“***Release Terence MacSwiney now”. Who do we say should be released?

**George V – King and Emperor speaking to Clive Standfordham his Private Secretary**

*‘Irish men and women dragged out of their homes and shot, houses burned, creameries set on fire’.* I thought that I had made it clear that these excesses of the Royal Irish Constabulary were to cease. Write immediately to the Chief Secretary for Ireland. and leave Greenwood in no doubt of his King’s views on the behaviour of the Black and Tans. This no way for men in my uniform to behave.

And quote the Bishop of Cork – ‘that the men who commit these murders must be brought to justice in the proper way’. There is no place in our legal system for random executions as a means of retribution. I cannot have such an image of our great nation blasted all over the world. People who, under ordinary circumstances, give little attention to the affairs of Ireland will inquire what caused of all this. They will point the finger at us. At me, which I think is jolly unfair.

**Mossie- soldier Cork accent speaking to Muriel who is volunteering in the Soth Infirmary during the Great War.**And I say ‘tis a fool I was’. Too busy listening to the recruiting sergeant talking of adventure and the money I’d be able to send home. When I should have been looking at the world map behind him and thinking: “That’s a fierce amount of pink to be on the one map” Ever wondered miss how many young lads have been killed and injured so that all those countries could be coloured ‘pink’? For surely ‘twas from their blood that the British Empire grew. But then missus, who am I to raise an argument against you if you wouldn’t mind your son being sacrificed in such a cause? You’re as much a tool of the British Empire as meself and this fella beside me.

**Newspaper Vendor- Cork accent defending Muriel for buying a Republican newspaper on the Grand Parade Cork.**

As far as I’m aware you don’t need a permit to buy our papers. This young lady is very welcome to buy what she likes. And if you gave me a hand instead of standing on the corner giving out to anyone you don’t like the look of then you would know that Miss Murphy is not the only young person of her class to be interested in the new ideas for Ireland.

**Ted - Prison Officer, Wakefield Prison explaining why Muriel may not be able to viist Terry.**

Ah doun't kna li' abaht 'a'. 'e's i' solitary confinement not allowed visitors. Ahl av 'im browt up. Ahl nip on missen i' case 'e's sayin 'is prayers. Reet 'oly joe 'a' 'un.

(I don’t know about that. He’s in solitary confinement not allowed visitors. I’ll have him brought up. I’ll be quiet though in case he’s saying his prayers. Right Holy Joe that one.)

# Actor 4

**Robert MacLean – Scottish Clergyman holidaying in Balmoral replying to the King**Moral in these places is never good - the men are only fed adequately, There is little in the way of diversions or comforts. Conditions for those serving their time in solitary confinement is understandably much harsher. It would not surprise me that having lived in these conditions for the past few years that the Lord Mayor’s mental state is not good. Could it be that this arrest, triggered feelings he associates with his many other incarcerations? Perhaps the Lord Mayor finds it preferable to throw himself on the mercy of the Lord rather than admit failure.

**Dennis- soldier Cork accent speaking to Muriel who is volunteering in the South Infirmary during the Great War.**‘Twasn’t the colour that concerned him. What about you miss? Supposing you’d a son? Would you want this for him? You see Miss, neither the King nor the Kaiser could raise an army if it weren’t for the thousands of farm lads like Mossie and meself ready to swop lives of poverty and boredom for the promise of adventure. And that doesn’t change which trenches you shoot from.

**Sean- Cork accent berating Muriel for buying a Republican newspaper on the Grand Parade Cork.**

Coming here wearing that uniform pretending you’re one of us. Do dead soldiers not have widows and childer? Fathers, who become old men in need of help to plough their fields? *(Pause)*Ye haven’t a clue. Tell you what missus, drop by again when you’ve time and we’ll explain it all to you. Until then keep you and your West Brit attitudes – away from our lads. Do you hear me now?

**Terence MacSwiney – Poet and Republican Activist, Lord Mayor of Cork. Cork Accent.  
In Wakefield Prison speaking to Muriel Murphy**

As you can see. If you could see. I’m locked up by those with neither the wit nor the compassion to provide a book or the light to read it by. We’re rarely fed, and they can’t see a need for blankets. If the men in here weren’t sick when they arrived, they’ll surely be when they leave. Wire Sean, no write, no, best tell him to his face. ***(The guard re-enters unbeknown to them).*** No charges have yet been brought against any of us, so this imprisonment is illegal. The news must get out that hundreds of men have been imprisoned. Many who have no connection to our movement at all. It is a disgrace. Something must be done.

Ní féidir linn aon rud a rá agus iad ag éisteacht. Labhraímid i nGaeilge

**Terence MacSwiney -Vaughan Hotel, Parnell Square**  
You’ve a sharp mind alright. I‘ll say that for you. Look it, I’ll send someone round to the alleyway at the back of the hotel. Eight o’clock sharp. The guards change shifts then, so we’ll have twenty minutes. Bring your empty suitcase. If no one turns up it’s because they’ve been followed. So go back to your room. I’ll send word before breakfast if I get the chance. If the police coming looking for me – tell them you haven’t seen me. And speak to no one. D’you hear me now?

**Terence MacSwiney -Reading a letter aloud that he has written to Muriel MacSwiney**  
You say you feel the pain you give me when you talk of this sadness, I so pray that I could shut it out from you along with all the pain of the earth. When you said you'd like to go into some small hole and hide yourself, did you not guess that I'd rather go into that hole with you however dark and uncomfortable. Think of my eyes. Don't you read the protection and love and sympathy therein? Where I to die I would not rest in heaven whilst you were in distress. Oh, my hope for you is fixed in God and cannot fail.

# Actor 5

**Muriel- very well spoken with a hint of a Cork accent.**

![A close up of a black and white photo

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**Speaking to injured soldiers whilst volunteering at the South Infirmary Cork.**Not me – but you. I daren’t think of the unspeakable horrors that would befall the French and Belgian women if there weren’t courageous men like you out there to defend their honour and protect their poor children. Mr. Redmond is correct *“This war is undertaken in the defence of the highest principles of religion and morality and right.”* Isn’t that what he told us all? You must both feel very proud to have taken part in battles that have gone so well.

**Confiding to her close friend about volunteering at the South Infirmary Cork.**I think I ought to stop volunteering at the hospital. I get so angry each time a young soldier arrives badly wounded. I keep thinking ‘lives lost for what’. Some days, when there are lots of casualties, I want to get Thomas to drive me round the recruiting tents and tell every young man with ideas of adventure and glory to think again.   
By the way I really enjoyed that Gaelic League meeting last night. Trouble is, what I will do if I give up? I can’t go back to days filled by bridge parties and afternoon teas.

**Expressing her republican views to her mother.**  
Mother, as I keep trying to explain, you have been indoctrinated into believing that it is okay for an oppressor not only to destroy your Irish identity but that of your daughter. Look out, the wind of change is blowing through our land. We will rise up and seek to become who we were meant to be. Mother, sooner or later you will have to accept that people of my age no longer think like you. They have no wish to be part of the Empire. Ireland will be free.

Hard luck Mother, your attempts at leaving me uneducated and fit for nothing forget that (a) I am in possession of a brain and (b) that the shops in Cork are full of books and magazines that I have the money to buy. Even you can’t stop the march of progress. The day will come when, all Irish people will share in the legacy of their own heritage.

**Sharing her happiness with her best friend about Terry’s proposal**.  
He wants us to get engaged. Terence. He wants to marry me Josephine.He wants to marry me. I never thought that he’d ask me, but he has. I’ll have to get a dress. And a veil. Do you think Mother will pay for it? She’ll have to, won’t she? She won’t be mean enough to say ‘no’. Will she? And you must be my bridesmaid. Promise me that you will. Oh. I’m so, so happy. I am going to spend my days with someone who loves me as I am, instead of who they want me to be. We’ll have children. One? Two? Three? Oh heavens, you don’t think that it will be six like my mother. Lord that would be far too many for the small house that we shall live in. ***(Josephine pulls away)*** What? What’s wrong? Why are you looking at me like that? You could at least say ‘congratulations’.

**Using her charm to try and persuade the Prison Office to leave her and Terry alone.**

***(Looks at the guard)*** We could all enjoy a piece now but unfortunately, the officer on the gate wouldn’t allow me to bring a knife in. Such a shame as it does look rather delicious, and we could all share the cake if we only had something to cut it with. But it seems that this can’t happen. Unless of course.  ***(Muriel smiles at the guard****).*  Would you mind dreadfully? That would be most terribly kind.

# Actor 6

**Muriel MacSwiney Aged 65** – **Well-spoken slight Irish accent**

Well, I remember the room being very quiet. There was stillness about the place. A sense of something important happening yet not happening. Does that make sense? Rather business like in the early days. Terry sitting in a chair, so we could chat. Talk about the campaigns, what to do, whom to contact next. Art O’Brien was very helpful as you’d expect - he managed the whole thing. People, ordinary people were very kind; sent flowers, mass cards, letters – that sort of thing. Once, a fella who didn’t quite understand turned up with a bowl of soup! Can you imagine! Then there were visitors. Some very ‘high ups’. And the press conferences. I was kept very busy.

Our task was to remain united. To hold the belief that we would win however many drawbacks there were. But of course, there comes a time when you realise how futile that was, and that Terry wouldn’t be getting out of bed ever again. I couldn't say anything of course and it was so hard to comfort him. Any touch was out of the question - too painful for him. And as for talking, well I could barely hear him. Except once. Do you know what he said? Told me ‘*That he was sorry for what he was putting me through’*. I made light of it of course. Told him that *I was seeing more of him now he was imprisoned than I had for years.* That reply still haunts me. Making a joke in the face of death.

He liked me to read to him. A book by a saint. It was called ‘The Imitation of Christ’. His religion helped him a great deal in those final difficult weeks. Unfortunately, it just provided me with endless questions. Left me wondering…. Look it, I’m not sure if I am supposed to even say this but I felt so alone. I wanted someone to help me understand what to think, what to feel. I'd never met anyone else in my position you see. I think that’s why I kept thinking about Mary- the mother of Jesus. What was going through her mind as she stood at the foot of the cross watching Her Son dying? Whilst at the same time thinking that He could have probably stopped things if He wanted to. Sorry I shouldn’t be saying this. It’s probably blasphemous.