SEBASTIAN BARRY

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On Canaan's Side

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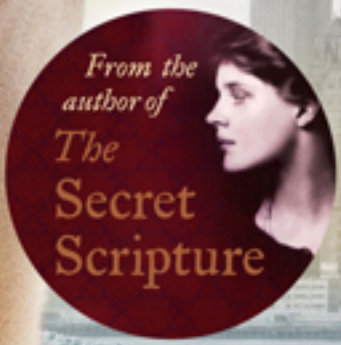

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On Canaan's Side

A novel

by SEBASTIAN BARRY

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PART ONE

First Day without Bill

Bill is gone.

What is the sound of an eighty-nine-year-old heart breaking? It might not be much more than silence, and certainly a small slight sound.

When I was four I owned a porcelain doll given me by a strange agency. My mother's sister, who lived down in Wicklow, had kept it from her own childhood and that of her sister, and gave it to me as a sort of keepsake of my mother. At four such a doll may be precious for other reasons, not least her beauty. I can still see the painted face, calm and oriental, and the blue silk dress she wore. My father much to my puzzlement was worried by such a gift. It troubled him in a way I had no means to understand. He said it was too much for a little girl, even though the same little girl he himself loved with a complete worship.

One Sunday about a year after I was first given it, I insisted on bringing it to mass with me, despite the long and detailed protestations of my father, who was religious in the sense he hoped there was an afterlife. He bet all his heart on that. Somehow a doll was not a fitting mass-goer in his estimation.

As I carried her in stubbornly to the pro-cathedral in Marlborough Street, by some accident, possibly the great atmosphere there of seriousness, she started to fall from my arms. To this day I am not certain, not entirely, that I didn't let her go on some peculiar impulse. But if I did, I

immediately regretted it. The ground of the cathedral was flagged and hard. Her beautiful dress could not save her, and her perfect face hit the stone and smashed worse than an egg. My heart broke for her in the same instance, so that the sound of her destruction became in my childish memory the sound of my heart breaking. And even though it was a babyish fancy, I do wonder now if it might not be a sound like that an eighty-nine-year-old heart makes, coming asunder from grief – a small, slight sound.

But the feeling of it is like a landscape engulfed in floodwater in the pitch darkness, and everything, hearth and byre, animal and human, terrified and threatened. It is as if someone, some great agency, some CIA of the heavens, knew well the little mechanism that I am, and how it is wrapped and fixed, and has the booklet or manual to undo me, and cog by cog and wire by wire is doing so, with no intention ever to put me back together again, and indifferent to the fact that all my pieces are being thrown down and lost. I am so terrified by grief that there is solace in nothing. I carry in my skull a sort of molten sphere instead of a brain, and I am burning there, with horror, and misery.

God forgive me. God help me. I must settle myself. I must. Please, God, help me. Do You see me? I am sitting here at my kitchen table, with its red Formica. The kitchen is gleaming. I have made tea. I scalded the pot, even in my distraction. One spoon for me and one for the pot. I let it brew, as always, waited, as always, the yellow light in the window facing the sea as solid-looking as an old bronze shield. In my grey dress of heavy linen, that I regretted buying the moment I paid out the money for it in Main Street

years ago, and still regret, though it is warm in this struggling weather. I will drink the tea. I will drink the tea.

Bill is gone.

The legend of my mother was that she died in giving birth to me. I broke free, my father said, like a pheasant from cover, noisily. His own father had been steward of Humewood estate in Wicklow, so he knew what a pheasant looked like, breaking from cover. My mother died just as the need for candlelight failed, at the first instance of the dawn. It was in Dalkey village, not far from the sea.

For many years that was just a story to me. But when I was pregnant with my own child, it suddenly became vivid, and as if it was present time. I sensed her in that cramped delivery room in Cleveland as I strained to get him out. I never had any true thought of my mother till then, and yet in those moments I do not think any human being was ever closer to another. When the baby was laid on my breast at last, me panting like an animal, and that matchless happiness surged through me, I cried for her, and the worth and weight of those tears was more to me than a kingdom.

When I was shown the Catholic catechism at four, in the little infants' school attached to the castle, and the very first question was posed, *Who made the World?*, I knew in my heart that the teacher Mrs O'Toole erred in providing the answer *God*. She stood before us and read out the question and answer in her wren-sized voice. And I might have been inclined to believe her, because she was impressive to me at four in her skirt as grey as a seal in Dublin Zoo, and she had been very kind to me as I came in, and had given me an

apple. But the world, as I thought she ought to have known, was made by my father, James Patrick Dunne, not quite at that time, but later to be, chief superintendent of the Dublin Metropolitan Police.

The legend of my father was that he had led the charge against Larkin's men in Sackville Street. When Larkin came over O'Connell Bridge in a fake beard and moustache, and walked up through the marble corridors of the Imperial Hotel, and out onto a balcony, and began to give a speech to the hundreds of workers gathered below, which had been forbidden by edict, my father and the other officers ordered the waiting constables forward, with batons drawn.

When I first was told this story as a child, on the very evening it happened, I misunderstood, and thought my father had done something heroic. I added in my imagination a white horse, upon which he rode with ceremonial sword drawn. I saw him rush forward like in a proper cavalry charge. I gasped at his chivalry and courage.

It was only years later I understood that he had advanced on foot, and that three of the working men had been killed.

Old matters. And not much to do with the grief of the present except it gives me my bearings. Now I'll draw breath and start properly.

When I came back in from the funeral my friend Mr Dillinger had come into the hallway while I was out and left flowers but not waited for me. They were very costly flowers, and he had put a little note against them, and written,

'To my dear friend Mrs Bere, in the time of her great loss.' It touched me, truly. I am sure if Mr Nolan was still alive he also would have crept in. But it would not have been welcome. Maybe if I didn't know what I know now, maybe if Mr Nolan's death had not occurred when it did, I might have gone on imagining him my closest friend in life. It is so strange that his death and the death of my grandson Bill have happened so close together in time. All things come in threes, no doubt this is true. The third death will be my own. I am eighty-nine years old and will end my life very shortly. How can I live without Bill?

I cannot do such a terrible thing without explanation. But who do I explain to? Mr Dillinger? Mrs Wolohan? Myself? I cannot depart without some effort to account for this despair. I am not generally despairing, and I hope I have exhibited little enough of it as a living, breathing woman. It has not been my style at all. So I will not entertain it for long now. I feel it, so deeply I fear it troubles my very pancreas, that strange blue organ that has killed Mr Nolan, but I do not intend to feel it much longer. As long as it takes to speak into the shadows of the past, into the blue ether of the future, so long will it be, I hope and pray. Then I will find some quiet method to dispatch myself.

I have not been immune to all the lovely sights of this world that I have been granted, whether some corner of Dublin as a child, some little unprized courtyard in the castle that seemed to me like a dusty paradise, or in these later times those long-limbed creaturely fogs that walk in against the Hamptons like armies, whether attacking or defeated, whether going out or returning home is hard to say.

I hope and pray Mr Nolan wends the long downward

road to hell, with the fields beginning to burn about him, and the sunlight to take on a worrying, ragged hue, the vistas to alter and seem strange to him – not the wide tobacco fields and blithe, wooded hills of home after all, for he was born and raised in Tennessee, despite his Irish name, and, like every dying son of a place, he may have imagined himself wending homeward naturally in death. And though in essence I loved him while he was alive, and for many many years we were friends, it will only be just and right now that the devil takes his hand and leads him in among the smoking meadows.

The devil, I am beginning to suspect, and great grief it is causing me, has a greater sense of justice than the other man.

'Only the unfaithful can be truly faithful, only the losers can truly win' – this was said to me once by my grandson Bill, with his usual sparkle, before he went to the desert war. He had already been divorced, aged nineteen, and already believed himself to have lost in life. Or Life, with a capital L, as he called it. The war took the last sparkle out of him. He returned from the burning desert like a man that had seen one of the devil's miracles. Some mere weeks later he was out with his friends, maybe doing a little of that drinking he liked. Next day he was found by a cleaner lady in the toilets of his old high school, of all places. He had climbed in there on some impulse known only to himself. He had killed himself on a Saturday night, for the reason I am sure that only the janitor would discover him on Sunday, and not the great tide of children on Monday. He had hanged himself on his tie from the door hook.

Why am I alive when he is dead? Why did Death take him?

Nothing else on earth would have set me to writing. I hate writing, I hate pens and paper and all that fussiness. I have done well enough without it too, I think. Oh, I am lying to myself. I have *feared* writing, being scarcely able to write my name until I was eight. The nuns in North Great George's Street were not kind about that. But books have saved me sometimes, that is the truth – my Samaritans. Cookery books when I was learning my trade, oh, years ago, though in these later years I sometimes still find myself dipping back into my tattered *White House Cook Book*, right enough, to remind myself of some elusive detail. There is no good cook that has not found errors even in their favourite cookbook, and marked them in the margins, like an old book maybe in the lost library of Alexandria. I will read the paper on Sunday sometimes, in a certain mood, from stem to stern. Burn through it like a growing flame. I quite like the Bible in a rarer mood. The Bible is like a particular music, you cannot always catch the tune of it. My grandson Bill also liked the Bible, he specialised in unpicking the book of Revelation. He said that was what it was like, the desert, Kuwait, burning burning, like the lake of fire. *He who is not written in the book of life will be cast into the lake of fire.*

I like stories that other people will tell you, straight from the mouth – or the *gob* as we used to say in Ireland. Easy-going tales, off the cuff, humorous. Not the heavy-hearted tales of history.

And I have had enough history for a lifetime from my

own life itself, not to mention the life of my employer, Mrs Wolohan.

That is an Irish name of course, but as there is no W in the Irish language I must suppose the letter was added in America, many years ago, in another generation. Because one thing I have noticed about words in America, they don't stay still. Like the people themselves. Only the birds of America seem to stick, birds whose natures and colours so intrigued and confused me when first I came. Hereabouts, these days, the seaside sparrow, the clapper rail, the grackle, and the piping plover, and the thirteen species of warbler that grace these shores. I myself have been about a bit, all told. The first town I hit was New Haven, a thousand thousand moons ago, as one might say. With my beloved Tadg. Oh, that was a wild story enough. But I will try and write about it tomorrow. I am cold, even though the heat of early summer is adequate. I am cold because I cannot find my heart.

Second Day without Bill

Not content with leaving the flowers yesterday, Mr Dillinger brought himself back today. The actual flowers I had put not very beautifully in an old milk-jug, but for all that they shone brightly on the kitchen table. He touched the blue petals absent-mindedly, as if he only half-remembered they were something to do with him.

Mr Dillinger has discretion, I am sure he knows when he is not wanted. But the difficulty with him will always be it is hard not to be glad to see him. He is one of those perhaps rare men that bear the face of an emperor, rather craggy, and what I imagine as noble, not being entirely sure what that might be. He has the looks to go with his reputation, which is as a wonderful writer. He is one of the very closest of Mrs Wolohan's friends.

Even in his late sixties, his manner gives no hint of age. He is very long and lean, so he didn't so much sit in one of my parlour chairs, designed for lesser mortals, as lean himself against it somewhat, like a ladder someone had propped there. Such is the nature of his mind that his head is always in clouds of a sort, and he speaks what is uppermost there, what is most important and urgent to him at that moment, and has not much small talk, something he shares with Mrs Wolohan. But she never had much need of it, with me. We went on like clockwork, in the days of my actual employment. I cooked the same round of things for her, and Wednesday lunch was the same thing more or less every

Wednesday, except when the pressure of the seasons was on me, and some items might be scarce. My days in Cleveland had been well spent, and my dear friend there Cassie Blake, who showed me the first oyster I ever saw, and many other mysteries, left her mark on me for ever, so that I just cannot say I was a bad cook. Which is just as well. Mrs Wolohan may have put great store on my being Irish when she first engaged me, or inherited me from her mother, but it would never have been enough for an employment.

Mr Dillinger has no small talk, but he does have talk. 'I think I should bring you with me next time I am going to North Dakota,' he said, as if the tail-end of a vast train of thought, as long and mysterious as the great freight trains that wind down through America. 'When I was very sad myself, when my wife passed, I found great solace there, among the Sioux.'

Of course I did not for a moment think he meant it, about bringing me with him. But there was its own kind of solace in his odd playfulness.

He began to talk about other things. Like an old-fashioned Irishman of my father's generation, he did not want to get at the main topic directly, but to creep up on it. Now he was telling me a story about his family during the Hitler years. Mr Dillinger's father had been quite wealthy, he said, and far from fleeing Germany with a cardboard suitcase, had made the journey hopping from five-star hotel to five-star hotel, all the way down through Europe, as far as Gibraltar, where he managed to book a first-class passage for his family to America. But his wife, Mr Dillinger's mother, at the last moment refused to go, and later died in Dachau, with two of her daughters. Mr Dillinger visited Dachau years

later, when it was a sort of museum. Mr Dillinger did not look at everything with the eyes of a tourist, he said with a beautiful solemnity, but with eyes made of the same stuff as his mother and sisters. There had been a huge photograph, he said, he remembered that, in an exhibition hall, of a woman running, staring back in terror, her arms flying, her breasts cut off. I jumped in my chair when he said that. I felt it in my own breasts, somehow. Terrible, very terrible.

'It is not always possible to know exactly what you are looking at,' said Mr Dillinger, his body visibly shaking.

Then he said nothing.

'I apologise,' he said. 'Please forgive me.'

'For what?' I said. 'I am very sorry what happened to your mother and sisters.'

'I came to try and say some words about Bill,' he said, his head down.

'There's no need,' I said.

Because of course there are no words of consolation, not really.

Then he seemed to shake his head at the next thing he thought to say, and the next, and so continued to say nothing.

I sat very quietly. I didn't want to cry in front of him for one thing. Tears have a better character cried alone. Pity can sometimes be more wolf than dog. I wonder if I were to have an X-ray at the little hospital, would the machine see my grief? Is it like a rust, a rheum about the heart?

At last he bestirred himself, and his face broke out into a warm smile. His blue eyes lifted their lids, those very eyes he had mentioned.

'Mrs Bere, perhaps I have taken up too much of your time?'

He rose nimbly from the chair, eliciting from it a half-musical squeak, and stared down at me. He seemed to be waiting for an answer, but my throat was stuffed with silence. Then he nodded his head, bent down towards me, and patted my arm very briefly. Then he went silently into the hall and away out into the dusty brightness of the day. The light of the Hamptons, with the lustre of a pearl.

Discretion.

When he was gone I took down the book he had given me years before. I had never read it, as indeed he had predicted the day he gave it to me. He had been coming up my lane, he had said, after a long walk by the sea, the beach in a great shroud of fog, just the way he liked it. He had seen a little wren going in and out of a hole in the old roadway wall. Stretching away from it, he said, was the vast potato field. Stretching the other way, the great series of dunes and salt-water canals. Above this tiny bird was the colossal, clearing sky of the Hamptons, the fog being dispersed by the huge engines of the sunlight. This, he had thought, was a bird that didn't know how small it was, that existed in an epic landscape, and believed itself to have the dimensions of a hero. This was a bird, he thought, that only read epics. And for some reason, best known to himself, whether he associated me with that bird, I don't know, or because I merely lived next to it, that very same afternoon he had decided to bring me a gift, a red-leather-bound volume of Pope's Homer.

'You may read it, or not read it, that is not part of our contract.'

The contract he referred to, I believe, was the contract of friendship.

I smoothed the beautiful leather under my hand:

Achilles' wrath, to Greece the direful spring
Of woes unnumber'd, heavenly goddess, sing!

The light sat on the myriad cobbles of the parade ground as if there were a bright penny balanced on each one. I was standing with my sisters and brother in a shock of vaguely made-up dresses and a slight stab at male grandeur. Our mother was dead my whole life and there was only my father's hand and eye to manage these dark matters. It was I think the day my father was made chief superintendent, and we had moved that morning into our new quarters in Dublin Castle, because we were to be denizens of that place. It was a lovely square flower-pink house and I was still so young that I had spent the morning showing my dolls the rooms. But I don't quite know what age I was. My brother Willie seems young enough too in my mind's eye, so it was certainly before the Great War. But all that, whenever it was, before and after, was nothing to the emotion that filled me at the sight of my father in his new dress uniform. There was no guesswork in that. The commissioner, dressed as my father said 'in a London suit of the finest sort', had come over from said London and was formally bestowing on my father, my own father, the signs and formulas of his new condition. I know now he was to lead the B division of the Dublin Metropolitan Police, and had risen now as high as he could ever expect, after thirty years in the police. No Wicklow sunrise over Keadeen Mountain, where our cousins and aunts and uncles still lived, could have matched the brightness, the shavenness and utmost delight in his face.

It was the same look I saw every evening I came home from school, and I ran into his arms, and he kissed me, and said, 'If I didn't have your kiss I might never come home', but magnified a thousand times. His large frame that would have thrown any tug-of-war team into despair at the sight of it, if it were coming to oppose them, was bound up in a black uniform with rushing darts of what looked like silver to me on the cuffs, but may only have been glistening white braid. His hat had a white feather that streamed in the solemn castle wind. His height made the commissioner, splendid enough but in his mere civilian suit, look sketchy and oddly fearful, as if my father might somehow engulf him on a whim of strength. The commissioner spoke for a few moments, and all the ranked constables and sergeants, themselves as black as burnt sticks, every one of them six foot tall and more, made a strange murmur of approval, as sweet to my father as the rush of the salt sea on the Shelly Banks was to me. The small delicate tide of friendship, shoaling against my father's bursting face, bursting with pride and certainty.

'A day for Cissie, a day for Cissie to see,' he had said to me, as he dressed me a few hours previously. This mysterious and unknown Cissie was my mother, whom my father rarely invoked. But it was the sort of day when a widower misses the excited eyes of his lost wife watching him. My father, who had learned much arcane expertise as a father, scorning at every turn any maiden aunt offered to him from Wicklow, smoothed out the sash on my dress with his big cold hand, and went round behind me and hunkered down, first tugging at the top of his trouser legs to prevent creases and stretching – one of the thousand possibilities in his life

he said 'would never do' – and with just the right amount of care and the right amount of speed, tied my bow.

'There,' he said. 'No king's child could be better kitted out, and no king could be better pleased with his daughter.'

Then he took me in his arms, myself a little silken girl, and squeezed me so that just for a moment the small cage of my chest was without a breath, and glad I was to be breathless, and he put his large moist mouth to my cheek and kissed me with enormous precision. I did not need to be told what the delicate tip of an elephant's trunk felt like, as it ate its stale loaves in the Dublin zoo, because I was sure and certain it felt like my father's mouth.

'There now, there now, and wouldn't she have delighted to see you, Lilly, wouldn't she though? She would.'

This little conversation with himself, though seemingly addressed to me, needed no answer since he had just supplied it himself.

Now we were out on the parade ground and our father had been taken from us, so that things could be said to him, and his men beam their approval at him. But soon we would go home to our new house, and my sisters Annie and Maud would stoke up the challenging new range, and we might have God knows what, tea, and I knew in the drip-press Annie already had a bowl of bun-mix curing, and she would set that out dollop by dollop into paper cups, and they wouldn't be long plumping out in the range.

So far so good, so far so good, but then I come in my head to the strange souring of that memory, and I am wondering to this day if I really did see what I think I saw. Not having clapped eyes on Annie or Maud for a whole long lifetime, and indeed both of them dead, Maud a long long

time, I could not ever ask them. I wonder is it mentioned or described in any annal of the Dublin police, I suppose not, because who is there left on the earth to read of the doings of the DMP? I can imagine all the books, all the daybooks and the night sergeant's ledgers, the infinite and infinitely growing sheaves of reports and court-papers and the like, put into some cellar like the very coffins of vampires, and left there for the million pages to soften and melt together, so that not even the eyes of angels could turn them.

We returned to our splendid house. What I would make of it now with my grown old eyes I do not know, but its big front door, its five high windows, excited me because it looked like a place where lovely things would happen, my sisters spoil me, while my brother tramped in and out, glowering and happy in the same breath, and my father continue to master the tying of sashes and the complimenting of daughters. The photographer, who had already done his work on the parade ground, had followed us over, and my father was to be photographed standing now in the frame of his front door, and while the photographer adjusted his dials and prepared to throw the black cloth over his head, my father stood there, fidgeting, I thought, which I knew was a minor crime in this life, and looking to me differently from on the parade ground, there was an odd look in his face, not fear, but something close to it, a little traipsing leak of anxiety that I had never detected before. He was thinking his thoughts and what they were no child was ever to know I suppose.

Big as he was, and he was a man that ate four pounds of meat a day, the door was three times his width. It was open, and I could see the black darkness within, and it amused me

that the last sunlight of that day might quite soon inch its way along our red-bricked wall and peer ever so briefly into the house, like a person with a candle. The sun currently sat on the extravagant roofs of the Chapel Royal, where all the flags of the viceroys hung, but not a place we would go into much, as Catholics. There was a little clasp of soldiers coming up from the Little Ship Street gates, they had just changed the guard there I am sure, and they were moving along smartly enough, but at the same time chatting and laughing, their guns carefully laid to their shoulders. Now and then the laughter grew, and the youthful noise clattered along the cobbled way, and climbed the low wall into the stable yards, making I was sure the lovely horses stir in their solitudes.

My father stood on the top step. Now the photographer was ready.

'A few minutes, sir, now, do not stir yourself. Now, sir, a good smile for me, sir, please.'

And my father, much to my surprise, obliged this person, a rangy long fellow in a suit with shiny leather patches on his knees and elbows, no doubt related to his work, with as much kneeling and leaning involved as the life of a nun or a cornerboy, and, his boots planted firmly, his feather stilled now in the lee of the house, the little raggle-taggle of soldiers just passing, beamed out a smile as good as the Wicklow lighthouse when at last it turns in its great arc towards you. What use was the lighthouse's light to those on land, I never knew, giving light to heather and fields, but really desiring to put that moon path of silver light along the tundras and swells of the Wicklow sea. What use was the lighthouse's light? I was thinking, a child's thought, and curious

that I remember it, but that is partly because as I write I see it again, I am that girl again, Lilly Dunne herself, before everything, in my full reign as it were as a little girl, Queen Lilly herself, and my father is my father again, though dust he is now. I do not even know precisely where that resplendent man is buried, God forgive me, and when he died I was not told of the fact, or did not receive news of it, for seven years, for seven years my father lay dead in an unknown yard, and still he lies there, but at this moment, this long-fled moment in that long-fled life, with his uncharacteristically unsure face, beaming his smile, the photographer under his cloth, the soldiers passing respectfully enough, but not entirely so, because this was mere police business, and they were soldiers, mighty soldiers, in the shadows of the hall I saw something. And just at that second the last finger of sunlight that I had been anticipating touched into the hall also, and gave a grave little light there, as if a deep well with a last glistening coin of water far below, and there loomed up from the shadows into the explaining sunlight a long brown creature, at first on all fours, and then when it saw my father's back, reared up, and most foully roared out, roared out like a great steam engine emitting steam, making my father spin round in adroit terror on his substantial feet, and stand there entirely frozen, the soldiers also frozen, but then in a moment one of them rushed forward and levelled his rifle, and fired it just by my right ear, an enormous and bewildering sound that I had never, in my years as a policeman's daughter, heard, the celestial effort it requires to force a lump of lead from a barrel, and in the instant of the bullet a sudden poppy of blood appeared on the bear's face, just above the nose, and in the same instant I saw that from the

huge soft nose, through a hole in it, a hole that shouldn't have been there it seemed to me, hung a few feet of chain, jangling about, and the bear, because it was a bear, reared up further, in violent pain, his last pain on this earth, and fell full length out onto the top of the granite steps, hitting the stone with a soft bang, whoof, and my father seemed to bend at the knees just slightly, as if poised to leap away now, and throw himself to safety among us, but strangely he didn't leap, he seemed to fix there with bended knees, gazing and gazing at the dead bear, and it was a child's eye that saw it, and I hoped, I hoped and prayed no one else did, but the beautiful creases and the excellent material of his dress trousers began to darken at the crotch now with piss.

Quite changed and different we sat all together that evening in our new parlour, children in unnatural but seemingly unbreakable silence, eating a sombre tea, Annie's bunmix undisturbed in the drip-press, and Annie looking every few seconds at her father, in his nightdress and dressing-gown, his serious-looking slippers like the bellies of seals, Maud, who took small things badly, now crying small tears in a corner, all our things still unpacked in tea-cases, left where the recruits had put them that morning, all the tune gone out of the whistle of life, on that day of days, long awaited, long worked for by my father, his long beat as a policeman, Dalkey, Store Street, Kingstown and now the castle, all our dwellings along the way, most especially Polly Villa in Dalkey where my head first cleared and I knew I was alive, and loved, all the story of those places, chapter by chapter, leading to this moment of the strangest humiliation.

At length, as a bell somewhere in the castle buildings marked some forgotten hour, making the many stone

statues briefly jump, and I jumped with them, a man in the uniform of an inspector came in to us, and spoke quietly to my father, who this once did not get up, and did not seem to have any orders to give back. My father only nodded his head, quietly receiving whatever information he was being given, and the inspector nodded his head, and said something I didn't catch, but knew from the tone that it was a pleasantry, and how relieved I was to see my father's face lift up to him, and offer a halfpence of laughter back. Then he laughed a little more, and then Annie began to laugh, and the inspector laughed, maybe greatly chuffed to have his remark so universally well received. But I did not laugh, because I saw still in my father's eyes those tiny hunting dogs of sorrow, moving across that dark terrain.

Next morning early at breakfast my father was recovered enough to tell us what the inspector had whispered to him. Some men unknown had come in by the gate and steps that led down into the police headquarters at the back of our house, though how the gate had been unlocked inside was a mystery, unless it was by a friendly hand, again unknown, and had led in by the chain in his nose a dancing bear, belonging to some travelling huckster, now identified, who had wept at the news of the death of his stolen bear, though whether because of the loss of his livelihood in hard times or from affection for the bear my father could not say, but at any rate they had led the bear stealthily in, and down the mossy steps, and into our house from the rear, and let the animal loose into the hall to cause grief to my father in his moment of great triumph.

'You may take some comfort, Jim,' he had said, 'from the fact that the teeth of a dancing bear are knocked out when

he's a cub, and his claws are drawn from his paws – though a blow from one of them might have made you stand up straight right enough.'

And it was only many weeks later that these men were found, and identified as members of the new civilian army, the citizen army of Larkin himself, who my father had arrested in Sackville Street some while before in the great agitation and turmoil of the Lock-out. And I do not think, though at the head of his profession now as he was, did he ever quite get away from that moment, nor ever quite clear the new motes and hounds of sorrow from his eyes.