

# **1912, A HUNDRED YEARS ON**

## **Philip Orr and Alan McGuckian**

'The past contains the seeds of many futures'

Fritz Stern

*Heliotrope bouquet rag (Joplin)*

### **SCENE ONE**

**One** - Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome to our drama,

**Two** - in which we will present, for your education and enjoyment,

**One** - some of the events that happened in our part of the world a century ago.

**Two** - This was a brand new age of motor vehicles,

**One** - aeroplanes.

**Two** - and giant liners.

**One** - It was an age of explorers, like Captain Scott heading for the South Pole.

**Two** - The era of brilliant scientists like Albert Einstein.

**One** - The era of silent movie stars like Charlie Chaplin.

**Two** - And the age of music halls

**Together** - 'When Irish eyes are smiling sure tis like a morn in spring, in the lilt of Irish laughter you can hear the angels sing....'

**One** - 1912 was an age of worldwide empires -

The French,

the Russians,

the Turks,

the Austrians,

And grandest of them all, the British!

**Two** - But there were revolutionaries around, men like Lenin and Trotsky, who were

organising the working man to fight for a brave new world where everyone would be equal.

**Together** - 'Workers of the world unite!'

'You have nothing to lose but your chains...'

**One** - It was an age of revolutionary women too -

**Two** - calling for the vote, breaking windows, chaining themselves to railings, staging hunger strikes.

**One** - There were arguments....

amongst the world's most powerful leaders.

The German Empire was the new kid on the block, vying with Britain to build a fleet of bigger warships than had ever sailed the seas before.

By 1914, World War would break out and millions would perish.

**Two** - So, what about us?

**One** - Us?

**Two** - Here in the northern part of this little island. ....

Some people may think we had no part in all this global 'excitement.'

**One** - A hundred years ago, we had plenty of

**Together** - 'excitement.'

**One** - We were building ships and aeroplanes. We had suffragettes and socialists.

**Two** - We too had dreams, we too had conflict.

**One** - Politicians argued. There was trouble on the streets.

**Two** - Fear about the future. Threats of violence.

**One** - And bravery too, as people stood up for their convictions. Want to hear this fascinating story?

**Together** - We hope you do.

## SCENE TWO

**Together** - 'Rule Britannia, Britannia rules the waves - Britons never, never, never shall be slaves...'

**One** - Its the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and from Cork to Donegal, the Union Jack is flying.

**Two** - And when the British sovereign visits Dublin, crowds cheer the royal carriage through the streets. The King must think Ireland is filled with loyal subjects. And in some places, it certainly is....

**One** - (John)

John's my name. My father owns a farm in County Antrim, in a place they call The Braid. We're modern farmers, we send our pigs to market and the pork gets sold. We're more prosperous now than ever. Britain's been good for us. I hope it stays that way, for I reckon that London knows best. You can see from my collarette that I'm a member of a Loyal Orange Lodge. That's where many of us Irish Protestants meet to share our heritage. Our King's a Protestant King and the Empire's a Protestant Empire. Don't get me wrong, though, my Catholic neighbours often help me out around the farm and I help out on theirs.

**Two - (Sean)**

The Antrim Glens. That's my home. My name is Sean and I farm the land. It's a tough job, here in the hills and I've two brother's gone to America to find a better life. But at night I'm down in the club, a happy man with my hurley in my hand. I'm a Catholic - but I've no grudge against any Protestant man. If we ever get our independence, then we'll all be Irishmen together. My grandma came from Mayo, in the west. Sixty years ago, in the Potato Famine, most of her family died of fever. Lot of good it did us, being in the

Empire then. We have a Feis in the Glens now, every year, and you'll hear folk speaking Irish in our village once again, the tongue my father spoke each day when he was a boy, a language that's been near crushed out of us!

**Two** - Nationalists leaders have emerged in the previous century, with strong demands.

Daniel O'Connell.

**One** - (O'Connell)'Ireland is not a fragment of England, but a nation. The justice that we Irish require is the creation of a domestic parliament.'

**Two** - Charles Stewart Parnell.

**One** - (Parnell)'We must do everything to obtain for Ireland, the furthest measure of her rights. No man has the right to fix the boundary to the march of a nation.

### SCENE THREE

**Two** - But people have been moving from the country to the towns. Places like Derry, Lurgan, Portadown, Ballymena, Belfast. Seeking jobs in the factories, foundries and shipyards that have brought much wealth to the north of the island. But most who move to towns are far from rich - crowded into red brick houses...

**One** - on narrow terrace streets,

**Two** - in communities where they share familiar things...

**One** - like religion... like politics.

**Two** - In Belfast there's the Shankill.

**One** - There's the Falls.

**Two** - Sandy Row.

**One** - Ardoyne.

**Two** - and Ballynafeigh.

**One** - New Lodge.

**Two** - and Tiger's Bay,

**One** - Short Strand.

**Two** - And sometimes tensions can explode,

**Together** – over politics, faith, job discrimination, public parades.

**Two** – and one of the infamous Belfast riots begins.

**One** – Trouble at street corners.

**Two** – on borderlines between ‘Catholic’ and ‘Protestant.’

**One** – Crowds shout slogans, sing party songs...

**Two** – fire stones,

**One** – throw bottles,

**Two** – pieces of paving stone,

**One** –lumps of cast-off metal from the shipyard or the foundry.

**Two** – It’s called ‘Belfast confetti.’

**One** – For some public speakers, the answer lies in bringing men and women together in a brand-new cause. The streets have echoed down through the years to the words of William Walker, Keir Hardie, big Jim Larkin and James Connolly ....

**Two** – (Larkin) My cause is the cause of labour, its is the cause of humanity...’

**Two** – (Connolly).....Here in Belfast docks, I see you men demoralised by long hours and pitiful pay. I see your your bodies pushed to breaking point. Catholic and Protestant alike. I have witnessed you women, keeping families together, with even fewer rights. If the working man’s a slave, the woman is a slave of that slave. You, the working-class of this great city must join the mighty army of toil which will conquer the entire world!

**One** – By 1912, Connolly founds the Irish Labour Party to fight for the working woman and the working man.

**Two** – But when he favours an independent, socialist Ireland, most working-class Protestants disagree.

## **SCENE FOUR**

**Two** - Meanwhile, many miles away, in the British House of Commons, politics is in a stir. With consequences for Ireland.

There's been an election in 1910 and the two main party-groups are neck and neck,

Conservatives and Unionists on the one hand,

Liberals on the other.

Then the Liberals squeeze back into power, led by Herbert Asquith, in an alliance with....

the Irish Parliamentary Party, led by John Redmond.

**One** - (Asquith)

Redmond. Nice to see you.

**Two** - (Redmond)

Yes, Prime Minister. Thank you. Now, can we get down to business?

You know we Irishmen require a Home Rule Act, to give us a parliament of our own in Ireland. Your predecessor, Mr. Gladstone did not succeed. You owe it to us now.

**One (A)**- Your recent support for us has been appreciated. I believe a Home Rule Bill would be a fair return..

**Two (Redmond)**-But if a Home Rule Bill passes in the Commons, it goes to the House of Lords to get approval,

And as you know, they will vote it down!

**One** - (A) That's where the Parliament Act comes in! This new act that we are drafting proposes that the Lords can't any longer block a law - but only hold it up for two short years!

**Two** - (Redmond)My Irish Party will vote for this Parliament Act. Of course.

**One** - (A) Excellent.

**Two - (Redmond)**And then our Home Rule Bill comes next?

**One** - (A)Yes, we'll put it to the Commons in 1912. And it will pass. This time, the Lords can only delay its progress. So, you'll have your Irish parliament in 1914.

**Two (Redmond)** - At long last.

**One** - (A)This will strengthen the bond between our two nations. Will it not?

## **SCENE FIVE**

**One** - roll up, roll up, ladies and gentlemen, let us present to you - 'The Home Rule Bill.'

In which you, the people of Ireland, will have a government of your own in Ireland.

Watch as the British civil servants disappear from Dublin Castle!

Watch as Irish MPs in Westminster are reduced in number.

See money pour in from London for your new Administration

Now, you will have some limitations to your brand new parliament - the Irish police are still under London control, at least for a while. The British army will stay be stationed in your country. And London will still look after your foreign affairs.

Now some of you ladies will I know, shed tears of regret that votes for Irish women will not be allowed.

But for those of you who are Protestant and fear discrimination under this brand new Dublin parliament - safeguards are promised, so that your cash, your laws, and your education will be dealt with in a safe and balanced way.

And yes, his Britannic Majesty, King George V, the Emperor of India, will still be the King of India.

Nowadays you might just call it -

**Together** - devolution.

**Together -**

'When boyhood fire was in my veins, I read of ancient freemen/ Of Greece and Rome who bravely stood, three hundred men and three men/ And then I prayed I yet might see our fetters rent in twain/ And Ireland long a province be a nation once again! /A nation once again, a nation once again./ And Ireland long a province be a nation once again!

**SCENE SIX****Two -**

For many nationalists it's cause for celebration. For the Gaelic League, fighting to renew the Irish Language.

For the Gaelic Athletic Association, promoting Irish games.

For the Catholic Church, remembering bygone years spent under strict suppression.

For the Ancient Order of Hibernians,  
full of enthusiastic Catholic citizens.

**One -** But not everyone in the nationalist camp is happy.

And that includes one secret body, heir to a history of *armed* resistance, which has been recruiting new members, convinced the only thing to send Britain homewards out of Ireland is the gun.

**Two -** (Sam Maguire) It is the most important ceremony in a patriot's life, so I ask again. Have you read through the oath, Michael?

**One -** (Collins)I have, Sam.

**Two -** (SA)And you fully understand?

**One -** (Collins)I do.

**Two -** (SA)And you have no further questions to ask?

**One** - (Collins)No, Sam.

**Two** - (SA)In that case, as a member of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, I must ask you, as candidate for membership, to stand before me, reading aloud these solemn words -

**One** - (Collins)I, Michael Collins, do solemnly swear, in the presence of Almighty God, that I will do my utmost, at every risk, while life lasts, to make Ireland an Independent Republic; that I will yield implicit obedience to the commands of my superior officers; and that I shall preserve due secrecy regarding all transactions of this society confided in me. So help me God.

**Together** - Amen.

**Two** - (SA>Welcome to the Brotherhood. We are different men from those who plead for crumbs from Mr. Asquith's table. One day soon, a chance will come to fight once more for Irish freedom. Bide our time and we shall see.

## **SCENE SEVEN**

**Two** - But there's another group of politicians who are far from happy with Home Rule, for very different reasons. They are Irish Unionists and their leader is Sir Edward Carson, a Dublin man and a famous lawyer.

**One** -

(Edward Carson)Is that Bonar Law's office?

**Two** - (Bonar Law) Law speaking.

**One** - (EC)Carson here. I'm in Liverpool, waiting for the Belfast ferry.

**Two** - (BL)Ah, yes.

**One** - (EC)I believe congratulations are in order. The Conservative party will have a new leader.

**Two** - (BL)Thank you, Carson. Kind of you to ring.

**One** - (EC)A Scotsman too! Well done. But down to business. This Home Rule Bill will be disaster. Thousands of my fellow-countrymen will certainly resist. Could tear my native land in pieces.

**Two** - (BL)Yes, and other nations looking on will think they see our noble Empire start to fall apart.

**One** - (EC)I am especially glad of your *personal* support.

**Two** - (BL)Yes, my family came from Ulster stock. So I know how Ulster Protestants feel.

Proud people. They bow down to no-one. And they've turned their Ulster into a prosperous place.

**One** - (EC)Will you come to Belfast, Law? Address the people?

**Two** - (BL) Absolutely.

**One** - (EC)Next year perhaps? Easter 1912 would be an excellent date.

**Two** - (BL)Indeed.

**One** - (EC)Thank you. That is splendid news. We'll make our preparations. I'm heading for Ulster tonight. Not a minute to waste. Boat leaves the harbour in an hour or so.

**Two** - **(BL)**Remember, you are fighting bravely to preserve our empire - and the Conservative party will always back you to the hilt.

## **SCENE EIGHT -**

**Two** -Already, Protestants are gathering in Orange Halls and Protestant Halls all over Ulster to discuss Home Rule. Led by gentry, factory bosses, clergy, leaders of the Orange Order. It's still a world where ordinary folk look up the social scale to them for leadership.

**One** - (chairman)Order! Order! As you know, Unionist Clubs were founded many years ago. They have fallen away somewhat. But now, branches like ours are springing up once again!

Brother Smith.

**Two** - (Smith)

As Worshipful Master of our lodge, I'm glad to report that we are all agreed on placing the Orange Hall at the club's disposal for future meetings.

**One** - (Chairman)We're glad to see industrial men well represented here. Mr. Robinson.

**Two** -(Mr. Robinson)

A parliament in Dublin will tax the profits we factory owners make and spend that money, shoring up the poorer, less developed parts of Ireland. Ulster businesses will close. Jobs will go. Everyone stands to lose. We must resist.

**One** - (chairman)Reverend Clarke, you represent the church.

**Two** - (Rev Clarke)

Gentlemen, this is a spiritual battle - we know the Irish Catholic is a kindly man and makes a decent neighbour. But he kneels in a church where error reigns, to which he owes his ultimate allegiance, and not this free and mighty Empire in which he dwells. Home Rule would be Rome Rule!

**One** - (chair)Sir David. Delighted you could come.

**Two (Sir David)**-

I've spent many years overseas with the British Army. I may be retired but I'm still quite game. I'm used to giving orders and training men. We'll need to raise an army of our own, for as you see, this Liberal government does not listen.

And let me prove that I am no old-timer. I propose, that in this modern age, we must include our women-folk in the movement. I suggest a local branch of the Unionist Women's Association.

**Together** - 'If God be for us, who can be against us?'

## **SCENE NINE**

**Two** - Craigavon House, near Belfast.

**One** - The opulent home of Captain James Craig, Unionist M.P.

**Two** - It's a September day in 1911.

And a crowd of 50,000 gathers in the grounds from early morning.

**One** -Men,

**Two** - Women,

**One** - Children,

**Two** -waving flags,

**One** - and holding banners.

**Two** - They've come from the back streets

**One** - and they've travelled from the elegant avenues in town.

**One** (Carson)

Mr. Asquith says we are not allowed to put our case before the British Electorate, to see if the people approve this plan, hatched at Westminster, to expel our country from the Union! Very well, if so, I have to tell you.... that there is only one strategy left - we must be prepared, the morning Home Rule passes... to become responsible for the government of the Protestant province of Ulster!'

For let us assert, here and now that the British constitution is the basis of all our happiness, bringing up our children to fear God and honour the King at all times of the day and night. The birth right under which we were born and under which in the future we are going to live!!!

Ladies and gentlemen, with the help of God, you and I, joined together, will defeat the most nefarious conspiracy ever hatched against a free people.

**Two** - That day, at Craigavon House...

everyone is impressed with a group from County Tyrone who marched out of the grounds in smart, military formation.

## **SCENE TEN**

**One** - (John)

I'm glad to hear Sir Edward's fighting talk. It means we'll not be trampled on. We came from Scotland long ago, my family built a home and tilled the soil and asked our God to prosper us and keep us safe. We built up Ulster into what she is and now we're proud of her. What we have, we will maintain! I

take the horse and cart to Belfast every week and when I come down from the Antrim hills and see, down there in the valley, the biggest shipyards cranes in all the world, I say to myself- how could anyone support these foolish changes Mr. Asquith and Mr Redmond talk about?

**Two** - (Sean) A Protestant province? I fear Sir Edward Carson has forgotten something - I mean the Irish Catholics. In Ulster, there's hundreds of thousands of us. But we're not an invisible people - we're here, we're Gaels and we are very proud of it. We still recall the days when Owen O'Neill trounced foreign armies, at the Battle of Benburb! We Catholics want to see our country free once more and strong. We'll share it happily with our neighbours - but they'll ignore us at their peril.

**Two** - (Connolly) Mr Carson and Mr Redmond both spend their time in that corrupt imperial parliament in London, while you working men and women strive and groan in daily labour. Whether in Belfast or in Dublin, your homes are slums and your children hunger - and still the politicians and the bosses divide you up, the working class, on pretext of religion. This way, your slavery will endure for ever.

'So comrades let us rally/ The last fight let us face/...the Internationale/ unites the human race....'

## SCENE ELEVEN

**One** - (A)

Troubled times, Redmond. Conservative party breathing down my neck. And of course, the Germans.

**Two** - (Redmond)Germans, Prime Minister?

**One** - (A)Every time we build two battleships for our Royal Navy, they build three. They want to control the world.

**Two** - (Redmond)And what about our Home Rule Bill, sir? Must not lose sight of that...

**One** - (A)Ah, yes. The date is set. First reading in the commons will come up soon.

But tell me, what about these Unionists in Ulster ? What do you think of Carson's claim?

**Two** - (Redmond)To establish his own government in Ulster when Home Rule comes? It's all a bluff.

**One** - (A)He's really caught the ear of the Tory party. Have you listened lately to Bonar Law, that meddling Scotsman?

**Two** - (Redmond)Carson and Law may both be threatening us but we'll win through. What can they actually do, apart from talk and bluster? March round in circles, holding Union Jacks? It's laughable. You know what a friend of mine calls this little Ulster state that the Unionists think they're going to conjure up?

Carsonia! Carsonia!

## SCENE TWELVE

**One** -Despite what Asquith and Redmond think, resistance to Irish Home Rule is beginning in earnest.

In fields, parkland, winding lanes, city streets, on dark winter nights, men from Unionist Clubs are meeting up to practice

**Together** - military drill.

**Two** - (Sir David)Welcome, gentlemen. Consider yourselves at home on my beautiful estate. Here's some basic drill, you must get perfect at...

This is the era of the Boy Scouts

**One** - Church Lads' Brigades

**Two** - Boys' Brigade companies.

**One** - Many boys are used to wearing uniforms.

**Two** - It's a crucial part of learning to become a man.

**One** - Showing pluck. Displaying resolve. Playing the game.

**Two** - Giving orders,

**One** - Taking orders.

**Two** - Marching,

**One** - drilling,

**Two** - drilling,

**One** - marching.

**Together** - MARCHING, DRILLING...DRILLING, MARCHING !

**Two** - Many young boys know the heroes of the British forces.

**One** -Marlborough.

**Two** - Nelson.

**One** - Wellington.

**Two** - Kitchener

**One** - and all those Irish regiments renowned for valour.

**Two** - Dublin Fusiliers

**One** - Connaught Rangers.

**Two** - Royal Irish Regiment

**One** - Royal Irish Rifles.

**Two** - and the Royal Inniskillings, who fought Napoleon at Waterloo.

**One** - and so the Unionists own part-time militia, modelled on the British Army, starts to grow.

‘They were all dressed out like gentleman’s sons/with their bright shining swords and carbine guns/ with their silver mounted pistols she observed them full soon/ Because that she loved her Inniskilling Dragoon.’

**Together** - 'Fare thee well Enniskillen, fare thee well for a while/ And all around the borders of Erin's green isle/ And when the war is over, we'll return in full bloom/ and they'll all welcome home the Inniskilling Dragoons.'

**One** - Many Ulster Protestants have heard stories about their ancestors, who settled in Ireland, 300 years before, and how they feared the native people who lived for many centuries in this land.

**Two** - (clergyman)

In those early days, the Irish threatened us with dispossession. I have seen images, too terrible to show you all, of 1641, that terrible year, when they fell upon us, bringing slaughter.

No man threatened us, after Prince William came to Ireland in 1690 and brought this island back securely under the British, Protestant Crown!

I must tell you all of a new decree, just issued by the Catholic church, which signals *further* danger. From now on, if you marry a Catholic girl, you must do so in a Catholic church, wed by a priest - and bring up your children in the Catholic faith.

What further, dark restrictions lie ahead for us, under a Dublin parliament?

In bygone years, our Scottish cousins, seeking freedom to proclaim their faith without control by any Italian Pope or English Bishop, worshipped on the Scottish hillsides, chased down and killed by English soldiers. The heather on the moors was stained bright red with their innocent blood.

**One** - Through 1912, many Protestant clergy preached to their people in words like these.

and preached them sermons about the men and women

who had gathered in an Edinburgh churchyard in 1638 and signed a covenant - a solemn agreement-

to stand their ground for the Scottish, Protestant religion against all its foes...

**Together** -

'Oh God our help in ages past/ Our hope in years to come/ Our shelter from the stormy blast/ And our eternal home...under the shadow of thy throne/ Thy saints have dwelt secure/ Sufficient is Thine arm alone/ And our defence is sure.'

**Two** - Yes, 19 hundred and 12, for many people, was a time of bright new hopes and dreams, of clear-cut faith, age-old stories and sad, dark memories.

On all sides.

### SCENE THIRTEEN

**Two** - (Sean)The practice is over, lads. See you tomorrow night. Same place, same time.

**One** - (Priest)Hallo, Sean.

**Two** - (S) Hallo Father. Enjoy watching the game?

**One** - (P) Indeed I did. I'm looking forward to the game on Sunday. Are you heading home through the village?

**Two** - (S)I am indeed. Let's take the short road up over the hill and walk together.

Well, you've been two weeks in the parish, now. I hope you're settling in.

**One** - (P)Ah, I've still a lot to learn about this place.

**Two** - (S)Well, this is a favourite road for local people, father. You can see the reason. We love that beautiful view across our valley and out to sea.

And its because of the history, too. Do you recognise that stone, over there?

**One** - (P)A mass rock, unless I'm mistaken.

**Two** - (S)My grandmother has all the stories she got from her own grandmother, about the times the people gathered here for mass, in rain, hail or shine, well out of the way of the Redcoats.

**One** - (P)I'm a safer man than I'd have been, back then!

**Two** - (S)Oh yes, around these parts, there's many a priest that paid with his life for his faith. The same as it was, all over Ireland.

And still my Protestant neighbours think the Battle of the Boyne was a blow for religious freedom.

Well, I just have to tell myself there's many a Protestant took our side in the fight for liberty, down through the years. And they may do again.

**One**- (P)You're thinking of United Irishmen like Theobald Wolfe Tone.

**Two** - (S)I am, father. And other brave men like Robert Emmett.

**One** - (P)'When my country takes her place amongst the nation of the earth, then and only then let my epitaph be written.'

**Two** - (S)Men like Charles Stewart Parnell, the uncrowned King of Ireland.

**One** - (P)Men like Sir Roger Casement, in our own day.

**Two** - (S)'I want to light a fire of freedom that will set the Antrim hills ablaze...' I heard Sir Roger say those words at a rally, just a few months back, right here in the Glens.

**One** - (P)Aye, things are changing, Sean. We have our churches and our schools. And politicians like wee Joe Devlin over in Westminster fighting for our cause. We'll have the making of our own laws soon.

Home Rule will come.

**Two** - (S)One thing rankles though. The Protestants took the good land and left our people with this bad old ground. Will we have some of that land back, after this parliament we're promised?

**One** - And indeed, that was an issue. In the years before 1912, the United Irish League had grown in strength. It eyed the estates, from Cork to Donegal, that English landlords had possessed for many years and asked the burning question - who owns that land?

## **SCENE FOURTEEN**

**Two** - Easter Tuesday 1912. The Agricultural Show Grounds at Balmoral. A massive Union flag is billowing.

**One** - 100,000 people are in the crowd.

**Two** - Seventy trains have brought in men and women from the country parts.

**One** - Unionist Clubs line up in row after row, a Protestant citizen army. Then they march in order past the platform where the politicians wait to speak.

Alongside sit the leaders of the Protestant church in Ireland. By now the vast majority of clergy, the vast majority of ordinary people in the pews have all agreed. They do not want Home Rule. So they bless and support the Unionist cause.

**Two** - (clergyman)'Lord, thou has been our dwelling place in all generations....satisfy us early with Thy mercy, that we may rejoice. Make us glad in the days wherein Thou hast afflicted us, and the years when we have seen evil.'

**Together** - Oh, Lord, establish the work of our hands.'

**One** - Bonar Law is in Belfast with 70 Conservative MPS.

**Two** - (Law)

'People of Ulster, you hold the pass for the Empire. The timid have left you. But you have closed the gates, just as your ancestors did at the siege of Derry, when King James's army threatened to overwhelm the town. The Liberal Government wants to shut you off from the British people. But help *will* come....

And when this crisis is over, men will say -

'You have saved yourselves by your exertions and you will save the Empire by your example.'

But the greatest cheers are for the man who's next to speak.

**One - (Carson)** People of Ulster, we ask for no privileges, but we are determined no one should have privileges over us. We claim the same rights from the same government as every other part of the United Kingdom. We ask for nothing more and we will take nothing less. Tomorrow I go the House of Commons, there to see the Prime Minister. And I shall say to him - 'Your bill has no moral force...we will not accept it. As you have treated us with fraud, if necessary we will treat you with force. We are here to meet a revolution with a revolution. It is the only way that revolution can be met.

**SCENE FIFTEEN**

**One** - But through the months ahead, the tensions grow.

**Two** - And one small spark can light a flame.

**One** - Saturday, 29<sup>th</sup> June 1912.

**Two** - Early morning, north Belfast.

A Presbyterian Sunday School excursion gathers for a trip to Castledawson, where a farmer has promised his field for a picnic. Protestant excursions carry Union Jacks in these days of empire and the flags flutter high at the head of the procession, led by members of a marching band.

**One** - The fields fly by. Then the train pulls to a halt, the party disembarks, and walks to a field, decorated with bunting, with trestle tables loaded down with sandwiches and lemonade.

**Two** - But another group is celebrating, two miles away, on the road towards Maghera. The Ancient Order of Hibernians.

Banners, sashes, pipes and drums. Catholic nationalists and very proud. Their motto - 'Friendship, Unity and True Christian Charity.' Their slogan - 'Faith and Fatherland.'

**One** - Early evening and the Hibernians leave to march back home, headed by pike-men, with ceremonial replicas of the weapons with which men went to war for an Irish Republic, in 1798. Wooden shafts and metal blades. Decorated with green ribbons.

**Two** - The Sunday School party are returning, with their band playing. Near the station, the two groups meet.

**Two (Prot)**- Have you read this? stones were thrown by Hibernians at a group of children.

**One** - (RC)The fracas was due to local Loyalists who joined the procession, bent on making trouble.

**Two** - (Prot)Little Protestant children were absolutely terrified.

**One** - (RC)Loyalist anthems were played by bandsmen, who had come down from Belfast.

**Two** - (Prot)My paper describes them as a crowd of Home Rule bullies and I'd well believe it.

**One** - (RC)My paper says the Hibernians were provoked ....

**Two** - (Prot)Poor defenceless Protestant women and children.

**One** - (RC) This is exaggeration by Unionist politicians...

**Two** - (Prot) Strong drink was taken.

**One** - (RC) God-fearing Catholic men would never harm the children!

**Two** - (Prot) Flags belonging to a Sunday School were ripped apart....

**One** - (RC) Exaggeration! The Hibernians are a respectable....

**Two** - (Prot)Do you see this?They were stabbed with pikes and beaten with cudgels!

So will this be the torture meted out to Protestants when Home Rule comes?

**One** - (RC)The Unionist press is fomenting party feeling on any wild half-rumour.

**Two** - (Prot)Home Rule is going to be Rome Rule!!

**One** - (RC)Home Rule is coming and God help you then.

**Together** - Are Irishmen going to fight forever like rabid dogs?

**One** - Questions are asked in the Commons. Unionist M.P.s make angry speeches, citing injuries to the children.

**Two** - In Ulster, Hibernians are arrested and soon face trial. But much worse follows in the wake of the incident -

## **SCENE SIXTEEN**

**One** - Crowds gather at familiar Belfast flashpoints -

**Two** - 'Attacking our children! Shame on you!

**One** - 'Home Rule! Home Rule! Home Rule!'

**Two** - 'You'se are Child-murderers!'

**One** - 'We fought by hand, we fought on foot, we fought by night and day/  
Depending on our long bright pikes, we cut our gory way/ And if for want of

leaders we lost at Vinegar Hill, we're ready for another fight and love our country still...!'

**Two** - 'On the Green grassy slopes of the Boyne! /Where the Orange and King William did join/ and fought for our glorious deliverence/ on the green grassy slopes of the Boyne.'

**One** - Flags are waved.

**Two** - Windows broken.

**One** - Drumming parties walk the streets, political songs are sung, fists fly. Missiles hurled.

**Two** - Until the police are called to intervene.

**One** - But it's events in the shipyards that receive most coverage in the papers, not just in Ireland but Britain and far abroad. The shipyard men are mostly Protestant, though many Catholics work there too. Catholics from places like The Falls.

**Two** - Falls Road? Isn't that's where wee Joe Devlin holds sway!'

**One** - Is that Joe Devlin you're talking about? M.P. for the Falls?'

**Two** - Yes a bitter Nationalist and president of

**Together** - The Ancient Order of Hibernians.'

**One** - Oh, so that's what those Falls Road boyos are?'

**Two** --On, the Falls Road, yes, of course they're all...

**Together** - ..Hibernians.

**Two** - Them's the ones that come across the city from the Falls to work in our yard. They're all...

**Together** - Hibernians.

**One** - Remember Castledawson?'

**Two** - 'Him over there.

**One** - He's a Catholic.'

**Two** - 'Him up there. He's a Catholic.'

**One** - 'These two, working over here.'

**Two** - 'Let's get them out of here.'

**Together** - 'And if they won't leave the yard, then let's teach them a lesson.'

**Two** - For several days, it keeps on happening. Men thrown in the water. Men taken to hospital. Attacks by one side on the other, take place everywhere in the city.

**One** - Clergy and politicians appeal for calm.

**Two** - Shipyard bosses threaten to expel anyone attacking fellow workers. Those who've been 'put out', finally return, with guarantees of future safety. The British Army stays on standby all through the rest of the summer.

**One-**

'Red Brick in the suburb, white horse on the wall/ Italian marble in the grand city hall/ Oh stranger from England, why stand so aghast?/ May the Lord in his mercy be kind to Belfast.

**Together** - We swear by King William there'll never be seen/ An all-Ireland parliament in College Green/ And so we are nailing our flags to the mast/ May the Lord in His mercy be kind to Belfast.

**Two** -

This city that harbours our hopes and our fears/ Was knocked up from the swamp in the last hundred years./But the last shall be first and the first shall be last/ May the Lord in his mercy be kind to Belfast.

**Together** -

The bricks they may bleed and the rain it may weep/ And the damp Lagan fog lull the city to sleep/ Is it on towards the future, or back to the past?/ May the Lord in his mercy be kind to Belfast.'

## **SCENE SEVENTEEN**

**One** - (Craig)

Your move, Carson

**Two** - (Edward Carson) Nice shot, Craig. You have me snookered.

Your frame.

Great view from your window.

**One** - (CR)Yes, you can see all the way to the Lough.

**Two** - (EC)And the shipyards. Quiet down there again, thank God.

Well, any progress on the document?

**One** - (CR)Yes, I've got a final copy for perusal. Much as the same as the one I sent you when you were abroad.

**Two** - (EC)Excellent. We need something, Craig.

For our people to focus on. To build their resolve.

**One** - (CR)Strange how it all began, really. In my club, over there in London. That chap Montgomery came up to me and said - 'The Scottish Covenant. Terrific item. You know, the one the Scottish people signed?...perfect as a watchword for the cause.'

So I headed to the library. Pulled a book down from the shelf. Blew the dust off, had a look.

Hmm. Not suitable.

**Two** -(EC)A long document, isn't it?.

**One** - (CR)And the language, Carson.

**Two** -(EC)Legal language. Not easy for the common man to grasp.

**One** - (CR)There are other 'unsuitable' phrases.

**Two** - (EC)Doesn't that document refer to the Pope as Anti-Christ?

**One** - (CR)It does.

**Two** - (EC)I deplore those bitter sectarian sentiments. Always have. Besides we need to stress the economic case.

**One** - (CR)Of course.

**Two** - (EC)Ireland's economy will never manage on its own. We have to stress the fact.

**One** - (CR)So I spoke to Thomas Sinclair.

And he offered to draft the covenant we have right here.

**Two** - (EC)'Ulster's Solemn League and Covenant.' Can you read it out. I'll comment.

**One** - (CR)

Ahem.

'Being convinced in our consciences that Home Rule would be disastrous to the material well-being of Ulster as well as of the whole island...'

**Two** - (EC)I like that. You mention the *whole* island.

**One** - (CR)'...subversive of our civil and religious freedom, destructive of our citizenship and perilous to the unity of the empire, we whose names are underwritten...'

**Two** - (EC)That's good, that's good. It's legal language but not too technical.

**One** - (CR)Like a pledge.

**Two** - (EC)It reads perfectly like a pledge.

**One** - (CR)'men of Ulster, loyal subjects of His Gracious Majesty George V, humbly relying on the God whom our fathers in days of stress and trial confidently trusted, do hereby pledge ourselves'

**Two** - (EC)Good, like I said - it's a 'pledge'!!

**One** - (CR)'.. in solemn Covenant, throughout this our time of threatened calamity, to stand by one another in defending for ourselves and for our children, our cherished position of equal citizenship in the United Kingdom'

**Two** - (EC)Equal. Yes, Craig, we have hit upon another vital word.

**One (CR)** '...and in using all means which may be found necessary to defeat the present conspiracy to set up a Home Rule Parliament in Ireland.'

**Two** - (EC) All means, eh?

**One** - (CR) You think that is too strong a phrase?

**Two** - (EC) No, no. It's...

...it's necessary, I'm afraid.

Necessary. For all of us. But please, do finish.

**One** - (CR) '...And in the event of such a parliament being forced upon us, we further solemnly and mutually pledge ourselves to refuse to recognize its authority. In sure confidence that God will defend the right, we hereto subscribe our names.....

And I like this final phrase, Carson. Full of Ulster honesty...

'further we individually declare that we have not already signed this Covenant.'

Well, what do you think?

**Two** - (EC) Craig, it's good. A short piece, certainly. One to which every loyal Ulsterman could sign his name.

**One** - (CR) And every woman?

**Two** - (EC) On a separate document perhaps?

## **SCENE EIGHTEEN**

**One** - Sinclair had indeed designed a short document. One hundred and eighty eight words. Three sentences.

**Two** - And he had chosen his words with care.

The Old Testament is full of covenants between God and Israel. Perfect for

Bible-reading Ulster people.

The words of liberty.

**One** - 'Conscience.'

**Two** - 'Citizenship.'

**One** - 'Freedom.'

**Two** - 'Equality'.

**One** - Words that spoke of fear and struggle.

**Two** - 'Subversion'

**One** - 'Disaster'

**Two** - 'Stress'

**One** - 'Trial'

**Two** - 'Conspiracy'

**One** - 'Peril'

**Two** - Words that spoke of serious intent and solidarity.

**One** - 'Convinced'

**Two** - 'confident'

**One** - 'pledge'

**Two** - 'solemn'

**One** - 'ourselves'

**Two** - 'we'

**One** - 'Mutual'

**Two** - 'Together'

**One** - And the covenant spoke of three things all unionists hoped would never, ever come apart.

**Together** - 'Ulster', 'Ireland', 'Empire.'

## **SCENE NINETEEN**

**One** - Gentlemen of the Ulster Unionist Council, I propose that we adopt this document, and, that every loyal man be asked to sign it on the 28<sup>th</sup> September 1912, herein called 'Ulster Day.'

And I propose a similar document -called the 'Declaration' - drawn up for womenfolk.

And I propose, across the Irish Sea, a draft we believe our Ulster-born friends will sign.

I also add that during two weeks prior to Ulster Day, our great leader must tour the province, raising the spirits of our people for the day ahead.

All those in favour say 'Aye!'

**Together** - Aye.

**One** - And against?

abstentions?

Motion passed.

**Together** - God save the King!

*Percussive mime of the signing by Carson*

**Two** - When the number of signatures is announced.

There are nearly half a million names. Over 80% of the adult Protestant population of Ulster.

## **SCENE TWENTY**

**One** - But not everyone in the Protestant camp is happy.

**Two** - (Macneice)

I am Canon Frederick John Macneice and I believe that we are in danger of intensifying the old bitterness that many of us hoped was dying away. Ireland's greatest interest is peace, so we must shrink from a policy that in the last resort means war, and worse still, civil war. The church of Christ must not borrow the weapons of the world.

**One (Armour)**- I am the Reverend JB Armour. Have you have noticed that nobody is allowed to have an opinion in this country except at the dication of fanatics? This covenant speaks of every means that may be found necessary to oppose Home Rule. So anyone who signs it could could commit murder which in the heat of passion would be a possible order. Purdysburn asylum will needd enlargement soon. The lunatics are winning.

**Two** - minority opinions, heard but not widely shared. That night, Carson makes his way through singing crowds to the docks and sailed for London. Red, white and blue rockets explode in the sky and as the steamer heads down Belfast Lough, the bonfires blaze.

## SCENE TWENTY ONE

**Two** - (S)Father, how are you?.

**One** - (P)Evening Sean. I'm well thanks. Have a good practice tonight?

**Two** - (S)Yes, indeed. A good session. But could I have a word with you?

**One** - (P)Of course

**Two** - (S)We meet in the parochial hall, tomorrow night -most of the men from the team. And some of our women too. My own sister will be there.

**One** - (P)What for, Sean?

**Two** - (S)Well, you know the way the country's going. This Covenant business?

**One** - (P)Game of bluff, Sean. It will all calm down.

**Two** - (S)Bluff or not, the boys in the club say they will not ignore it. Did you read what the document said?

**One** - (P)Yes, I've read it.

**Two** - (S)And did you see where it said that Unionists would block our Home Rule parliament 'by any necessary means.'

**One** - (P)Those were the words.

**Two** - (S)And what do they intend by 'any means', that's what the boys are asking.

My cousin was mending a fence on the edge of the bog last night and he saw men marching down a lane on the far side of the valley. One is a Protestant neighbour who went to Belfast on Ulster Day to sign the Covenant.

**One** - (P)How many men were in the group?

**Two** - (S)Twenty, Dermott says.

**One** - (P)Marching?

**Two** - (S)Marching, in real military style.

**One** - (P)Well drilled.?

**Two** - (S)Very well drilled. And they belong to a Unionist Club. They meet in an Orange Hall that we all know well, four miles from here.

**One** - (P)Sean, we simply have to let them march. Let them play at soldiers.

**Two** - (S)Dermott thought he saw them carrying weapons....

**One** - (P)Rifles...?

**Two** - (S)He thinks they weren't *real* guns. Dummy guns and some men holding broomsticks. But maybe you can see why the lads are meeting in the hall. We have to talk. And maybe we will have to do much more than talk. When our neighbours covenant against us, march around the roads, and plan to take up guns to pull down all that we, as Irish men and women, have been struggling for - the right to own our native land...

We have to contemplate resistance!

**One** - (P)Sean, do not act in haste.

**Two** –(S)Unionists keep on saying ‘Ulster this’ and ‘Ulster that’ as if they owned this place. Don’t they know that Ulster is the proudest Gaelic province of them all?

**One** - (P)When winter comes, you’ll not see Carson’s Army marching through the glens, with snow on the ground. And anyway - Britain has *promised* us Home Rule. It’s on its way through parliament.

And what have we got to fear from a broomstick army?

Hold to the leadership O’Connell gave.

Greatest Irish leader of them all. Eighty years ago he gained us freedom for the Catholic faith without a shot being fired. Whatever happens, Sean, the gun - even the threat of the gun - that must be the very last resort.

Have I convinced you?

## **SCENE TWENTY TWO**

**One** - It’s the autumn of 1912, and the football season is well under way.

**Two** -there’s a match at Celtic park. ‘Paradise’ their supporters call it.

**One** - But today the opposition’s Linfield.

**Two** - And 20,000 spectators are packed in tight on a bright, cold day.

**One** - Green Stripes versus Blues, in a city as tense as a drum.

**Two** - Linfield at one end.

**One** - Celtic at the other.

**Two** - And when the Blues pass the ball out to their winger.... who crosses it in the air to a big centre forward.... who knocks it down for his own inside right to score a brilliant goal, its yes, yes, no, no, no, everything erupts.

**One** - ‘On the Green grassy slopes of the Boyne! Where the Orange and King William did join, and fought for our glorious deliverance, on on the green grassy slopes of the Boyne.’

**Two** - 'We fought by hand, we fought on foot, we fought by night and day, Depending on our long bright pikes, we cut our gory way. And if for want of leaders we lost at Vinegar Hill, we're ready for another fight and love our country still...!'

**One** - The crowd spills out onto the pitch. Players, referee, linesmen run for cover.

**Two** -there's a massive fight going on in Paradise. Two teams of rioters, one goal. Trouble.

**One** - amidst the hurly burly, gunshots ring out

**Two** - Men drop wounded.

**One** - Fathers with little boys by the hand rush off towards exits. There even a fight going on now out on the road, over on the pavement, across in the bog meadows. Nuts and bolts rain down like silver hail.

**Together** - Belfast confetti.

**One** - bits of metal from the tramway rails hurled through the air. Ten minutes into the brawl and bleeding men lie everywhere.

**Two** -men who rescue the injured are punched and kicked.

**One** - Women scream and young girls faint. Children bawl.The players shiver in the changing room, and '...refuse to go back out..'

**Two** - The referee pronounces ' match abandoned'...

**One** - Then police arrive. Arrest some of the offenders and take their names. While others run or limp or crawl away.

**Two** - And ambulance men walk in with stretchers to pick up those still lying on the pitch, some groaning, some unconscious.

## **SCENE TWENTY THREE**

**One** - Order. Let the House come to order.

**Two** -(Redmond)

As leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party, I believe we will see the abatement of these terrible passions once Home Rule is achieved. Contrary

to what Sir Edward Carson believes, the Irish parliament *will* cultivate friendly relations with Great Britain and promote the unity welfare of the Empire.

**One** - (Carson)As leader of the Unionist Party, I place before the house the following words uttered several years ago by my honourable colleague. 'History shows that Catholic Irishmen were never guilty of religious persecution and the experience of the present shows they are incapable of bigotry.'

Would the honourable gentleman care to comment further, after what we have seen at Castledawson and in Celtic Park?

**Two (Connolly)** - We must trample underfoot all the soul-shrivelling prejudice with which this society has poisoned the soul and warped the intellect of the people. A small nation like ours can only become great by reason of the greatness of its soul. So we must resolve to risk even our very lives in order to end our country's degradation. Even though thrones and empires have to fall along the way.

## **SCENE TWENTY FOUR -**

**One** - By the last few weeks of 1912, an issue that would have been unthinkable, a few years ago, is emerging in discussions.

**Two** (Redmond)- I wish to raise an issue, sir.

The Unionist see now that Home Rule is inevitable. But they are pondering whether the northern counties could be left out of the Home Rule arrangements. The Irish people will not accept such a move. We cannot have our island sliced in two.

**One** - (Asquith)Tell me, which counties are they contemplating for 'partition'?

Antrim and Down?

**Two** - (Redmond)Yes.

**One** - (A)Armagh? Londonderry?

**Two** - (R)Yes.

**One** – (A)The whole of Ulster? All nine counties? Surely not.

**Two** – (R)Unlikely. But they may try for six.

**One** – (A)Well, I shall knock such a proposal on the head.

**Two** – (R)You must, Prime Minister.

**One** – (A)Can't go breaking up your country, can we?

**Two** – (R)Never.

**One** – (A)Extra army units can be sent. They'll back up the police. Keep good order till Home Rule beds down. I think you'd see Carson's army melt away, if troopships sailed into Belfast Lough.

**Two** – (R)You think the army would put down these Ulster rebels?

**One** – (A)Of course.

As for that insufferable Bonar Law. Sickening man. Telling Carson's lot that they 'won't stand alone'. And then we have to listen to that confounded poet.

**Two (R)**– Kipling.

**One** – (A) Rud- yard Kipling . What's he doing meddling in politics? He should stick to children's tales – the Jungle Book, that kind of thing. Have you heard his latest evil doggerel?

' The dark eleventh hour draws on/And sees us sold/To every evil power/We fought against of old – rebellion, rapine, hate/Oppression, wrong and greed/ are loosed to rule our fate/ By England's art and deed.'

**Two** – May I remind you, Prime Minister, of the dangers of partition? Unionists will put their own government in place. It's already bad for Nationalists in the north. They do menial jobs under Unionist bosses, and every day they feel the pain of hearing their religion reviled by politicians and by clergy, but think how much worse it could become!

Mr. Asquith, if you grant Ireland Home Rule, you must give her back her nationality entire. If you do this, you will soothe her wounded pride and you will find her to be a dear colleague, a sister and a friend.

Any alternative arrangement..... is one that you and your party and the great empire which we both respect .....will surely live to regret.

## **SCENE TWENTY FIVE**

**Two (EC)**- 'The dark eleventh hour, eh?' Kipling's right.

I wonder what the future holds, Craig, apart from pain and shadows. For the Liberals to pursue this Home Rule path is deepest folly. With Redmond leading them, it's the blind leading the blind. Will they come to their senses and withdraw this legislation that sets Irishman against Irishman? I think not.

Yet we must be strong.

'We perish if we yield.'

**One (CR)**- Carson, our Unionist clubs are growing.

**Two** - (EC)What are the numbers?

**One** - (CR)50,000 men. Grow at this rate and they could soon be 100,000 strong.

**Two** - (EC)They need centralized. By January next year, at the latest.

**One** - (CR) A command structure. I can see it in my mind's eye.

**Two** - (EC)I can think of several retired British generals from our Unionist ranks. With the expertise to lead.

**One** - (CR)Province-wide divisions, regiments, battalions, companies.

**Two** - (EC)And funds. We want no rag-time soldiers, Craig.

**One** - (CR)We want a force we can rely upon.

**Two** - (EC)All the features of a modern army. You served in South Africa. You know the score.

**One** - (CR)A signaling corps.

**Two** - (EC)Dispatch riders.

**One** - (CR)Yes. And a Motor Car corps.

**Two** - (EC)Medical Services?

**One** - (CR)Yes, doctors, ambulances, nursing staff.

**Two** - (EC)Women will want much more than nursing duties, Craig.

**One** - (CR)Of course. There are telegraph operations to think about. And other vital jobs and chores.

**Two** - (EC)And a uniform for our Ulster army?

**One** - (CR)Yes, a simple uniform for the men, based on what has gone before.

A hat and boots, a badge and regimental number.

**Two** - (EC)And the name of the organization that we form?

**One** - (CR)How about

THE ULSTER VOLUNTEER FORCE!

**Two** - And we need guns.

No rag-time army, Craig. Not broomsticks to defend ourselves. We need guns.

**One** - There are Rifle Clubs already forming. Men are practicing. And guns are being smuggled in.

**Two** - That's limited.

**One** (CR)- Yes, too true. I inspected one small group last week.

Six shotguns, three revolvers, and a useless British Army Rifle.

But I've got news. Big news on the guns score.

**Two(EC)** - Really?

**One** - (CR) You know Fred Crawford's travelling to Hamburg on a secret mission. I think we ....

**Two** - (EC) Wait. One moment. If we fail.

**One (CR)** - Come, come now, Carson.

**Two** - (EC) No, let me be clear about this. Let me be honest.

IF WE FAIL.

If, despite our efforts, and despite the support of Bonar Law and all the strength of our Ulster Volunteer Army, the sentiments of our Solemn Covenant, and the resolve that you and I have shown...

... if Asquith and Redmond proceed with the Home Rule Bill, which looks damned likely, there is this thorny question of compromise, in which we accept that the southern counties are left to their Home Rule fate - a thing that breaks my heart as a Dublin man - and we accept that what we are left with under the Union....

... is only Ulster.

**One (CR)** - But is it to be *all* of Ulster?

**Two** (EC) What counties are you thinking we must jettison?

**One** - (CR) Donegal. Cavan. Monaghan. Large Catholic majorities.

**Two** - (EC) Craig, there are Protestants there who signed the Covenant. Doesn't this stink of rank betrayal?

And then what other counties do you leave out of the Union? Tyrone for instance? There's a Catholic majority there.

**One (CR)** - Carson, political options, like options on the battlefield, are never less than tough.

## SCENE TWENTY SIX

**Two** - By the end of 1912, the Home Rule Crisis has grown - and it will grow still further. Guns will soon be smuggled in for the Ulster Volunteers. A militia of National Volunteers will be formed. And every one will have to find a place to stand amidst the looming conflict.

**One** -(John) - Mr Asquith wants to push me to the very edge of the Union. And as for Redmond, Devlin and the lot of them in that Home Rule camp, we know fine rightly what comes next, after they have got their parliament, when us proud folk who wear this collarette would soon be speaking with an unheard voice. They want my land, the soil I till and work each day, the only part of Ireland that I call home - and after they have got my Land, well, what do I surrender next? My faith? My freedom?

What choice have I got but to resist?

**Two** (Sean) - Mr Carson and Mr Craig have backed me into a corner with my back against the wall. As for Bonar Law and his Conservative chums, they have no interest in Ireland except for their own selfish ends. So what comes next? Who knows... but history tells me it won't be good for us. I've heard rumours in the last few weeks that they'll draw a border across our beautiful island and hem us Ulster Catholics in behind it. So when freedom comes, we'll be denied it. Now you tell me, what other way is there but to resist?

*Heliotrope bouquet*