Last Orders



A short story for English reading and speaking

Table of Contents

Introductory Questions

Last Orders

Reading Comprehension Questions

Essential Vocabulary

Discussion Questions

Writing

Reading Comprehension Answer Key

Credits

All rights reserved © ManWrites 2026 – www.manwrites.com

Introductory Questions

1. Is there such a thing as the angel of death?
2. How does he collect souls?
3. If it is someone's time to die, what choice do they have?

All rights reserved © ManWrites 2026 – www.manwrites.com

Last Orders

Rich rang the bell with a sharp tug.

“That’ll be it, gentlemen,” he called to the last few customers. “Last orders.”

It was coming up to midnight. He should have closed ten minutes ago, but there was always someone who wanted to finish a drink, tell one more story, or put off going home for another half-hour.

Rich had been doing this long enough to know the difference between someone who needed another five minutes and someone who needed telling twice.

A man in a crumpled suit nodded to him, swallowed the last of his beer, and got to his feet. He pulled on his coat and headed for the door.

“Night, Rich.”

“Night, Dave.”

The door opened, letting in a brief gust of cold air and the sound of traffic from the street. Then it closed again.

Most of the regulars were like that. They knew when it was time to leave.

All rights reserved © ManWrites 2026 – www.manwrites.com

Most of them.

Rich looked towards the man sitting two stools down.

Jake.

He came in four or five nights a week and rarely spoke to anyone. On the nights he didn't appear, Rich assumed he was drinking somewhere else.

His face told the story. Burst blood vessels spread across his bulbous nose and cheeks. His eyes were permanently bloodshot, with heavy bags beneath them.

In front of him stood a glass of warm beer, which he held between his hands as though praying to it. Beside it was an empty shot glass.

The cheapest house whisky. That was what Jake really came for.

“Ready, Jakey?”

Jake raised his head and looked at Rich as if seeing him for the first time.

“I just —” he began. “Just, y'know —”

“Come on, Jake. Time to go.”

Rich gently eased the beer glass from his hands.

“First one's on me tomorrow night.”

Jake watched the glass being taken away. Then he nodded,

All rights reserved © ManWrites 2026 – www.manwrites.com

rubbed the top of his head and slowly got to his feet.

He reached for his coat.

And stopped.

For a moment, he stood perfectly still, staring towards the far end of the bar.

Rich followed his gaze.

Nothing unusual.

Just the empty stools and the shadows beyond them.

“You all right, Jake?”

Jake didn't answer. He pulled on his coat, keeping his eyes fixed on the far end of the room.

Then he hurried towards the door.

“See you tomorrow,” Rich called.

But Jake was already outside.

Rich shook his head.

Poor old Jake. One of these days, he'd drink himself into an early grave.

“He looks a little worse for wear.”

Rich turned towards the voice.

A man was sitting at the far end of the bar.

For a moment, Rich simply stared at him.

All rights reserved © ManWrites 2026 – www.manwrites.com

When had he come in?

He was certain that stool had been empty only a moment ago.

Perhaps he'd been too busy dealing with Jake to notice.

The man smiled.

A pleasant, sympathetic smile.

“Yes,” Rich said. “He's not in a good way. Hasn't been for years.”

The stranger nodded, as though this confirmed something he already knew.

He was perhaps fifty, although there was something about his face that made his age difficult to judge. His dark suit was immaculate, his white shirt perfectly pressed.

He looked like someone who belonged in a much more expensive establishment.

In front of him stood a glass containing a slice of lemon and the remains of some melted ice.

The man raised it.

“May I?”

Rich glanced at the clock.

He should have closed by now.

Still, one more drink wouldn't hurt.

All rights reserved © ManWrites 2026 – www.manwrites.com

“Sure. What was it?”

“Gin and tonic. Easy on the tonic, if you please. No need to drown it.”

His voice was quiet and precise.

English, certainly, but Rich couldn't place the accent. There was something old-fashioned about the way he spoke, as though every word had been carefully selected before being allowed out.

Rich took the glass and turned to the bottles behind him.

He poured the gin, added a little tonic and dropped in a fresh slice of lemon.

When he turned back, he glanced around the room.

Everyone had gone.

Just him and the stranger.

Outside, a bus passed along the wet street, its lights moving briefly across the windows.

Rich placed the drink on the bar.

“Not seen you in here before.”

“No.”

“You live round here?”

“Not anymore.”

“Just passing through, then?”

All rights reserved © ManWrites 2026 – www.manwrites.com

The man smiled.

“Something like that. I've come to see an old friend.”

“Ah. Well, I hope you enjoy your visit.”

“I'm sure I shall.”

The man lifted his glass and drank.

Rich watched him tilt his head back and swallow the entire drink in one smooth movement.

He lowered the glass.

“Excellent.”

He placed it carefully on the bar.

“How about another?”

Rich gave a small laugh.

“Sorry. That's your last one.”

The man continued smiling.

For a few seconds, neither spoke.

Then the smile disappeared.

“Another.”

Rich looked at him.

“Sorry. We're closing.”

The stranger didn't move.

Rich became aware of the silence.

All rights reserved © ManWrites 2026 – www.manwrites.com

A moment earlier, he'd heard the traffic outside. Somewhere down the street, a car horn had sounded.

Now there was nothing.

Not even the low hum of the refrigerator behind the bar.

He glanced towards it.

The little green light was still on.

“Another,” the man repeated.

Rich had dealt with difficult customers before. Men who'd had too much to drink and decided that the whole world owed them something.

Usually, it was easier to humour them.

One more drink, then out the door.

“All right,” he said. “One more. Then you're leaving.”

He poured another gin and tonic and set it down.

The man looked at the glass.

Then at Rich.

For an instant, something seemed to move behind his eyes.

A flicker of light.

Rich blinked.

The stranger raised the glass and drained it.

He put it down again.

All rights reserved © ManWrites 2026 – www.manwrites.com

“Another.”

Rich stared at him.

“No. That's it.”

The man held out his glass.

“I said another.”

Rich straightened up.

“You'll have to leave.”

The stranger regarded him for a moment.

Then his fingers tightened around the glass.

There was a sharp crack.

Rich watched as a thin line appeared in the glass.

Another followed.

Then the whole thing shattered in the stranger's hand.

He didn't flinch.

He simply closed his fist around the broken pieces and squeezed.

Blood began to run between his fingers, dripping onto the polished wooden bar.

Rich took a step backwards.

“Get out. Now.”

The stranger opened his hand.

All rights reserved © ManWrites 2026 – www.manwrites.com

Fragments of glass lay in his palm. Blood ran down his wrist and onto the cuff of his immaculate white shirt.

He appeared not to notice.

“Get me another, Richard.”

Rich felt a sudden chill.

Richard.

Nobody called him that.

Not here.

Had he told the man his name?

He tried to remember.

No.

He was certain he hadn't.

“Look,” Rich said, keeping his voice steady. “I think you'd better leave. Before I call the police.”

The stranger glanced towards the telephone behind the bar.

“You're not going to call anybody.”

Rich reached for the receiver.

He lifted it to his ear.

Nothing.

No dialling tone.

He pressed the buttons.

All rights reserved © ManWrites 2026 – www.manwrites.com

Still nothing.

He looked at the telephone, then at the stranger.

The man was watching him with mild interest.

“Now,” he said, “I'd like another drink. And I think you should have one yourself.”

Rich put the receiver down.

“What's this about?”

“We have a journey ahead of us.”

Rich stared at him.

“What journey?”

The stranger didn't answer.

He took a clean glass from the bar and placed it beside his own.

Then he folded his hands in front of him.

The blood had stopped flowing.

Rich looked at the man's palm.

There were no cuts.

No wounds.

Nothing.

Only a few dark spots of blood on his shirt cuff.

“Who are you?” Rich whispered.

The stranger smiled.

All rights reserved © ManWrites 2026 – www.manwrites.com

“An old friend.”

Rich shook his head.

“I've never seen you before.”

“Are you quite sure?”

Something about the question made Rich uneasy.

He looked at the stranger's face, searching for something familiar.

The eyes.

There was something about those eyes.

But whatever it was, he couldn't remember.

“I want you to leave,” Rich said.

The stranger sighed.

“Richard. We really haven't got much time.”

He pushed the two empty glasses towards him.

“Pour us a drink.”

Rich stood motionless.

Outside, the streetlights flickered.

Once.

Twice.

Then they went out.

The bar was suddenly darker.

All rights reserved © ManWrites 2026 – www.manwrites.com

Rich turned towards the window.

He could no longer see the shops opposite. The parked cars had disappeared into the darkness.

There were no headlights.

No movement.

Nothing.

He became aware of a smell.

Faint at first.

Something burning.

He looked around the bar, searching for its source.

The smell grew stronger.

He turned back to the stranger.

The man was still sitting patiently on his stool, his hands folded on the bar.

“Go where?” Rich asked.

The stranger looked at him for a long moment.

Then he smiled.

“It's time, Richard.”

He pushed one of the glasses a little closer.

“One last drink?”

All rights reserved © ManWrites 2026 – www.manwrites.com

Reading Comprehension Questions

1. Who is the main character in the story?
2. What is his job?
3. Where does the story take place? What time of day is it?
4. Is the bar busy or nearly empty at the beginning of the story?
5. What problem does Jake appear to have?
6. What is Jake drinking?
7. Who speaks to Rich from the far end of the bar after Jake leaves?
8. What is the stranger drinking?
9. Describe the stranger's appearance.
10. What does Rich notice about the stranger's accent and manner of speaking?
11. What name does the stranger use for Rich? Why does this unsettle Rich?
12. After finishing the first drink Rich serves him in the story, does the stranger ask for another?
13. How does Rich initially respond to this request?
14. Does Rich eventually serve the stranger another drink?
15. What condition does Rich give before serving this drink?

All rights reserved © ManWrites 2026 – www.manwrites.com

16. After finishing that drink, does the stranger ask for another?

17. What does Rich say in response?

18. What does the stranger do to the glass? What does Rich later notice about his hand?

19. Does Rich try to call for help? How does he do this, and what happens?

20. Does the stranger explain where they are going? What does he say about their journey?

All rights reserved © ManWrites 2026 – www.manwrites.com

Essential Vocabulary

a sharp tug	crumpled	stool
blood vessels	bulbous	permanently
bloodshot	whisky	to ease
worse for wear	sympathetic	immaculate
establishment	remains	gin and tonic
precise	old-fashioned	tilted
smooth	to humour someone	a flicker of light
drained	to shatter	to flinch
fragments	palm	cuff
police	receiver	dialling tone
journey	wounds	motionless
flickered	faint	

There may be a lot of new or unfamiliar vocabulary to you in the story. This is the perfect time to get to know these new and strange words and phrases.

Write down all the new words and phrases in your vocabulary notebook. Look up the meaning of the new vocabulary in a dictionary or online and write down the meaning next to the word or phrase.

It should look something like this:

All rights reserved © ManWrites 2026 – www.manwrites.com

A Sharp Tug – *a quick and often strong pull or yank against something.*

Crumpled – creased or wrinkled, rather than smooth.

Then write a sentence of your own that uses the new word or phrase correctly.

When we got to the park, my dog gave a sharp tug on his leash.

He arrived at the interview wearing a crumpled shirt.

If you do this correctly, it will help you learn many new words and phrases. This will build your English vocabulary and writing down all the words and phrases, making sentences of your own, will all help you to remember all of this new vocabulary.

All rights reserved © ManWrites 2026 – www.manwrites.com

Discussion Questions

1. In your own words, what is this story about?

2. Who — or what — is the stranger in the bar?

3. What does he want from Rich?

4. Where do you think the stranger intends to take Rich? What clues support your interpretation?

5. What kind of bar is the bar in the story? Try to describe it.

6. What kind of people go to this bar?

7. What is a dive bar?

8. Is the bar in this story a dive bar?

9. What kind of people go to a dive bar?

10. What is an Angel of Death?

11. What does this creature do?

12. Do you believe in the Angel of Death? If so, why? If not, why not?

13. Do you think the stranger in the bar is the Angel of Death?

14. Can you tell how old Rich is from the story? What, if anything, suggests his age?

15. Why do you think the stranger has come for Rich?

16. What do you think Rich's next reaction could be?

All rights reserved © ManWrites 2026 – www.manwrites.com

17. What will he do next in the story?
18. If you were to encounter this situation, what would you do?
19. Do you think our time of death is already planned?
20. Or can we go at any time?
21. Are you ready for death?
22. Do you think about this at all?

All rights reserved © ManWrites 2026 – www.manwrites.com

Writing

This is a creative writing exercise.

Imagine you are in a similar situation to Rich in the story.
The Angel of Death appears and tells you your time has come. It is time to leave.
But you refuse.
And the Angel of Death doesn't know what to do about this. Usually, people just comply and go with him.

Write your story.

And when you have finished, read it out loud in class in front of your classmates and teacher.
Ask everyone for feedback.
Or you can ask your teacher to give you a review of your writing.

All rights reserved © ManWrites 2026 – www.manwrites.com

Reading Comprehension Answer Key

1. Rich (Richard).

2. He is a barman who serves customers and closes the bar.

3. In a bar, around midnight.

4. It is nearly empty, with only a few customers remaining. The exact number is not stated.

5. He appears to have a serious drinking problem. He visits four or five nights a week, and Rich assumes he drinks elsewhere on other nights.

6. He has a glass of warm beer and an empty shot glass from the cheapest house whisky.

7. An unfamiliar man sitting at the far end of the bar. His true identity is not confirmed.

8. Gin and tonic, with only a little tonic.

9. He looks perhaps fifty, although his age is difficult to judge. He wears an immaculate dark suit and a perfectly pressed white shirt.

10. He sounds English, but Rich cannot place the accent. His speech is quiet, precise and old-fashioned.

All rights reserved © ManWrites 2026 – www.manwrites.com

11. He calls him Richard. Nobody calls Rich that in the bar, and Rich is certain he has not told the stranger his name.

12. Yes. He finishes the drink in one movement and asks for another.

13. Rich initially refuses, saying that was the stranger's last drink and that they are closing.

14. Yes. After the stranger insists, Rich pours another gin and tonic.

15. Rich says this will be one more drink, and then the stranger must leave.

16. Yes. He drains it and demands another.

17. Rich refuses, saying, "No. That's it," and tells him he will have to leave.

18. He crushes the glass in his hand and squeezes the broken pieces, making his hand bleed. Later, Rich sees that the bleeding has stopped and there are no cuts or wounds.

19. Yes. He picks up the telephone receiver and presses the buttons, intending to call the police, but there is no dialling tone and the telephone does not work.

All rights reserved © ManWrites 2026 – www.manwrites.com

20. No destination is given. The stranger says they have a journey ahead of them and later says they have little time. At the end, he says, “It’s time, Richard,” and offers one last drink.

All rights reserved © ManWrites 2026 – www.manwrites.com

Credits

This lesson plan is courtesy of **ManWrites**.
This content is copyright © 2026 **ManWrites** — *© 2026 ManWrites*
For more information, visit:
www.manwrites.com
Or join my mailing list below — I'll send you more ESL teaching ideas straight to your inbox.
ManWrites Mailing List

All rights reserved © ManWrites 2026 – www.manwrites.com