

Ulster Says No.

We got to know each other well, Wilson and myself, after so long together, in the darkness of his resting place. I liked him immediately, after I had rubbed his bones together, and he had appeared, Genie-like, sitting cross-legged in front of me. He was young - young as I was, about seventeen - and wearing his army uniform of khaki brown. He had a fresh, innocent face, slightly pale, with a slender mouth and delicate, pointed features; he had smiling blue eyes in whose depths I saw compassionate starlight, and bright blonde hair that hung in lank strands over his forehead. Wilson was a handsome young fellow; his body appeared lithe and graceful, no weight of gravity appeared to pull him down. His voice had the most beautiful English lilt to it as if it was always on the verge of song; I heard soldier's marching songs humming at the back of his throat. He told me all about the Boer campaign and his eyes darkened as he spoke. Sometimes I thought I saw a tear. He was glad, he said, to be at rest, far away from Africa. I apologised for being the one who had torn open his tomb, pulling away the crumbling stone to hide myself inside; but he said that it didn't matter; it was a long time since he'd had someone to talk to, and anyway he liked me. I could see that. With Wilson it was like looking in a mirror; we were that close; we looked at each other and we saw ourselves. We had an instant, intense sympathy with one another. Wilson wanted to know what was going on "above board". I told him and he said, "the world is a stranger place

now, than ever it was before", and let a low, dark, troubling whistle escape him.

I told him. About the Bull. About the Minotaur. No, no, I mustn't get confused; I don't want to go into that labyrinth again... I've been doing too much reading here; the English grammar classes are getting to me. The Bull was my father, that was his nickname. My laughing uncle Jack loved to tell the story. About the Protestant farmer with the savage bull and my father ducking across the fields with the sledgehammer hidden under his coat. "The English were gone, the English were gone," my uncle would laugh, "but some of the mongrel race were holding on!" My father emerged at last into the field where the bull was and revealed himself by slowly walking into the middle of the field. The bull who was at the far end of the field turned and snorted and pawed the ground. My father waited. The bull lowered his head and ambled towards him. My father opened his coat and held the sledgehammer ready. The bull began to trot, then to run, his feet pounding the earth. My father lifted the sledgehammer up. He was only sixteen. The bull charged; he thundered towards my father, running faster all the time. My father stood his ground. He was steadfast. The bull sprouted wings and flew straight at him. My father resisted him like a stone wall. The sledgehammer came down; crack! The bull's head opened down the middle; its brains flew out and hit my father in the face. Carelessly, he wiped the mess away. The bull was dead at his feet. My father left a note, a signature on the side of

the animal: John Bull! It was a message for the farmer. My father was a brave man. My father would destroy anything English. "Get to hell out of here!" the note said. Weeks later the farmer left for Lancashire; where Wilson came from. He was better off there. The Bull had conquered him.

There were five of us: the Bull, my broken-hearted mother, and the three children. I was the youngest. Pat was my older brother, then came Cissie, and then *mise*, by five or six years younger than they were. I was born in nineteen-sixty two and so was seven or thereabouts when all hell began to break loose and the Bull found his mission in life. "Oh, if only I was in Belfast or Derry now!" he would lament. "I'd break the bodies of them fucking soldiers in two, so I would!" I knew all the phrases of war before I knew what they meant: "the invading army", "the savage foe", "the eternal enemy", "the bloody brits", "those English bastards", and so on and so forth, until those words were draining out of my infected ears like pus. Nor was my geography perfect. Once my father, having pulled my ears for some stupidity, demonstrated on a creased map where Belfast and Derry, constant source of his sadness, lay; and where we lay. We were as distant as North from South quite literally; the North was up there, its eminence apparent in the high corner of the map, and we were nowhere except in the dead centre of things, where a pinprick had savaged the tiny lettering of a townland, and left a tiny hole through which our lives had fallen. "Those bastards! Those Northern bastards!" my father

moaned hopelessly. And I repeated, "those bastards, those Northern bastards!", just to appease him. He put his arm around my shoulder and squeezed. He could be a kind man when it suited him.

My father, the Bull, was an example of living history; he had it all at his fingertips as if it was part of his own experience. In the evenings he pounded the table and spoke for hours on end about the "English Treachery", about "Queen Lizzy", about "that fucking bastard Cromwell", and "the Protestants who had ruined us". He spoke about "the plantations of Ulster and Leinster", "the Battle of the Boyne", "the seige of Limerick", "the Wild Geese", and "the Flight of the Earls"; about "the Invasion of the French", "the Penal Laws", "the Famine", "the Evictions", "the Coffinships", "the Fenians", "the I.R.B" and "the I.R.A."; also "Lord Leitrim, "the Black and Tans", "Home Rule", "Partition", "Churchill and the War", "Red Hugh O'Neill and Red Hugh O'Donnell", "King James and Sarsfield", "Wolfe Tone and Robert Emmet"; together with "Roger Casement, Padraig Pearse, Joseph Mary Plunkett", "Bunreacht na hEireann", "the War of Independence", "the Civil War", and last but not least "DeValera", whom he hated with a vengeance. The tears would come to his eyes as he told how in the thirties, after he had interned them in the desolation of the Curragh, DeValera, had ordered his father and my grandfather to be shot, "for wanting to free his own country, that was all, for wanting freedom; what was wrong with that?"

And then, in his maudlin rage, we had the songs and the poems: "Kevin Barry was a young man..."; "the sea, oh the sea! Long may it flow between England and me!"; "Sean South from Garryowen"; and on and on and on! I could recite dozens of them for you. When my father was tired of singing he'd put on the records: "The Wolfe Tones", "The Rifles of the I.R.A.", "The Men behind the Wire." He had an old battered mono record player and the only music that was allowed on it was rebel music and rebel songs. Bursting with emotion my father would leave the house and start sawing timber in the back yard, singing his songs and shouting, "Up the Rebels" at the top of his voice. That was the only entertainment we ever had. I only discovered the Beatles when I came here, to prison. I always found it strange to imagine a world which was not pointed like a compass needle to the North. In our world, the Bull's world, we needed the North to make sense of anything and everything. Without it life would have had no meaning. No wonder that I too, before long, began to think about the North, and to give it the place of honour in my imagination. I had never seen it but little by little I began to recreate it in my own mind, to piece it together bit by bit, until it stood impressively whole and solid in front of me, as impenetrable and unknowable as a tombstone; as strange and mysterious as the lives of those English buried in the English graveyard in Kilscreggan; lives forever shut away, and hidden behind stone.

For some reason I was a disappointment to my father; he

called me a "slow, fucking eejit!" And, he used to say: "You'll never be able to wipe your own fucking arse, that's for sure!". I think it was because of my mother. I think I remember during the first years of my childhood she was quite fond of me. Cissie, poor Cissie, always said I was her favourite; but as I grew older, and as if my father's wrath frightened her away, she shrank more and more from me, until I noticed that she seemed almost afraid to touch me or to address a single word that was not a question or a command to me. In the end, I asked nothing from her; I needed all my wits about me to keep the Bull at bay. Strangely, my brother Pat, who shared a bedroom with me, got on great with my father. They were drinking buddies and would come rollicking home late at night, to sit by the fireside and curse the English. "They took our Land!" my father would say. Pat would nod. "Aye, Aye!" he'd answer. "They took all we had!" my father would say then and Pat would nod again and answer, "Aye, Aye!" "They left us with nothing at all!" my father would say next and Pat would nod his head more vigorously and answer, "Aye, Aye!" And my father would spit bitterly in the flames and crush a fallen, smouldering ember with his foot. "I'd crush them under my foot like that!" he'd say, pointing at the crushed ember. Pat would nod, consider the ember a moment, then answer pensively, "Aye, Aye!" The great, fucking fool! Later Pat, unable to find his own bed, would fall into mine, and get sick on top of me. If I complained, he'd warn me, "I'll kick the fucking shite out of you, laddie! I'll kick the fucking shite out of you!" And he had done once or twice; such kickings, till

my arse bled shite all down my legs. "I'll take the fucking sledgehammer to you, one of these days!" he used to whisper in my ear before I slept. "I'll get you first!" I used to promise myself, and dug him as hard as I could with my elbows while he slept.

When I was about ten, Pat left school and went to work and live "someplace else". Up North I think it must have been, but everytime I asked my mother said, "Sssh, don't ask!" and so I stopped asking. My father was happy though. "I'm so proud of Pat," he would say. Once he lifted me on the edge of the table and said, "I want to be proud of you too, Sonny!" It was one of his rare moments of gentleness. He pushed with his hands towards me as if he was pushing some invisible, intangible object out of the way. "We're going to push the fucking English out!" he said. "We're going to push them fucking out!" And then with a single blow of his hand he sent me reeling back over the table-top, scattering all the delft arranged for tea, and almost sending me into the fireplace. "Just like that!" he roared and laughed. "Just like that!" I lay on the broken heap of delft waiting for my mother or Cissie to lift me up but neither even looked to see if I was alive or dead. At ten, I still had no idea how the politics in my house worked. They didn't dare help me; they didn't want to know. I was marginalised, excluded, shut out, hated... To be in anyway associated with me was to invite the wrath of the Bull. "I only want to teach him a lesson!" the Bull explained. "I only want to make him strong!" I was not

convinced. I suspected the Bull's hatred of me had a much deeper root. "How will he make his way in the world if he can't be strong?" I was weak, terribly weak. I picked myself up off the ground as I had done so many times before. I brushed the fragments of broken delft out of my clothes, and then, quick as lightning, my head down and my arms over my head in case something was thrown at me, I shot out of the room and away from him. I ran and ran and ran, until I felt safe. I'd climb a tree somewhere and shelter in its branches and wait for nightfall. I had to be back before nightfall. The Bull demanded it. If I came back later than that, he would roar and bellow, and half-kill me. "I was a dirty, little, disobedient bastard!" he would say as he clattered me good and hard. That was what I was! "A dirty, little, disobedient bastard!"

I was little, by any standards, but no one picked on me at school, not my fellow pupils, not my teachers. In fact, I inhabited a strange kind of isolation hemmed in by wry smiles and cold silence. I was left to myself; I did not participate, and was not invited to participate in any of the school activities. The rest of the kids avoided me, I see that now. "What do you expect?" Cissie used to say brutally. "Do you expect them to like you? You!" She was unhappier than I was because she couldn't get a boyfriend. Poor Cissie! I was not yet old enough for sex to be a problem so I adapted more easily to my permanent state of quarantine. I amused myself during class and I was ignored totally. During the breaks I climbed over the

stone wall at the back of the school and examined the tombstones in the English cemetery. They were nearly all soldiers, their graves covered in moss, their tombstones tangled with thick, winding creepers. The names were nearly always illegible. By diligently scratching with a sharp stone I uncovered the names of one or two. That's how I found Wilson's name; Private Wilson, born in eighteen eighty one, died in nineteen hundred and seven; a short life, a quick one, and no doubt a sad one. In the middle of it he had fought a war and had seen death flower up bloodily out of the scorched earth. He told me this afterwards and much, much more. "So that was you scraping up above?" he asked me with a sweet sarcasm. I nodded, but he didn't know it at the time, I was only passing the time before the school bell called me back. Clang! Clang! Clang! If I felt like it I ignored it. I never understood why all the other kids rushed when they heard it as if it was an alarm bell signalling a fire somewhere. No one ever protested when I came into class late. I was ushered gently by some concerned teacher to my desk, as if I was a sheep being gently pushed into its pen. My book was opened, spread back, and laid on the desk for me. I was not expected to read it; no, it was simply there as a prop, a prop to my existence. School was nothing more than theatre as far as I was concerned, a matter of appearance only. The reality of it I don't think I ever grasped; except once maybe, when the Inspector called; and then, all at once, certain things became clear. The Bull of course, was at the back of everything. For a little while, back then, I suspected that the Bull was in charge in some way. He ruled the

world. He made the laws. He said what was right and what was wrong. And dare you, just dare you, transgress! The Bull would have none of it and no excuses. The Bull was intransigent and implacable; and the Bull was totally, irredeemably, unforgiving. The Bull would never, ever, ever, just let you walk away. Just like that.

The Inspector's name was Mooney, and he had a face as big and bright, and bald as the Moon's. His tragedy was an overbearing officiousness he had got from God knows where. The Bull soon set that right, in the only way the Bull knew how. Some people just don't understand the way of the world; it takes violence to open their eyes; and violence, the Bull had aplenty. The Inspector acted as if he was Lord and Master of the school: he insisted on being left alone with us and expelled our teacher from the room; our kind, our knowing teacher. "I want to ask you some questions," he said, facing the classroom; and then he began, circling the room like a hawk, with a long, yellow cane grasped tightly in his hands. I was soon singled out; the other boys, their voices trembling, had answers to the questions put to them, but I, I retained a resolute blankness and could only blink my eyes haplessly at him. He pointed the cane at me. "What is wrong with you, boy?" he snarled. I didn't know. None of his questions meant anything to me. "I don't understand what you're saying!" I protested. The cane came down with a vicious snapping sound on the cover of the desk. "Sir!", he roared. "Whenever you talk to me, address me as Sir!" One of the other boys tried to

warn him, tugging anxiously at the edge of his jacket. "Please, Sir..." Mooney's face turned blood red. "Shut up! Shut up!" he cried. Then turned to me again, his victim. "I want to benefit from the immense knowledge this young man has gained from attending this glorious institution funded, at no cost to himself, by the Government of this Nation!" He smiled at his own eloquence. None of the other teachers had ever treated me this way; I had never, ever been asked a single question about anything; anything! Who was this Mooney? Was he English? "Are you English?" I asked him quietly. He stepped away from me in astonishment; his cane raised high, vibrated in the air above my head. "Do you think you can come in here and just take over?" The cane dropped slowly to his side. I could see him puzzling over that one, but I wasn't finished. "Do you think there's no price to be paid?" I sounded just like the Bull in one of his threatening moods, but the poor sod, Mooney, never knew. He didn't see the warning signs. The cane was raised up again. "Out with your hand!" he commanded. I held my hand out. Whack! The cane came down. It stung like a nettle stings. I didn't care. I was the Bull's son. The Bull had made me strong. Mooney could kick the shite out of me and I still wouldn't care. "Again!" Whack! Whack! "Again! Again!" Whack! Whack! Whack! I defied him; I pushed him to greater extremes; I held my hands high under his chin, inviting him to whack, whack, whack harder. He was an absolute madman I had decided. He was a walking fucking mistake and he was going to pay for it. I held my hands higher. Whack! Whack! I invited him into my trap. He deserved no pity. I felt

no pity for him. None at all.

When he had finished, he slumped exhausted and out of breath over my desk. His clothes were all dishevelled as if he'd just come through a thorny bush and thick beads of sweat tumbled down his big, white Mooney face. "All right, then! All right!" he said breathlessly. "Sit down! You've learned your lesson!" I sat down. All day I sat with my hands opened on the desk in front of me. They were red and blistered. My teachers were horrified. They wanted to bandage my hands but I wouldn't let them. "Don't tell your father," one of them whispered. I said nothing. In the corridor I passed Mooney in deep conversation with the Principal. "I won't leave the school!" he was insisting. "I'll apologise to the boy! But the Minister has asked me to spend three days here and I won't leave for any reason!" The Principal called me. "Mr. Mooney has something to say to you." Mooney coughed awkwardly. "I am sorry!" he said. "But you must realise you're here to learn! It's for your own good! It shouldn't matter who your parants are! Do you understand?" I nodded. "Good," he said. "Now, run along!" The Principal caught me by the shoulder as I turned away. "You heard Mr. Mooney say he was sorry, didn't you?" I nodded again. "Mr. Mooney is very, very sorry!" he repeated. "And so am I!" I nodded and turned away. Neither of them had looked at my hands. They were swollen like footballs and were a fiery scarlet colour. They hurt so much I couldn't hold the straps of my schoolbag and had to carry it on my shoulder; it fell off on the

way home and I had to abandon it, books and all, to the rain and mud-filled shore. I met Cissie. She cried when she saw my hands. "Daddy will kill him!" she said over and over, and I could tell that, not knowing Mooney, she was unreasonably sorry for him. She bathed my hands in cold water when we got home. My mother cried as well and then went to her bedroom; we didn't see her after that for days. When the Bull came home I held my hands out to show him. "Who did that?" he asked. "Mooney, the Inspector!" I answered and he sat down to eat his tea. He never said a word all evening, but sat by the fire looking at the flames. I think he sat there all night. He was there first thing in the morning for breakfast looking in the flames still, silent as a rock. I let Cissie wrap my hands in some bandages. They felt much better. "Is he going to school today?" she asked the Bull. He nodded. "Take him!" he said. On the way we recovered my rain-sodden schoolbag. In school the teacher helped me lay the books out on top of the heater to dry them, and opened his own books in front of me on my school desk. Then we waited. Everyone was waiting. The atmosphere was tense and frightened. No one made a sound; everyone was listening. We heard Mooney's voice from the classroom next door. "Why doesn't he be quiet?" one of the boys said out loud. "Why doesn't he go away?" one of the other boys asked. The teacher shuffled uneasily behind his desk. His eyes watered nervously and he wiped the edges of them with a handkerchief. "Sssh, boys!" he told us. "It's nearly time for the Angelus!" He looked down the row of desks at me. "Would you ring the bell for the Angelus?" he asked me. I had never been

asked before but I was glad to do it; bells, I've always loved the sound of bells, big and small. I lifted the bell in both my bandaged hands and carried it out into the school corridor. The teacher nodded from his desk and put his watch back in his pocket. It was twelve, exactly. I rang the bell. Clang! Clang! And again. Clang! Clang! And as I rang I saw the large hall door of the school open and an immense man, big as a mountain, step inside: the Bull. Clang! Clang! I summoned him. Clang! Clang! I called him forth. Inside the classroom the boys stood intoning their prayers. I let the bell go silent. Their eyes swivelled towards me and opened wide when they saw the Bull. They fell silent. The teacher came to the door of the classroom. "Please!" he pleaded with the Bull. "Is this Mooney?" my father asked me. "No," I answered, and with a smile I could not prevent, I pointed to the next classroom. "In there!" I said. "He has a big, white, round face on him!" My father nodded and advanced to the next classroom. He looked through the glass and then stepped inside. There was no voice raised in terror or in pain. We heard a thud and a crunch and then another crunch, and then a loud crack and another crack. One by one the boys left the room their faces deathly white. "Get your coats from the cloakroom and go home!" the teacher ordered them. "Say nothing of this to your parents!" Five minutes later the Bull emerged dragging a senseless Mooney on the ground behind him. I had never seen anything like it. Mooney was unrecognisable. He had been smashed to bits. He was a bloody, featureless mess. My father hung him on a coat hook just inside the hall door. "Leave him there!" he

ordered the assembled teachers. "Don't touch him! Leave him there until I come back and take him down!" He put his arm around my shoulder. "This is my child!" he said. "And nobody, nobody is allowed to treat my child like an animal!" I was proud of him then; the beauty, the power of his violence. I could see the fear in all their eyes. I felt a strange and terrible sense of triumph. They were all, all of them, afraid of him; and because they were afraid of him, they were afraid of me. I was suddenly conscious of my own power, a power that had been hidden from me so long. Mooney, God bless him, had demonstrated to me my own vulnerability; the Bull, may his soul rot in hell, had shown me my own strength.

Cissie when I told her on the way home, sat down on the footpath and cried. "Why can't he leave us alone?" she sobbed. "He's ruining our lives!" I put my bandaged hand on her head. "But Cissie!" I countered. "Don't you see? You'll never have to be afraid of anyone! No one will ever dare touch you! Ever!" Her eyes were swollen scarlet like my hands. She looked so pathetic. "You're right," she said. "No one will ever touch me! Ever!" It was many, many years, not until Cissie came to visit me in prison, before I realised that she was terribly, hopelessly in love that time; and that every smashing blow the Bull delivered to the world was a blow also to her hopes and her dreams of love. I like to think that what I did, I did for her sake as much as my own. When we got home there was no Bull. "He's gone drinking with his buddies," Cissie said. "He'll tell them all

about what he did! They'll have a good laugh about it!" She was restless all evening, going into every room, pulling all the drawers open as if she was looking for something. Then she went outside to the shed in the backyard. She was gone for about twenty minutes, then came back and called me out. "I know you think your father's a great fellow at the moment," she said quietly. "I want you to take a look at this." We went into the darkness of the shed. There was a sack full of old rubbish just inside the window. Cissie shoved her hand in and pulled something out. She held it up in the light from the window. Despite its thick coat of detritus it glimmered and glistened in the light. "This is what he used!" Cissie said. She took a solid piece of wood and put it in the angle of the window. "Stand back!" she warned me and raised the hammer over her head. She smashed the hammer down on the wood. The wood cracked in the middle and tore apart full of jagged splinters. I don't know why, but I began to cry. I think the noise of the wood breaking must have frightened me. Cissie wiped the tears away with her fingers. "Do you think Mooney deserved that?" she asked me softly. "Do you think anyone deserves the likes of that?" She pushed the hammer back down into the sack. "Now, go to bed!" she said. And though it was still bright, I went to bed and curled up under the blankets. I didn't sleep. Cissie had smashed that hammer into my imagination and I could see now, over and over and over, what had happened to Mooney. It was like a film shown over and over in my head. It was inside me, the violence was inside me, and I couldn't shut it out. No matter how hard I

tried. I could have torn my eyes out, and my brain, and my heart, and it wouldn't have mattered. The violence was set on slow motion action replay for the rest of my life and it was too late ever, to do anything about it.

We lived in the country about five miles from the nearest town. Where we lived was known locally as Kilderry. Our house, a big old farmhouse with fields around it, had been inherited by my father from his people. In my father's family there was only himself and his brother Jack, who we never saw anymore, anymore than we saw Pat. I never knew anyone belonging to my mother's family. I always thought they must live far away. It was Cissie who told me, when she came to visit me here in prison, that they had always lived on the far side of the town, and that they would have nothing to do with the Bull nor he with them. The Bull, in any case, needed nobody; he resembled an island of solid rock in a sea of chaos. Even his "friends" when they called appeared distanced from him by what I thought was respect, but now I know it was fear. The chaos around Bull was the fear he inspired in every one who knew him; and you could not know the Bull and remain unafraid of him. He demanded, by his very presence, that you be afraid. I had been afraid of him all my life, and so had my mother, and Cissie, and I bet Pat and Uncle Jack were afraid of him too; I bet they were, deep down!

After about nineteen - seventy the Bulls friends came to the house more and more frequently. They always came at night fall, bringing the shadows with them. There was about six of

them, all chat and laughter, and shaking hands with "the missus", and "how's the little girl?", and "how's the little boy?" Fuck the lot of them from a height, that's what I say! We were banished from the room and they stayed to have their conversations. Sometimes I caught a word, - I was curious, you see -, it might have been the name of a place or the name of a man, but it usually meant nothing to me. Only later did some of those names begin to click and appear significant. For example, the name Herrema, when it came seeping through the floorboards, like air escaping from a punctured tyre, definitely meant something the first time I heard it; and meant a lot, a lot more, before I ever heard it said again. And there were other names which in the light of day, glimpsed in a newspaper, might leap out at me with a gasp of recognition and sudden sorrow. Those shadowy men plotting in the twilight of our farmhouse kitchen were gradually becoming clearer and clearer to me. I began to know them. I began to understand their nature, and to understand the importance of steering clear. Of keeping out of their way. Of having as little as possible to do with them. I had to plot and conspire all on my own to live independently of them; to live independently of everyone, because at twelve or thirteen I was beginning to be afraid and suspicious of everyone. Everyone except Cissie, that is. Cissie was different. Cissie was the flower who had grown up out of the dungheap. God bless you, Cissie, wherever you are! Without knowing it you gave me something to live for!

I don't know what the Bull did or what he worked at. He was a farmer but ours was a miserable farm with just a few cows and a donkey and nothing more. There was money, not much money, but enough; I never knew where it came from. Every Friday I saw my mother sneaking it out of the tea caddy on the mantelpiece as if she was afraid someone might be looking at her. On Fridays she went into town and bought all she wanted; her eggs, her rashers and sausages, her pudding, her potatoes, her bacon and cabbage, her chops, her bread and butter, her milk. Then she put the change from the money back in the caddy on the mantelpiece. I never heard her mention money to the Bull and I never heard him ask if she had enough. She did with what he gave her, that was all; no one ever asked for more of anything from the Bull. The Bull had money of his own; I don't know how much, but he had enough to drink with. He went to the pub almost every evening, on his own since Pat had left, but seldom came back in the rousing good form he did with Pat. Usually he was in a sombre mood, and tight-knit, as if he was thinking about something intractable, something that would not yield its secrets. He used to sit and read his paper, "An Phoblacht", pulling it out of his jacket pocket and rifling its soft, flaccid pages. Sometimes he'd look at me with undisguised contempt from over the edge of the paper. "When are you going to get sense, son?" he'd ask. "When are you going to grow up?" He waited for an answer. "I'm sick and tired of waiting for you to become a man!" If I was lucky he'd hand me the paper and say, "Here, read this! You might learn something!" If I wasn't, it was Gaelic football

time! How high could he kick me in the air before I burst? Once, my head hit the ceiling, and broke the lamp. He blamed me. He pulled me by the hair. "You little bugger!" he said. "You don't even know how to say you're sorry!" I always left the window in my bedroom open in case I had to run in there and throw myself out of it. I had to do it once or twice, flinging myself lengthwise under the raised sash, the Bull grabbing for my ankles. In some moods I was sure he was capable of killing me. Sometimes I thought he wanted me dead. Now, I see he never wanted to kill me; he only wanted to torture me, that was all. And that *all*, was the Bull's fatal error. The day I realised that, I was suddenly much, much stronger than I had ever been before.

The Bull had his interests. He liked his Irish, that gibberish he sometimes spoke when he was drunk. He liked his football, the loud, cheering, Sunday matches. He liked his stupid music: "*Mo chroi, O mo chroi, is gra geal mo chroi...*" He liked that tuneless diddley - da Ceili shite too. He liked his bloody paper. He liked his fucking drink. He liked his shadowy, bastard friends. And he liked his rotten greyhounds. There were two of them: Paddy and Mick. He coursed them regularly. They lived in a huge wire enclosure at the bottom of a field close to the house. They were lean and vicious creatures and had no respect for any living creature, only the Bull. I hated the sight of them. The Bull used to threaten to throw me to them. "You'd soon see what they'd do with a little piece of shite like

you!" he'd say. I already knew. Every month or so the Bull came home with a cage full of live rabbits. Every time I had to help him cart the cage into the field where the greyhounds were. The Bull didn't need help but he demanded it all the same. I'd had to help him ever since Pat had left. The wire lid of the cage was lifted off and the rabbits would try to jump out. My father would grab one of them by the ears and swing it in over the high fence. The savagery that followed was indescribable. There was nowhere out of that thing. It was hell for little rabbits: it was absolute fucking hell! "Well, what are you waiting for?" my father wanted to know. He pointed into the cage. I had to pick one of the rabbits out, pulling it up by the scruff of the neck, and hold it in my hands. I could feel its heart beating through its fur. The poor thing was terrified. But what was worse, much worse, was that I had to do it; because, I thought, maybe the poor thing expected mercy from my hands, and I could give it none. I held it, and felt its heartbeat, and maybe it hoped against hope for release which would never come. What came next was the cruellest moment in the world for any living thing. I threw the poor beast high in the air and watched its little legs struggling uselessly. I never made any mistake: for it to fall back in my hands would have been crueller still. The rabbit tumbled over the top of the fence and down. Down, down into hell. I watched. "One of these fucking days, I'll throw you in over that fence just like them fucking rabbits!" the Bull said. In front of me the poor thing was torn to pieces. I saw its entrails ripped out, its still beating heart throbbing on the

ground. "You can do it now, if you like, Bull," I said under my breath, not caring whether he did or not. Once or twice he grabbed me and threatened to throw me in but I just didn't care. I was beginning to understand. The Bull was finally getting through to me. I didn't count. I had never counted. I wasn't worth shite: not worth shite! And the Bull had me under his boot and could do what he liked with me. "You fucking little traitor!" he used to say. "You dirty, little, disobedient bastard! I'll show you!" And I knew that he would, show me, for as long as I let him, just as he had shown me the greyhounds and the rabbits. "The greyhounds aren't bad," he said on the way back up to the house. "It's just their natures! What can you do with nature?" Each time the rabbits came Cissie crawled into my bed because it was the furthest away and filled her ears with toilet tissue and bundled handkerchiefs. And then silently, oh so silently, she cried, and cried and cried, and cried. And her little heart beat in her little chest like a rabbit's heart in the hands of its executioner.

Every six weeks or so Paddy and Mick were taken to the meet. I had to go along to help the Bull. The Bull had a little red Renault van and the dogs were bundled into the back of it. The dogs were muzzled but even so there was a wire fence between them and us. They were his dogs, but even the Bull didn't trust them. At the meet they were kept muzzled until the last moment. The Bull stood at the edge of the enclosure watching the dogs being brought in. Paddy and Mick always won. Maybe that's where

the Bull made his money, I don't know, but I never saw him show any emotion as they edged ahead of the other chasing greyhound to snap their teeth first on the hare's helpless flight. The Bull didn't seem to enjoy the chase or the kill in the way the other men did, or maybe he enjoyed it in another way, a less obvious, a more subtle way. His satisfaction at the same time was tremendous. It seemed to increase his stature and make him look larger than he already was. He would glance around and accept the nods and winks of congratulation with a grimace of contentment. The Bull's dogs had done it again and what else could be expected? The Bull went to collect his dogs. I stayed in the crowd; it was the only place to hide. Once, someone offered to put me on his shoulders to see better, but I could see as well as I wanted to from where I was. All around me faces shone with strange happiness as the flight of the hare was rounded and driven into the earth. The greyhounds had it all their own way. It was easy for them. There was no way out as far as the hare was concerned. No way out of the circle of raised, cheering voices, or the thirst for the kill. All around me, the faces shone with strange happiness, and I could follow every moment of the chase in the oblivious, entranced eyes of the lookers-on. I dreamed I even saw the flesh torn in their eyes and the blood spurt in hot jets out of the bottomless darkness of their pupils. Then the arms raised up, the raucous cheer, the blinding gap-toothed smile, the fixed stare of complete fulfillment. Who were these men gathered in a dreary field to witness this brutal sacrifice? What priesthood did they belong

to in which the savagery of life was ritualised by dog and hare? How was their genuflection to the Universe, the mangled, bloodied hare, different from that of other men? Were they proud of their own truths? Or was it all an act? Did they go home to cry in their beds like I did, or like Cissie did? "Your mother's made you too bloody soft!" my father used to say, before he drove his boot through the cleft in my backside. Was that what they were afraid of? That accusation? That retribution? I would have liked to believe it. To have believed it would have redeemed them all, not that they sought or wanted redemption. Only for me... Only for me... I wanted to believe in some goodness, somewhere. I could not see it in the Bull. I could not see it in these men. I could only see it in Cissie and in the soft-hearted tears she cried. Not one tear of remorse was ever shed at the meet, where real men would surely have laid their faces on each others shoulders and wept until all their hearts were emptied.

But tears would be wasted on a couple of dead hares. On the way home in the red Renault van, with Paddy and Mick sniffing through the wire at our exposed necks, we listened to the News on the radio. The soldiers had killed people at a march in Derry. The Bull had to stop the car. At the side of the road he knelt in the mud and covered his face with his hands. He roared. He roared so loud, as if the greatest imaginable pain had swept into his heart, and he could not contain it. I thought he was dying. I hoped he was dying. I turned the radio up. The dogs began to howl. I turned the radio up louder. There was the sound

of gunfire like crackling static. The Bull rolled on his back as if he had been shot. But he wasn't dead or bleeding... On the radio a voice said: "Good Christ! We're just being shot down and slaughtered! They're killing us for no reason! What on earth is going to happen to us at all? Where will it end? Where will it end?" I thought if ever I was going to run away from the Bull, this was my moment. The open road stretched before me. I saw a signpost with the word "Dublin" on it. I knew I could walk the distance. I wanted to go. I really wanted to go! But then I thought of Cissie. Cissie was all I had in the world. I couldn't go without her. "Come on, Da, come on!" I said. "Let's get home!" It was beginning to rain. The Bull began to stir. "Don't turn off the radio!" he warned me. All the way home we heard the news. A lot of people had been killed, just shot down. I thought the Bull was going to pull the steering wheel out of its socket. "We'll get them back for this!" he said. "They're going to pay such a fucking price as they never imagined! Just let them wait and see!" When he got me home he dragged me into the house and threw me on my knees by the fireplace. My mother jumped up off her chair. She was terrified, I could see that. None of us had ever seen the Bull in such a fury. Cissie pulled me away from the Bull's kicking feet. My mother stood between us. "For Jesus' sake, Bull, what's wrong?" I thought the Bull was going to flatten her, but he didn't. He swirled around the kitchen table his fists up in the air, roaring like an old cow calving. Then his fists came crashing down, right in the middle of the table. The table crashed to the floor under the impact of the blow;

fragments of shattered wood flew everywhere. I began to cry. I began to cry, I couldn't help it, for the dead hares. The Bull knelt in the middle of the broken table; he knelt in front of my mother with his arms outstretched towards her as if he was pleading with her for something. "The fucking Brits!" he answered her quietly. "The fucking Brits, that's what's wrong!" Cissie rushed me upstairs and into bed. I couldn't stop crying. Outside, the dogs in the van were still howling. "Now, you just shut up!" Cissie said, holding me. "Now you just shut up, do you hear?" I didn't blame anything or anybody for my grief. I didn't even blame the Bull. What was he to do with the rages he felt? What was he to do with his anguish? I almost felt sorry for him. It didn't last long, but I almost felt the only compassion I ever did feel for the Bull. He was just the way he was, the way he was made, and I guess there was nothing he could do about it. All that anger, all that blinding rage, I guess he had to take it out on someone. And, I guess, I was the best he had. He was my father, and in a way, some way, I guess, he needed me.

The next night the shadowy men came at twilight and stayed till morning. This time there was no restraint in their voices; they could be heard loud and clear ringing through the rafters, full of savage menace, overflowing with savage hate. They made plans. I heard every detail; I knew exactly what they were going to do; I became, though I did not want to be, their accomplice. There was nothing I could do. Things were stepping up. We were all about to be swept along by a tidal wave of history, of

force, of hatred, of death, and there was nothing any of us could do about it. The next morning over breakfast nothing was said by any of us; we hardly exchanged glances. On my way to school I said to Cissie: "They're going to kill a man!" She slapped me hard on the face. "You keep your mouth shut!" she warned. "Or the Bull will cut your tongue out!" I cried but I could see she was crying too. In the end she sat down on the side of the road and held her hands over her face. The tears streamed out, thick like jelly, from behind her hands. "I want to get away from here!" she cried. "I want to get away from that mad, fucking bastard! That fucking Bull!" She stamped her feet in the ground. "Don't!" I attempted feebly. "Please, don't!" She stood up. "You're useless," she said to me bitterly. "Just like the Bull says, you're not able to wipe your own fucking arse!" She shook her fist at me. "Leave me a-fucking-lone!" She screamed. And I ran from her as fast as I could with her screams stabbing in my back like knives.

School was almost like home for the next two weeks. They ran up black flags. They took us to Mass, the church was packed with people, the whole town was there, and we had to mourn the dead, whether we liked to or not. Then, they said, all those weak men who were afraid of the Bull, afraid of me, they said, there was going to be a March, a big March through the town, like a funeral. It was like the roof of the world was caving in and despair was falling through on top of us. This had a strange effect: suddenly I had friends at school; the other boys talked

to me. They said: "Those fucking Brits!" and looked at me meaningfully, until I signalled my approval. One or two went further: "The I.R.A. are going to kick them out of Ireland now, aren't they?" To which I replied, suitably ambiguously, "We'll wait and see!" None of their friendliness tempted me to any real revelation, though I could have told them a lot of things to make their hair stand on end if I had wanted. After all, the shadowy men to these innocents were a complete mystery, but I had heard them speak, and to me they were no mystery at all. But I held my peace; times were rough; there was danger in the air. One morning I saw the Bull packing the back of the van with hurling sticks. He was leaving for the day. My mother had prepared a bag of sandwiches and a flask of tea for him. He threw them on the seat beside him. He never said, Goodbye, but drove away with a look of intense determination on his face, the same sort of look he had when he came to the school to punish Mr. Mooney. Later in the day, we saw where he had gone to. It was on the telly: the crowds around the British Embassy, the Building in flames, the tattered, burning Union Jack, the Guards under seige by men with hurleys. I thought I saw the Bull, hacking his way through the Guards. They might as well have given him the key to the Embassy; nothing could stop the Bull when he got going. He did good work that day. The Embassy was gutted. The next day one of the boys in school said to me: "Hey, did you see your old man on telly last night? Beating the shite out of the Guards he was!" I never even thought about it. I just hit him square between the eyes and he went flying backwards his

arms and legs trailing in the air. It was the first time in my life that I ever hit anybody and I liked it. It felt good. I stood above him, ready to hit him again when he got up, and that felt good too. "Shut fucking up!" I roared at him. "Or I'll cut your fucking tongue out of your head!" And that felt good too. He climbed up off the ground with an astonished, frightened look on his face, and that felt good too; he was afraid of me, I could see it, he was afraid to look at me, the way I sometimes was with the Bull: he was scared shitless! He crawled shame-faced back to his seat and huddled there crying. He was weak and I had exposed him. He was weak and I had put him in his place.

The Bull didn't come back for over a week. We thought maybe he'd been arrested. I hoped maybe he'd been shot, killed even; but there was no hope of that. Dublin wasn't Derry or Belfast: the Bull was safe, the soldiers didn't shoot people in the streets there! Even my mother didn't know where he was, but none of us had much worry for him. The Bull could take care of himself, no one better. He'd come back; we all knew that. In the meantime, despite a mood of anxious foreboding, and the knowledge that our peace would soon be shattered by the Bull's return, we enjoyed a week of strange and lovely tranquillity. We blossomed! I could see it in all our faces, but especially Cissie's, she became almost plump and there was a new freedom and grace in her movements. She came and went as she pleased also, flitting in and out of the house at all times, like a bird let out of her cage. Once I followed her and discovered another

source for her inner happiness. Not far down the road a car had pulled into a gateway hidden with low branches and dense leaves. Cissie disappeared into this car and into the embraces of someone waiting inside. I climbed into the tree above them and edged out till I was positioned over the windscreen. I thrilled at what I saw; the symphony of roving, roaming hands, indiscreet and indelicate; the wild and innocent disarray of flesh, with all its sticky consequences; the flowering wilderness of young, half-mad, love, bursting with sadness and desire; the blunt, simple beauty of palped skin and tearing mouths. The Bull would kill her if he found out; there was no doubt about it. Kill her and kill him, whoever he was. Later when Cissie got out of the car she could hardly walk and she staggered home along the roadway, her bundled nylons trailing desolately from the pocket of her coat. When I arrived home five minutes later than her she looked at me with dreadful suspicion. "Where were you?" she said. "Out feeding the greyhounds!" I told her. "Where were you?" I asked her. "Out walking!" she said, and went straight to bed, to dream.

At the end of the week our peace was shattered, as we had all known it would be, but not by the Bull. It was first thing in the morning; we were still sleeping in our beds when they kicked the door in. I heard my mother screaming and crying, and then Cissie screaming and crying, and the sound of furniture being overturned on the floor. I thought, maybe it was the Bull, but there were too many voices and none was his. I wrapped the

sheets and blankets around my head and hoped they would not come as far as me. But they did. I heard them tramping on the stairs and the door of my room being kicked open. I pulled the blankets tighter around my head but they were pulled away. I was dragged by the arms out of bed and dropped heavily on the floor. I had two ribs broken after. I saw my bed overturned, my drawers ransacked, my furniture dismantled. One of them knelt over me and leering menacingly at me, questioned me: "Now, you little cunt, you tell me where everything is!" As he spoke I heard two gunshots. I began to cry. "Don't kill, Cissie!" I cried. "Please, don't kill, Cissie!" But the Guard only smiled and rubbed my head. "Don't worry," he said. "We don't kill people, only dogs and animals!" It was the first time the Guards had come and they left the house looking like the tailend of a jumble sale. Cissie said that they had always been afraid of the Bull until now; something really terrible must have happened or they wouldn't have come. Cissie said the Guards didn't want to come, that they had been ordered to. "You could see in their faces they were afraid!" she said. "If the Bull was here they were in for it!" The Guards found nothing; they left empty-handed. One of them left a message for the Bull with me. "Tell your father," he said, "the next time he brings them dogs coursing I don't think he'll find much running in them!" Inside the wire enclosure both dogs lay dead, shot through the neck. I was delighted. The Bull had left a couple of live rabbits in a cage in the shed in the backyard. I took them down now to the dogs and put them inside the enclosure. I brought Cissie down to

see it. The rabbits sat beside the dead bodies nibbling at the bloodied grass. We both laughed at the good of it. Cissie said, "C'mon, I'll show you what the Guards were looking for. They couldn't find their own shoes if they were asked to look for them!" We walked across some fields and clambered through thorn bushes. In a corner of a field, right in under the ditch, Cissie stopped and pulled away some sods of grass-covered earth. Underneath there was a shore grating which she pulled up. There was just enough room for us to squeeze through. I don't know how the Bull ever got down there. Below us there was a tunnel we went through on our hands and knees. It was dark. I was frightened. "Cissie, where are we?" I complained. Cissie stood up in front of me. We had arrived in a larger chamber, a cave, completely dark. Suddenly a caged bulb hanging over my head came alight with yellow brightness. Cissie played with a switch in the wall. "Can you believe it?" she said. "They even have electric light down here!" All around us there were wooden boxes. Cissie lifted the lid off one. "Look!" she said. I saw bits and pieces of blackened metal. "What is it?" I asked. "Rifles!" Cissie said. She opened another box. "For explosives!" she said, showing me a small instrument like a clock. She pointed at another box. "I won't open that box!" she said. "There's gelignite in it! It can get on your hands! The Bull would find us out and we'd have to be killed then!" She seemed suddenly afraid. "Let's get out of here!" she said, and switched the light off. We got down on our hands and knees again and crawled along the tunnel. Cissie lifted me up to grasp the shore

grating and pull myself out, then scrambled out herself. "Quick! Let's get back to the house!" she said. We ran across the fields. My mother had tidied up the house; she had righted all the furniture and swept up the broken delft. She was sitting at the table listening to the radio when we got back. She had a strange look on her face as she listened. She looked as if she wanted to cry but as if she wasn't able to cry and I realised that I had never, ever seen her cry. I wanted her to cry. Cissie sat at the table and then I sat beside her. We all listened to the radio. Someone had been killed and dumped on the side of the road. It was some Politician; even now, his name won't come back to me... I suppose his wife and children still remember him. He'd been tortured and shot through the back of the head. They'd carved a message in his arm: "Brits Out!" But he wasn't a Brit; he was Irish. "They've gone too far!" Cissie said, shaking her head. "They've gone too far, now!" On the radio they said he had a wife and three children, just like the Bull. They said, he'd been killed because he'd been too outspoken and had always stood up to the men of violence. The men of violence do not like people to stand up to them, I knew that; it's a question of pride, they lose face if they don't do something. That poor man! They'd taken him to the Border and shot him for having had too much to say. Then they dumped his body on a roadside in the North, on British soil. Everything they did, those shadowy men, was full of symbolism. Somehow, they always managed to carve a mystical poetry out of their own violence and murder. It was as if they were sacrificing to unknown Gods who ruled them and

every body was a gutted, bloodied beast, and every roadside an altar. Death, death, death, that was all they were able to churn up out of their souls, death and more death, and they scrawled their slogans across history like schoolboys writing obscene graffiti on toilet walls. And this had gone on for how long, without respite, without redemption? Hundreds and hundreds of years! No wonder my mother was out of tears: can anyone cry more than a lifetime's? I doubt it; I doubt it very much! I was wasting my time waiting for my mother's tears to fall. She was sitting like she was in a trance. There wasn't a stir out of her. Cissie and myself left her to her own inner thoughts and dreams, unknown to us. We went back to bed. It was only about ten in the morning but we were both exhausted after all that had happened. We slept all day. We missed school. How could anyone expect us to go to school on a day like that?

In the evening I had to be taken to the Doctor with my ribs. Cissie took me. We were lucky. While we were away the Bull came back and found the door kicked down and his greyhounds dead. When we came home the dogs' enclosure had been flattened and the dogs buried. Bull was nowhere to be seen. My mother told us to go to bed straight away. We went there and clung desperately to the silence till morning. It was years later before Cissie told me all that happened. The Bull had gone to town with his van and his sledgehammer on the passenger seat beside him. The Guards when they saw him coming had bolted and barricaded the door of the barracks but the Bull smashed his way

through it. The dozen or so Guards who were inside jumped from the windows to escape him. The Bull ran amok inside and broke everything. In the end he set fire to the barracks and waited for the flames to catch and build before he left it. He stood outside and watched it burn. The Guards kept their distance. "The Bull was afraid of no one!" Cissie told me. "But everyone was afraid of the Bull! Even the Guards were afraid of him!" The Bull turned to the watching crowd behind him and addressed the Guards. "If I ever find who the bastard was who killed my dogs I'll string him up by the intestines to the nearest lamppost!" And the Bull meant it; I don't think the Bull ever said a word he did not mean. He came back that night in a savage temper. He pulled me out of bed and began to shake and hit me. "You let the Guards in!" he said. "You let them kill my dogs!" Cissie saved me. She threw herself between us. "No! No, he didn't!" she screeched. "He fought them! He fought them all he could!" She pulled up my pyjamas to show him. "Look at the bandages! They broke his ribs! They beat him! He fought but there was too many of them for him! He was on his own!" She screamed the last sentence as if it was an insult she was hurling in the Bull's face. Maybe that's why he hit her; I think he took it, what she had said, for an insult. I think he thought she was accusing him of leaving me alone to fight his battles. And that sort of thing just wasn't acceptable to the Bull. So, he hit her. He hit her hard in the face. She went flying. She was a light thing, Cissie, and there was very little of her to anchor her to the ground. She tumbled across the room like a thrown doll and fell

looking dazed and disjointed on the wooden floor. I had never seen the Bull hit either Cissie or my mother before. I think, it was part of his code of conduct never to hit a women; he could make their lives a misery all right; he could tyrannise and brutalise them, but he prided himself on never hitting them. Until this time. I saw a look of pain on his face as if he realised his pride was shattered now forever. He looked away from me as if to hide his expression; he looked away from Cissie. Cissie was struggling to sit up on the floor. Her face looked funny, looked strangely twisted and distorted. She touched her jaw and cheek and it obviously hurt because she began to cry and whimper. I just thought it was funny; I began to laugh. Her face looked as if it had had an extra dimension smashed into it; looked like some warped piece of painting in which the bones are broken and reassembled all wrong. I laughed and laughed and laughed. The Bull rounded on me like one of his dogs turning round a small, pathetic hare. But for the first time in my life I was not afraid of him and for the first time in my life I had the better of him, without having to fight him. "Hey, Bull," I said, pointing at Cissie sprawled on the floor. "Hey Bull, you hit a woman!" His hands fell empty by his sides. He looked as if he was going to cry. Then, without saying a word, he turned and left the room. I helped Cissie up. "You little fucker!" she said. "What are you laughing at?" But the words came out all funny and I only laughed more. "You know," I said to her, "the Bull isn't all he thinks he's cracked up to be!" I'll never forget what I said then. "Someday I'm going to

make him pay for everything! Someday, he'll be sorry!" Cissie was crying with the pain in her jaw, I don't think she heard what I had said, but I had heard it! Heard it as if it was coming from outside of me, heard it like it was a third person in the room speaking those words. I could hardly believe it, my own hubris, as if for the moment I was immune from the Bull. I shouted downstairs. "You better get her a doctor! She needs a doctor!" And the Bull did it. He went back out into his little red van and came back a half-hour later with the only doctor he could find. I recognised him immediately and saw his hands tremble as they reached out to touch Cissie's face. I saw her tears too tremble onto his fingers and roll down their slopes into the palms of his hands. And I saw the way his hands closed on her tears and squeezed them tight as if they were something precious and he would never let them go. I was rapidly beginning to discover more about what was hidden in our small house than anyone else living there could have imagined; and I was determined to keep it secret. Cissie's heart, I decided, would not be safe in any hands, if not in mine.

The morning of the March in town the Bull produced a bundle of black rags from the back of the van and flung them at me. "Get into these!" he ordered. I pulled the black clothes on; they were a couple of sizes too big for me, but with the trouser belt drawn tight they didn't look too bad. The black beret the Bull shot towards me like a floppy, cloth frisbee, was the problem; it fell persistently over my eyes, and looked like a

burnt and blackened pancake on my head. I looked ridiculous. Cissie laughed when she saw me but not when the Bull produced some clothes for her too. "What do you expect me to do with these?" she protested. Then she dressed herself slowly, deliberately, trying to make the most of her impromptu uniform. She looked o.k., but maybe the skirt was a little short; you could see her knobbly knees. She pulled her thickest pair of black tights on and it made her legs look better; then in front of the Bull she began to march to and fro in the room swinging her arms. The Bull was amazed. "What the fuck are you at?" he roared. Cissie smiled at him indulgently. "This is what you expect from me, isn't it?" she asked him sweetly. And continued her march with more energy and vigour. "Istigh! Isteach!" she barked, like some lunatic soldier in some lunatic army. The Bull was red in the face, but I could see, he didn't know what to do; everyday now we seemed to regain some of the territory he had established over us. We were pushing the frontier back; and it had all started that time the Bull had shown weakness in front of us, that time he had hit Cissie. For the moment he could not think what to do to quell our defiance; the Bull was at a loss; he was terribly embarrassed. But still we knew our limits, and in most things, we did what he wanted; the violence of the Bull could never be discounted or taken lightly; it was as inevitable as it was unpredictable. We sat in the red van beside him; Cissie sat on my lap. She felt warm and under her black skirt and blouse there was a smell of sweet perfume as if her skin was wrapped in wildflowers. The Bull sniffed unpleasantly but I'm

sure he never noticed anything like that; anything like the scent a woman might wear. As we approached the town we entered a stream of traffic and there were more and more people walking until we were part of an enormous crowd heading for the centre of town. Once in the town the Bull shunted the van through the crowd and down a narrow roadway and into the wide yard of what looked like a disused garage. There was about two dozen other black-shirted creatures waiting there, friends of my father's, the shadowy men and their shadowy children, like sitting crows waiting for a dustbin to be put out. The Bull formed us into a tight group then marched up and down in front of us, reminding me of Cissie earlier, to demonstrate the type of stance and attitude he wanted from us. "Remember you're soldiers!" he reminded us. "Be proud! Ireland's cause is our duty!" I wanted to laugh but they all looked so stern and serious around me; I couldn't believe they were taking it so seriously; the kids were all behaving like well-regulated, good little soldiers. And off we went! We marched back down the narrow roadway, twisted round in the Main Street, and strode determinedly down into the town Centre. The crowd fell asunder on either side of us. I could see the mixture of awe and respect on their faces. I could see that they did not admire us, but that they were afraid of us all the same. They stood back; they moved to one side; they looked at us and then they looked away. Nobody laughed, as I had feared, at my ridiculous pancake beret. I began to think that if it wasn't ridiculous then I couldn't be. I began to take myself seriously. I began to be in awe of myself. I strode ahead forcefully. We

marched down the town. Our shoes made a loud stamping noise on the road. Our unison, unpractised and unrehearsed, was remarkable. I couldn't understand it, how before we even reached the end of the narrow road leading from the garage, our arms and legs were swinging perfectly together. We marched as one, we felt as one. The pride of the others invaded me. It was a heady feeling. I felt as if I was one of an elite, as if I was one of a handful. I tightened my face to stop from smiling. I felt strangely giddy. I felt as if I was floating on air; as if I had become part of some tremendous, charismatic centipede whose movements controlled mine. I was not myself; I was more than myself; I was better than myself. I had become a soldier. And I was gliding through history on hobnailed black leather shoes. Stamp! Stamp! Stamp! We swung through town, stamp! stamp! stamp! and joined the mainstream of the march. The immense crowd opened out to let us into its heart. We propelled it along. Soon the whole crowd was marching with military intensity and fervour. The air and buildings around us vibrated to the noise we made. Stamp! Stamp! Stamp! Ahead of us the Brass and Reed band began to play. I recognised the music: "A Nation once Again!" One of the Bull's favourites. That music infected us. We began to stamp! stamp! stamp! with even greater energy and to swing our arms and legs wider and further. I felt completely dislocated as if my arms and legs were suddenly unattached from my body and flying all over the place in impossible formations. I began to sing... I began to sing! "And Ireland free, will one day be, a Nation once Again!" The Bull looked back suspiciously at me from

the head of the group, but then I saw his mouth opening and shutting on the same words as my own. And then the others began to sing! It was a wonderful feeling of togetherness. We were like some fateful Greek Chorus intoning the future: the entry into the labyrinth; the unravelling of the clue; the battle with the monster; the victory. We marched straight into the town square and positioned ourselves in the middle of it, in front of the memorial for the 1916 fallen. My father stepped forward and pulled a long sheet of paper from his pocket. He began to proclaim. My eyes were fixed on the sky above the square; a grey sky full of floating cloud. I watched the seagulls whirling. There was storms at sea when you saw the seagulls inland, I had been told. There was storms at sea then as my fathers voice raged inland. I heard his words only intermittently, I recognised the slogans: "British Colonial Imperialism!", "Occupied Territory!", "Surrender and Withdrawal!", "Peace with Justice!", " Thirty-two county Republic!", "New Ireland!", "New Future Together!" His voice rang loud and clear, and full of a strange and bitter melancholy, like the voice of some aged poet intoning the sad and ageless poetry of his people. When he finished the silence around him, and around us, was palpable. On a raised platform at the back of the square I saw the politicians and priests of the area waiting for the Bull to finish. The crowd too were waiting expectantly to see what we would do next. The Bull delivered the coup-de-grace. "About Turn!" he ordered with quiet authority and we wheeled round in perfect harmony and strode away from the awestruck, timid

thousands who were gathered round us. Behind us the place where we had stood remained empty as if the crowd was afraid to infringe on territory we had marked out as our own. There was no doubt about it; we were men and women apart; we were different; we were alien and strange to them and they were alien and strange to us; our lives were divided. We marched away from them and they watched us go. We marched up through the deserted streets of the town. It began to rain as it always does. Let them stay and listen to their Priests and Politicians, I thought, let them get wet! We would soon be safe and dry. We turned down the narrow roadway again and marched into the disused garage. We dispersed without a word. We shook hands only, my father doing the rounds of the shadowy men. My hand was warmly shook by all of the other youngsters; they sought me out. My father looked with quiet pride on me. Cissie sneered contemptuously. I began to feel contempt for myself. My earlier euphoria was rapidly dissipated. My clothes looked depressingly black. My beret looked like a pancake again. I felt ridiculous. Cissie caught me by the hand and pulled me towards her. We sat back in the red van, with Cissie on my lap again. My father was silent. The roads all around were silent and deserted. Cissie leaned with her arm around my shoulder and her hair against the side of my face. I felt her lips against my ear. "My fucking feet are all fucking blistered!" she whispered bitterly. "I'll never be able to walk, ever again!" And inside my own shoes, tight and hot, I felt my own blisters rise, and prepare to burst.

That was the last time I ever felt pride; nothing that happened afterwards brought me anything but pain and humiliation. We were on, and had always been on, the slippery slope to some imminent conclusion. It all must end somewhere, I told myself. Things can't go on forever. But the Bull used to say, "Things will get worse before they get better!" And if that was true things would never get better; how could they? Things would always get worse. Until the End. And no matter what the Bull or anyone else could say I knew the End would eventually come. It had to. It couldn't be avoided. It would take the form of death, if nothing else, but it would come. And so I could afford to be patient and I waited, certain that the Bull's ranting and raving would one day stop, some way, some how... God only knew! For the moment the Bull was intolerable. He was worse than ever. We avoided him like the plague. We hated the sight of him. There would never be enough distance between us; I'd have run a mile to get away from him; I only wanted to hear that he was "gone" and never that he was "here". We all felt the same way. We hated the Bull. We'd have liked to have seen him dead. Cissie particularly. She had no freedom. Once a month she concocted some reason to go to the doctor, and I wondered what other manoeuvres she employed to mislead the Bull and conduct her secret love affair. Once, I found the doctor's car parked down a side road but there was no sign of him or of Cissie. I climbed up in the nearest tree to watch and wait but it got so late I had to go home without discovering them. I couldn't

imagine where they were going on their lovers' trysts, and couldn't imagine where in the area they could feel safe from the Bull. How could they or anybody make love in such a state of terror? How could they make love anymore than they could feel free with someone, or something, like the Bull breathing down the back of your neck? But Cissie was trying. She'd found some corner of the Bull's maze where she felt safe, where she felt free... When I found out where it was I couldn't believe it. I couldn't believe that she had taken such a risk; but Cissie was a desperate girl, and the doctor was a fool; and fools in love, they hadn't a hope!

But Cissie was clever too, in her own way. Every time the shadowy men called she was out of the house and they called more and more frequently now. The Bull was away more and more often too; sometimes for days on end. Cissie took every chance she had. Once when the Bull went missing she called to the doctor every day; I knew, because she always went on her way home from school and I had to wait for her. "Play with the rainwater or something!" she'd say. "I won't be long!" And she never was. Ten minutes, fifteen minutes, never longer. I can imagine now the hurried passion of those moments; at the time I wanted to believe her when she said she was just, "leaving a note!" The strangest thing is that it went on for so long undisturbed, that hidden love, as if the Gods were conspiring with them, and would protect them. Or maybe they liked the danger. I could believe it of Cissie. I never got to know Doctor Curran, but there was some spark in Cissie's eyes that showed she liked playing with fire.

I sometimes think it was just a game she was playing with the Bull all that time. That that's all it was, a game, in which the Bull was being made to look a fool. And then I think that maybe as far as Cissie was concerned it was more than a game: it was war. Cissie could have chosen to run away at any time but had chosen to stay, to stay and fight. "I won't let the Bull get the better of me!" I remember her saying, and that was her spirit. No matter how strong or terrible that bastard was she would not let him get the better of her. Everything the Bull did to hurt her only made her more determined. She used to face him with a glint of defiance in her eye which said, "You'll never win, Bull! You'll never win, no matter how big or bad you are!" And I loved her for it, because she stood up for me too. "Listen," she said to me once, "we're in this together!" She fed me her spirit of rebellion. "It doesn't matter how small you are, if you're strong enough inside!" And I, the runt of the litter, loved to repeat that over and over to myself. You can do anything as long as you're strong enough inside! I was ready to do anything for Cissie against the Common Enemy. Together we plotted his downfall; together we prayed for his destruction. We rejoiced in every misfortune that befell the Bull. When the news came that Pat, our brother, had been arrested and interned we danced together on the road to school. The Bull was apoplectic. His veins stood out on his neck and forehead as if they were going to burst. I could barely contain a cheer. Pat's picture was in the paper. He'd been caught up North transporting a lorry load of explosives. He'd been shot in the arm trying to escape. The

arm had been almost severed by a hail of army bullets. He was lucky to be alive. We were sorry he was. The paper said he'd get at least twenty years in jail. It wasn't long enough. It wasn't long enough, unless the Bull was in there with him. And even then it wasn't long enough.

The Bull took Pat's arrest badly. He never stopped, morning, noon, or night, lamenting him. "My poor Pat!" he'd cry out in anguish. "My poor son rotting in an English jail!" He'd rattle the table with his fist and glaring into empty space pronounce his own far-seeing judgement on things. "The English have always stood with their muddy boots on the throat of the Irish! And now it's Pat they have! God bless him and keep him safe from all harm!" His benediction concluded he'd rise from the table and walk out into the yard to contemplate the sunset. God knows what devilment he was considering. When the shadowy men came there were long, long discussions. That was when I first heard the name of Herrema. It could have meant anything to me at the time, it was foreign enough and strange enough to sit snugly alongside Kalashnikov or Gelignite and not cause them any discomposure. Herrema: it sounded like air escaping from a punctured bicycle tyre, it hissed around the house, and around my ears, for an entire evening; it reproduced itself in my dreams and made my sleep uneasy, but in the morning when I woke, it was gone. It had left with the shadowy men and would only come back with them; that is, if they wanted it to. Sometimes the names they used figured only once in their roll-call,

received a quick death sentence, and were never spoken again. I could list a whole army of names that had passed through their lips and then been annihilated. To be spoken on the lips of a shadowy man was a hard thing for any name; better not to be a name, not to have a name, or to have a false name; if any name fell prey to a shadowy mouth it was finished. To be nameless, to be perfectly anonymous, was the best possible destiny in the world of the shadowy men. Herrema's misfortune was that he had a name. Who can forget it? There is a name that will echo in history and remain part of living history until the living are all dead! Poor Herrema, once he was born with a name he could not escape the shadowy men. They notice things like that. They pay attention to people's names. Oh yes, they do! The point is, if you can help it, be a nobody, don't have a name, cease to exist, and then you'll be safe. And being safe is what everyone wants isn't it? Leave us in peace, is what everyone demands, isn't it? And so now you know. Take it from me. Be nothing on earth! Then you'll be safe. And the shadowy men won't even know you're there.

I don't know how long Herrema was in the underground bunker before I discovered him. It was Cissie in fact who led me there. The Bull was away at the time and she was flitting out of the house in the evenings in her lightest summer frocks, despite the cold, damp weather. I determined to catch her with the Doctor; it was the only excitement I had back then; and so I followed her. One evening I followed her so closely all she had to do was

turn around and she would have seen me trailing furtively behind her but she never looked back. When I heard the Doctor's car approaching on the road I ducked into the nearest ditch and prayed he would not drive away with her. He didn't. He stopped the car in off the road, where it was partially concealed by hanging branches, and after five minutes of impatient fumbling with each other, they left the car and squirmed through a gap in the ditch into the nearest field. Cissie led him by the hand. I crawled, snake-like, on the ground after them, my elbows plunging again and again into hidden, disgusting cowpats. A hare was disturbed by Cissie's feet and came bounding towards me. I put out my hands to catch him but he leapt through them, his feet touching my shoulders lightly, before he raced away. God, I'd have loved to be able to move like that, the speed and grace, the beautiful animal ease of it. Humans are clumsy by comparison. Everything we do seems stupid and clumsy when you think of how the hare is. My elbows stuck with clots of cowshite I rowed faster and faster after Cissie and her Doctor. They crossed two more fields and I still couldn't imagine where they were heading for. Were they just going to lie down in the grass somewhere and go at it? It looked as if they were, and then they stopped. Cissie knelt on the ground and began to pull clumps of grassy earth away. The heavy sods of earth came away easily in her hands. I looked around to try to get my bearings and was surprised to see the farmhouse just two or three fields below me. This was crazy! Cissie was fucking mad to come here! Her legs disappeared into the ground and then the rest of her body

slipped down. She was taking the Doctor in there -I couldn't believe it!- with all the guns, all the explosives; that was her love nest! And that was so like Cissie! I understand now... The joy she must have had in fucking herself to happiness, outrageously surrounded by the Bull's plastic wrapped and impotent Arsenal! And the danger in every touch, in every whisper, which might set off, with any carelessness, an all-destroying explosion at any moment, and blow them both to Kingdom Come. This was the still, cold, unbeating heart of the Bull's domain; if he found them there, they were both dead, no doubt about it, they were hung, drawn and quartered, finito; and Cissie, for my money, had a nerve like nobody else ever born to go down there, and take the only love and happiness she had in the world with her! But not this time! She didn't go down this time. She had just vanished into the hole in the ground when her arms shot back up again and the Doctor pulled her up quickly. Quickly she replaced the sods of earth, and pulled the Doctor away. They ran back down the field as fast as they could. I should have followed them. In the interests of furthering my sex education, and of nurturing my limited imagination, not to mention the terrific entertainment of that most stimulating of human acts to behold, I should have followed them; but I didn't. Was I mad or was I just thoughtless, I don't know. But I watched and waited for a full half-hour and I thought if there was someone down there they would have heard Cissie and would have come out to investigate, but no one had appeared; therefore, I concluded intelligently, there was no one in the bunker, and

Cissie must have been upset by a rat or a spider or something like that. So, foolishly, I decided to go down in the bunker. I hadn't been back there since Cissie had taken me down to see it. Cissie had warned me: "Never go back! Never ever go back! The Bull will kill you!" and I had believed her. I never had gone back and that had suited her. Cissie had outmanoeuvred me at the same time as she was outmanoeuvring the Bull. I didn't like that. It hurt. I needed to regain some of my loss of self-esteem. And so I went down in the bunker. I lifted the sods of earth away and placed them neatly and methodically in a pile beside the shore grating, then I pulled the grating up. I shuffled down into the hole and got down on my hands and knees to negotiate the tunnel. It was larger than I remembered and was easier to get through. Inside was complete darkness. I could see nothing. I knew there was a switch somewhere. I tried to remember where but I couldn't. I stood up in the larger chamber and began to feel my way around the walls, leaning in over the wooden boxes, spreading my fingers out in wide circles. Then I heard behind me, a noise like a shoe scuffing the ground. I stopped dead. I listened hard. I could hear something. I didn't know what it was. It was like the breathing of a small animal. There's a fox in here, I thought. I got ready to swing around and kick with my feet. Then my fingers touched the light switch. My heart began to pound. I was afraid to turn the light on. I heard the scuffing sound again. It was bigger and heavier than a fox. I wanted to get out, to get out of there at all costs, but I couldn't move. I could hardly breath. And then a voice said, a

voice with a strange, gentle, foreign accent, "Please, please! Why don't you say something?" I felt as if my chest was going to burst. I opened my mouth to scream but nothing came out. I felt cold tears trickling from my chin onto my neck. I was dying. I was sure of it. I was ready to drop down dead. And then the voice repeated, "Please! Say something? Why don't you say something?" With shaking, awkward fingers, I pulled the light switch down. "Please say something!" the voice said. "Please say a word! Just a single word!" I turned to look at him. He was tied up completely with ropes around his wrists and ankles. He was blindfolded but he was looking straight at me as if he could see me through the blindfold. "Say something!" he pleaded with me. "Please say something!" His mouth was cracked and dry. There was a bowl of water by his feet. I knelt beside him and pushed the bowl of water closer to him. He sat up as if he was excited by the fact that I was so near to him. "Say something!" he said again, with more urgency this time, with desperation almost, as if he craved this word, this something, more than anything else in existence, and pitying him, what could I do but offer it to him. "Hello!" I said. "Who are you?" He shook himself with delight. He laughed like a man told sudden, undreamt of good news. "I'm Herrema!" he said. "Have you heard of me?" I remembered. "Yes," I told him. "Good, good, good!" he said, barely able to contain his excitement. "Can you get me out of here?" I was sorry to disappoint him. I said nothing and I could see that he knew I could do nothing for him. "Is there anyone who can help me?" he said, almost to himself. "No!" I said. I

had to be honest with him. I didn't want him to expect anything from me. "There's no one at all, who can help you!"

I was out of touch at the time because we had no telly. The Bull had wrecked our telly. All because of Big Ian, my hero! Big Ian and the Bull were alike in some ways. Big Ian was a large mountain of a man with a loud, booming voice and so was the Bull. They both had history foaming at the mouth; and they both had their slogans, one set countering the other exactly, that justified them. They both had the threat of violence in the back of the throat, like a schoolteacher letting you know the stick was ready for use at any moment. And they were both, hopelessly, irredeemably lost in that corner of the map called the North. The two were like images facing each other in a mirror, turned inside out and reversed, but essentially the same. Only, I liked Big Ian. Every news time he did his appearing trick in our kitchen with the sole intention, it seemed to me, of provoking the Bull to uncontrollable fury. Every evening Big Ian trotted it out, his stolid, unbending line of resistance to the Bull's hopes and dreams. "No Surrender!" echoed around us, and myself and Cissie loved that. In our heart and soul it echoed, "No Surrender!", as the Bull danced like a badly made puppet on a string in front of the flashing, bright television screen. "We shall maintain the Union at all costs!" became our battle hymn; "Ulster says No!" our battle cry. The Bull nearly had a fit. "Someone should shoot that fucking Protestant bastard!" he'd roar, and shake the telly with his bare hands as if he could

discommode the wily Protestant Minister of the Church by doing so. And Big Ian, implacably smug, smirked savagely as if he was only too aware of the Bull's outrageous impotence faced with the magic of modern technology. "I'll throw that fucking television set out of the window one of these days!" the Bull used to say. But then the Bull had no sense of humour. I don't ever remember him cracking a single joke. He was the Minotaur, he knew nothing of laughter, trapped in his eerie maze; he knew only the crack and crunch of bone and flesh, and the sizzling heat of escaping blood from torn veins and arteries; laughter was as alien to him to him as kindness; if he laughed it would crack him up, he wouldn't be able for it, it would destroy him utterly and forever. On the other hand, Big Ian was the MC of laughter. Secretly, inwardly, we laughed every time he opened his mouth, as if somewhere in his own heart there was the tremendous power of contained laughter, incredibly, subversively infectious. "No Surrender!" and "Ulster says No!" became the punchlines to terrific in-jokes that only the initiates understood. And Cissie and I were initiates. We had been sworn in, had sworn ourselves in, to Big Ian's loyal cause. We like him, were against the Bull. We, like him, supported the Union. "Ulster says No!" Big Ian never let us down. Each news time we waiting impatiently for him to appear like some subversive magician of the airwaves and he always did. We hunched forward to catch every word that fell from his lips and we lapped them up. We waited for his pearls of priceless humour: the time he compared the ship honking behind him to the Pope blowing his nose, that was unforgettable. I had

to leave the house to roll sore with laughter on the grass of the furthest field I could get to before my sanity deserted me. The poor, stupid Bull, if only he could have learned to laugh with Big Ian! It was left to me and Cissie to appreciate Big Ian's greatness. If I'd had him for a father I think I could have put up with anything. I would have joined the fight, I would have upheld the cause, I would have walked on all the Catholics around and trod them into the ground, without any afterthought, any misgiving whatsoever. Big Ian inspired me where the Bull only depressed me. In the mirror at night I imitated his every move and gesture; I made myself large, I opened my arms in the air, I swayed the adoring, spellbound crowd with my fingertips. I intoned the fierce intransigence of his slogans. "We shall not be ruled by Rome!" I told the bland, indifferent mirror. I rose up high on my toes and offered the supreme catchphrase. "Ulster says NO!" That was my favourite. Repeating that, at the top of my silent voice, roaring it from the very root of my gaping, noiseless mouth, I was *Ulster!* I was the voice of Ulster Protestantism. I was the opposite of what the Bull was; and I was proud of my share in the greatness and grandeur that was not Rome. And in my dreams I inhabited a free Ulster, with the red hand emblazoned on every gable wall, and the Union Jack floating over every Post Office and School and strapped to every chimney. I consigned the Bull willingly to his side of the Border. A Barbarian through and through he would never belong on Ulster soil. Freedom? He would never understand the meaning of the word! I knew what it meant. It meant: no

Bull! Unity? That was the sickest joke of all, born from the cruellest depth of the Bull's eerie maze, his charnel house labyrinth in which he skulked with his dreams of despair. How could the Bull and I, made of the same horrid flesh and blood, reared on the same poisoned land, nurtured inside the same crumbling four walls, looking out at the same rotting light, breathing in the same contaminated air, and speaking the same foul language, ever be united? The absurdity of it! The stupid, empty, moribund absurdity of it! No wonder I was driven half-mad by it; because I was, by the end of it all, half-mad, and completely desperate. Only Big Ian kept me sane. The great greyhaired bear of a man with his large embracing, welcoming arms, whose voice reached out to hold me from my Northern homeland far away. Big Ian was my bulwark of sanity against the drivelling madness of the Bull; he kept me going for as long as he could, but one day the madness in me was sure to break out. I had it from my father. The Bull was surely as mad as mad could be. Every day his madness assailed him and vanquished him. That's what happened with the telly. One day Big Ian was on and the Bull couldn't take it any longer. He shook the telly as he always did but that had no effect whatsoever on Big Ian's enduring aplomb, his perfect imperturbability. But the Bull was determined to get to him this time. With a gut-wrenching bellow he wrapped his arms around the set and pulled it out from the wall. The back of the set ripped away in a shower of sparks that fizzled down the electrical cable and buzzed noisily into the wall socket. Big Ian disappeared, his voice fell silent, and all

the lights in the house were abruptly extinguished. We sat in the darkness with the mountainous shadow of the Bull whirling past us to the open doorway, with the television set trailing its innards, gripped like an accordion in his hands. He flung the set away from him and drove his big boot through it. Valves and tubes scattered in the twilight air like little birds. I felt sad and empty and did not know what to do. Big Ian was gone. Big Ian was gone from me forever. The Bull had driven him out. The Bull had banished him. The Bull came back into the house and began to sift through his rebel music. He pulled out one of the Wolfe Tones stomach churning dirges and flapped the disc down on the turntable of his old, sad-looking mono player. He cursed the machine when it wouldn't work. He shook it the way he had shaken the telly. I waited for him to carry it to the door and kick it too into the next world. He snorted menacingly at it. He knocked it against the wall and rapped it with his fists. I would be next, I knew well. But this time, this time, I wasn't going to take it. Just let him! He began to pull and drag at the wires in the back of the record player. He was ready to snap them too, I could tell. Then Cissie said something. "You're wasting your time! There's no electricity! The fuse is blown!" Not: "You're a big, fucking eejit, Bull, you've blown the fuse!" No, not that! Nothing in our house was ever the Bull's fault, and nothing ever could be; we granted him instead the passive platitude of, "the fuse is blown!" That! It made me sick, the way we all pretended with him. I'd had enough of it. I was done with pretending. I was the one who said, "You've blown the fuse,

Bull, you big, fucking eejit!" And the silence that settled suddenly between the four of us was like a bomb on the point of going off. The Bull glowered at me, his eyes flaming through the darkness. My mother said, "He didn't mean it, Bull! He doesn't know what he's saying!" And Cissie said, "He didn't mean it, Bull! He's gone soft in the head lately!" The futile voices of women pleading, sentences dropped like stones into a dried-up well, necessary precursors to inevitable violence. It had to happen. I did not resent it. The Bull's dilemma was clear. Violence was the method he took to everything. It was his be all and end all. It was his right and his reason. It was all he had to earn respect for himself, from himself. To do nothing was to lose respect, deeply, inwardly. To do nothing in the face of insult was to lose face, to sink one's pride in the despairing rebuttal of violence. The Bull was no more capable of that than he was capable of eating his soup without slurping it. The Bull! The Bull was inexpressible. The Bull was beyond words. I was black and blue, yellow and purple, and green, white and gold all over for weeks afterwards. I could hardly talk for days. Cissie's doctor friend had to come and wrap me up in bandages. I had no school for a month. I was shattered. I was in bits. I could barely stand. I thought I'd never be right again. Cissie said that, I was lucky to be alive! It was my mother, she said, who had saved me in the end. For the first time in my life that hopeless woman had done something for me. "You were lucky!" Cissie reminded me. I was lucky! Or was I? At the time I didn't care whether I was living or dead. I would have been happy if

the Bull had murdered me. At least that way, I'd have had nothing more to do with him, and he could never get at me again. I wanted to see an end to him. As soon as I could walk I was going to run away. As soon as I could walk I went back to Herrema. He was gone from the bunker. Without a telly I lost touch. I never saw him come out of that Monasterevin house where the seige was. Years later I saw the film clips on the prison telly. I wouldn't have known him. A man looks all different when he's trussed up like a pig and blindfolded. He had a gentle face and kind eyes, I thought. He looked beyond the camera with a distracted air. I wondered what he was looking for. Maybe he was looking for me. Maybe he wanted to see the boy who had told him, "there's no one at all who can help you!" He cried after I told him that. He believed me. Without knowing it I had infected him with the bacillus of my own total despair. He thought his case was hopeless. He thought he was going to die in the Bull's bunker. I reached out and took him by the hand. He stopped crying, stopped sniffing. "But all this will have to end somewhere, sometime," I told him. "It can't go on forever!" Offering him my own touchstone philosophy. He nodded. "Will you wipe my face?" he asked. With a rag dipped in the bowl of water at his feet I wiped the stains of his tears away. "It will end somewhere, sometime!" he repeated. "Yes," I said. Though without a telly I never knew where or when it had ended. When I went back to the bunker and he wasn't there I forgot about him. I even forgot his name. When I saw him in prison I was pleasantly surprised. "So he's still alive then!" I said to one of the

other prisoners. "Oh yes!" he answered. "They should have plugged him when they had the chance!" I had to laugh. The farce is never-ending. Some people think killing a man is like eating a sandwich, nothing more. I could have told him. I could have told him all about it. But I didn't. Why, I asked myself, why bother?

I thought I was never going to see Cissie again; I thought she didn't care. When she came to the prison I felt so happy. I wanted to tell her, but Cissie and myself were never able to say things like that together. Instead I told her about following her and her medicine man. She laughed at that. They had three children in England, in a place called Endstone, a small nowhere of a village, Cissie said, where there were no Irish. "My children are going to be English!" Cissie said. "I tell them nothing about where I come from..." She looked apologetically at me. "They'll never know anything about you," she said. In a way I was sorry. It's not nice being written out of someone's life that way. "They'll want to know someday," I hinted. She shook her head. "No!" she insisted. "I tell them I have no one! I tell them I've been entirely alone all my life!" But still she came back, at least a half-a-dozen times. It's not easy at all, you see; it's not easy to pretend you have no one; it's almost impossible. I've tried; here in prison I've tried. I wanted to eliminate everything; to forget who and what I was; to clean the slate and start from scratch; it couldn't work. I was too well known for it to have worked. I was in all the papers and when I

arrived here everyone knew everything about me. There was no need for lies, no need for pretence, no room for evasion; they knew me inside out; the truth had preceded me. And then there was Pat; there will always be Pat. Sometimes I don't know who's on who's side anymore. The prisoners have always been kind to me; it was one of the warders who taunted me first with, "Your brother Pat says he's coming to get you!" I got so much of that in the beginning and it still goes on. Who gave them their licence to amuse themselves at my expense? To hone their blade of wit on me as if I was some kind of barbers strop intended for that purpose? They must have nothing better to do! "Hey, Ulster! Your brother Pat says he's going to seal up your arse with semtex and blow your backside to Hell and back!" Yeah, yeah, yeah! So funny! "Well, you know what he's going to stick up your arse," I tell them. "And I bet you like it when you get it!" Fuck them! I say nothing! I never rise to the bait. As far as I'm concerned all that is beneath me. I keep out of it. I keep my nose buried in a book. Every morning I go to English Classes and every afternoon I go to the Library to collect my books. Sometimes the Warders stop me on my way back to the cell and peruse the covers of my books. That's what they say. "I just want to peruse the cover of your book!" They spend five or ten minutes looking at the cover. "Aha, aha, aha..." they mutter idiotically. "The Legend of Theseus and the Minotaur." They scratch their heads under their peaked cap. "Now, what the fuck is that?" Sometimes I really wonder who's on who's side anymore. Am I really so alone? They hand me back my book. "You pathetic,

little, fucking I.R.A man's get!" is the usual insult. I never know what they mean. They talk in riddles. Their speech is not speech; it makes no sense; it twists and turns through a mire of confusion and embarrassment. You would think language should be simple; but language to them is like an uncontrollable twitch, now mild, now extreme, they don't know where it comes from. It goes in and out of their hearts and mouths and takes on whatever shape it wants to. Protean! It just climbs up their throat, squeezes through their vocal cords, trips across their tongue, and falls out of them. It sprays like vomit to my feet. I walk over it to get to my cell. I lock myself in, shutting the steel gate; if the key were mine I'd throw it away and never come out again. But in the mornings the gate must open, life must go on, the sound of the warders voices rattle on the empty gangways, the smell of porridge wafts up from the depths of the kitchens, and I want to die; oh, how I want to die! If only the world would let me die! Why am I living anyway? I've never been able to figure that out! Why was I born, as they put it, a "pathetic, little, fucking I.R.A. man's get!" It's not just language that lacks meaning; it's not just words that have no sense! Life itself is conceived and born out of emptiness and will one day return there! Nothing is meaningful; everything is meaningless. That's what I've learned in prison. That's what I believe in now... I don't even believe in Cissie anymore!

Cissie. I keep coming back to Cissie. Once she was the flower on the dungheap. Once she was my only hope. And then she

left me. She gave in to the Bull. She shouted, "Surrender! Unconditional Surrender!" loud and clear, and skipped it with her medicine man. They left for Endstone and I was alone with the Bull. She had no excuse for deserting me; no worthwhile excuse in the midst of the greatest battle of our lives, the battle for our lives; but she left anyway, running to Endstone, with Doctor Cure-all in her arms. What was the point in being in love, if not to defy the Bull with it? "I'm sorry," she said once, when I accused her. "If the Bull found out he would have killed him! I couldn't take the risk any longer! I really did love him! Not in the beginning, but afterwards! Yes, I loved him!" The tears streamed down her face so tenderly, I was not without pity. She loved him more than she loved me, that was what hurt so terribly. She loved him enough to abandon me, to abandon me to the Bull, our common enemy, to be eaten and devoured by him. "You didn't care what happened to me!" I said. She admitted as much. "How could I care?" she cried, and the warder told her to "keep it down!" "How could I care," she whispered, "living in that place?" It was three or four days before we realised she was gone forever. I cried and cried and cried. The Bull thought I was in on it. He took an old rusted bicycle chain from the shed in the backyard and twisted it round my throat. He dragged me across the fields on some bizarre cross-country run, pulling me roughly through the briared ditches until I bled from every pore in my body. He kicked me in the face and head until I was half-blind and half-stupid. He kicked me until he had exhausted himself and then he knelt

beside and pulled my head back by the hair until I thought it was going to snap off in his hands. Then he bit a corner of my ear off. I told myself that this was it, I was going to die in this corner of a field, south of the border, with my own blood raining into my eyes, blotting out the sky. Then the Bull began to snort and wheeze at me and blow hot air into my bleeding earhole. "I'm ashamed of you, son!" he said. "I'm ashamed!" He had hardly any breath after his exertions. Why did he bother talking at all? I didn't want to know! "You're no bloody use, are you?" How long did it last? A half-hour? An hour? All my bleeding life? Stop it, Bull! "You'll never be any use!" He pulled my head back even further, I felt my flesh tearing asunder, my head pulling off my shoulders. "You're hardly able to wipe your own arse!" Did he want me alive to tell me all this? "What use is a son like that to any man! What use is it? Tell me!" I was paralysed in his arms. There was blood pouring into my mouth. I was choking on my own blood. I couldn't speak; not a word, not a single word. He shook me away from him. I lay on the ground with the bicycle chain twisted round my neck like some savage, mutilating necklace. I tried to pull it away but it was embedded in my skin. It hurt too much. The Bull stood over me. I reached my hand out to him. I wanted him to help me. "Help me, Bull!" my gaping hand screamed voicelessly. "Help me!" He turned away. He wriggled back through the ditch behind him and left me to die. The rain began to fall. A soft, cold rain. It washed my skin clean. It washed the blood out of my eyes and ears and nose and mouth. I began to breathe again, began to feel

alive again. The rain loosened the chain from around my neck. I pulled it slowly away from my skin. On every link of the chain a bloody fragment of skin was encrusted as if it were a necklace made from torn and bleeding human flesh. I threw it away from me. I don't know what animals fed on it! I don't care! I crawled back through the rain, easing my way through the broken ditches, peddling with my elbows over the fields strewn with cowshite. My mother was alone in the house. I don't think she even noticed as I dragged myself in the door, trailing blood and flesh on the stone kitchen floor. I crawled to her feet and curled up there. I wanted her to pick me up and put me on her knees. I wanted her to hold me. But she didn't, wouldn't, couldn't... I don't know. No love could be shown in the Minotaur's maze. No love! And she had no love. I never saw such emptiness as lay in the bottomless darkness of her abysmal eyes. I never felt such pain as I felt then, curled and shivering in front of the small fire she had lain and lit for herself in the kitchen hearth. I could not speak my pain clearly but I tore the wretched pain-filled syllables that clogged my throat like clotted blood up by their roots and spat them out on the ash-strewn ground at my lips. "Oh Cissie!" I cried out. "Oh Cissie! I hate you! I hate you!" My mother kicked me in the small of the back. "Sshh!" she warned. The Bull was coming. I heard his boots on the stone floor. He sat down on the opposite side of the fireplace. There was silence for a long, long time. Then he said, "We're going to see your brother, Pat!" A small ray of hope glanced through my heart like deflected light from a mirror. We were going to Ulster. We

were journeying to my homeland, up North, my own sweet corner of the map. "Good!" I tried to say. "Good!" I might even see Big Ian. I might even see my God-like hero, my "Ulster says No!" giant. If I was lucky.

I didn't see Big Ian, not at all; I looked and looked on both sides of every street we passed through, but the big man never appeared. On television screens in the pubs we stopped at I watched for him to appear but he never did. He was cautious of the Bull now; he wasn't going to be responsible for any more televisions kicked to oblivion. The Bull had conjured him out of existence. Or so it seemed. We saw Pat all right! Bauld Pat! There were tears of happiness in both their eyes. They were allowed one quick embrace. I had never seen my father with his arms around anyone before. Was this what he did with all his love? Pat seemed even more stupid than I remembered. Prison had brought out all the nonsense in him. He talked in idiot circles, trotting round and round in well-rutted sentences like a horse in a circus. "Becoming a man... Soon be ready for the fight!" he said everytime he looked at me. "Bah!" the Bull countered. "That little fucking runt couldn't fight his way out of a paper bag!" And, "I brought him here to see a real man!" Pat never said anything that followed on what was said before; he seemed to pluck learned sentences from the air in front of his eyes, sentences that appeared at random, with no connection to what went before or what came after. "I'll tell them nothing!" he said. "I'll do my time but I'll tell them nothing!" He wasn't

the same Pat. "Are they treating you well?" the Bull asked, with a hint of suspicion in his voice. Pat nodded erratically, his head rolling on his shoulders. "Has anyone touched you?" the Bull asked. Pat shook his head vigorously. "No,no..." he said. "Only..." The Bull glowered at him. I knew what was happening. I knew all about this from the inside. Pat was afraid, he was afraid to say what he wanted to say; he was afraid to show weakness in front of the Bull. Prison wasn't agreeing with him, that was for sure. He pulled himself together. "I won't tell them anything!" he promised. "I won't tell them a fucking thing! Fucking Imperialist, Colonialist state, and all that!" He looked at me for succour. "Soon be ready to join the fight, won't you?" The Bull took up the thread. "Bah, couldn't fight his way out of a paper bag, that runt!" They laughed together. The Bull and his calf. They should have been on stage together. They'd have made anybody laugh. I laughed too. And behind Pat, on the other side of the barrier, the prison warden, looked suspiciously at us, as if our laughter were a coded plan for escape, or for murder. "Time!" he barked. The Bull and Pat threw their arms around each other again. "Come on now!" the warden said. Pat was led away. He looked over his shoulder as he went. No matter how hard he tried he had to show some weakness in the end. There was sadness and tears there somewhere, I could see. The Bull could see too if he wanted to, but I don't think he wanted to. There was no room in the maze for weakness. Pat, the poor bastard! Exiled from the Bull's maze he was just a baby; outside of the labyrinth that long streel of venomous vomit was no more than an

infant. I bet he had a good cry when he got back to his cell, hiding his tears from the hard men around him. I bet he cried his eyes out. But I didn't care. He deserved to be chained to a rock somewhere and have his liver eaten away by some devouring bird, that's what I felt. Fuck him! He was my brother, but he was the Bull's son too, so fuck him! He didn't frighten me any longer. In fact, he didn't frighten me at all. He made me want to get sick, that was all. I hoped I'd never see him again. I had seen all I wanted to of, "a real man". "You know what happens now?" the Bull asked me. I hadn't a clue. "They take him into that room there and take all his clothes off him! Then they turn him inside out! They search every bleeding hole in his body! They stick their fingers up his arse until the skin tears and bleeds! They humiliate him, to his very soul! They degrade him!" He gripped my shoulder hard and stared in my eyes. "And do you know why?" he asked sternly. "Do you know why?" I felt I should know; I felt I should, but I didn't. The answer, of course, was obvious. "They're Brits, that's why!" the Bull said. It was all so simple. "The Brits have humiliated and degraded the Irish for centuries; centuries! Do you understand that? Can you grasp that? Not one lifetime, not two, but hundreds of years, generations and generations, millions of lifetimes, hundreds of millions of years and lifetimes!" Moved by his own speech his voice wavered and softened, then hardened again. "It's impossible not to hate them!" he said. "You might as well try to stop breathing as try to stop hating the Brits! Good God, I'd kill every last fucking one of them, if I had the means to

do it!" And the Bull said this in the heart of the confines of Britain's strongest prison, with steel-plated watchtowers and hundreds of armed and watchful, helmeted and visored soldiers, surrounding him. They let him go! It's hard to believe but they let him go, with only a glance at his papers, and a glance at his back as he walked away. What way was that to fight a war? It was not the Bull's way, that's for sure. The Bull's way was to kill, to kill, to kill! That was real war! I couldn't understand this other thing. I waited for someone to step out of the shadows and pointing a gun at the Bull's heart and head wish him a speedy return to Hell, but it never happened. They let him walk away! With all the strength they had, all the force they had, all the power they had, they let him walk away! And you just can't do that, not in a real war! Someone, somewhere along the line, has to show courage! Someone, somewhere along the line, has to step out of the shadows and pull that trigger! Without the moral strength to do that you may as well give up, give in; because that's what you're up against: the moral strength to do that! The moral strength or the moral blindness? I don't know... I don't know... But to let the Bull just walk away was a mistake I have never forgiven them.

On our way back the Bull drove slowly, terribly slowly. We drove through town after town, and in each town the Bull looked around him with supernatural attention as if he was committing everything he saw to memory. Then, in one small town, no town in particular, he stopped the van. "Like some chips, would you?" he asked me. I was hungry. I nodded. I became his accomplice. He

bundled a paper bag under his jacket, got out of the car and walked to a chip shop about a hundred yards up the road. Five minutes later he came out with a steaming bag of chips in his hand. As he came near the van he stopped beside a wastebin. I saw he had two bags in his hands now. I thought maybe he had bought two bags of chips. Then he threw one bag carelessly into the metal bin. He walked slowly to the van and sat in beside me. "Here's your chips," he said. "Did you get any for yourself?" I asked him. "I ate them on the way back," he said. He started the van. We drove up the street past the metal bin, past the chip shop. I saw mothers with prams, I saw children playing in the street. I could have jumped out of the van and run back to the bin, but I didn't. I could have shouted some word of warning, but I didn't do that either. I have no excuse. I'm not trying to hide anything. I plead guilty. It was all my fault. I am responsible for it all. For all the deaths. For everything. The shadowy men were waiting when we got home. They were in rare good form. They were laughing and they shook my father's hand with barely-contained excitement. Mine was the hand that needed shaking! I was the one who had made it all happen. We had heard it all on the radio before we had reached home. There were three deaths, a mother and child, and a soldier. There was a man who lost his legs and another man who lost his arms and his face. There was a girl of fifteen who was blinded. There were fifteen people, men, women, and children, seriously wounded, lacerated by flying metal and shattered panes of glass. There was nearly a hundred brought to hospital with shock. There was a little town

left on its knees, in bits, its flesh hanging from its bones. And I did all that... But it would never have happened if they had not let the Bull walk away! And so I blame them as much as I blame myself. And will never forgive them, anymore than I can forgive myself. In spite of it all, I slept well that night, with the voices of the shadowy men seeping through the rafters to hover round my bed. "You'll soon be big enough to join the fight!" one of them had said to me before I had gone up to bed. "How's Pat?" one of them asked my father. "Pat's a tower of strength!" the Bull answered proudly. "He says he'll do his time and tell them nothing!" I had no time for any of that. I went up to bed. The voices of the shadowy men hovered around me. I buried my head in the pillow. I slept. It had been the longest day of my life. Everything had happened so slowly. I wanted to die. I wished I had never been born. I had blood on my hands. And the chips felt like poison in my stomach.

In the end there is only one way of dealing with the Minotaur; and only one way to survive his deadly maze. The Minotaur knows that one way; he has practised it all his life; it is part of his own being; in truth, he and it are the same. The way is death, is murder. And say what you will, if you are trapped in the maze, sought by the Minotaur, and do not have the means or the will to do it, then you are done for. You have no hope. You have given up the ghost even before it is ripped from your entrails. And you will never be at peace. I had the means; I had the will. The Bull himself had given them to me. "If

something oppresses you, you must rise up and strike it dead!" he said to me. "If it is stronger than you are, then you must use stealth, cunning, secrecy... And then strike when the moment is right!" He struck his fist hard into the centre of the table. I jumped away with sudden fright. "You weren't expecting that, were you?" he asked me. "No, no, you weren't! You're asleep, you see! You must never sleep! You must always be on your guard! If you're not one hundred per cent alert, then you're as good as dead!" The Bull was changed somehow, as if he had lost an edge of hardness he had always relied on; he was mellowed in his old age. For the first time I noticed the flecks of grey in his hair, the shadowy paleness of ageing in his eyes and face. He had had some news about Pat. Pat had tried to break out of the prison but had been caught and brought back. The Bull went North to see him. When he came back there was something different about him. I asked Cissie what had happened but she didn't know. "Pat was always a weakling," she said. "The Bull could never see it! It was bound to come out sometime!" So the Bull seeing weakness in Pat had felt weakness in himself perhaps; the great wall of illusion had tumbled down. He wasn't such a hard man after all. The Bull's sons weren't worth pissing on; and who could respect a man with sons like that? I saw it sometimes when the Bull looked at me: the shame! The same shame he had whispered in my ear the time he was strangling me with the bicycle chain. He couldn't hide from it anymore; and he couldn't wipe it out of existence the way he did most things he hated. Sometimes I knew he was sorry he hadn't finished me off; but it

was too late now; he was never going to get the chance again; I'd see to that. The poor Bull, the poor, stupid, fucking Bull! He never even saw it coming. His judgement let him down.

After his visit to Pat he needed reassurance. "You'll be ready for the fight soon, won't you?" he used to say to me, but I never answered him. One day he took me to the Bunker; I never let on that I'd been down there. "I'm taking you into my confidence, son!" he warned me. "But I'll tell you once and once only, if you don't respect my confidence, it'll cost you your life! This isn't a game!" We slid down into the Bunker and he switched the light on. He opened one of the crates. "Do you see this?" he said, pulling out a rifle and offering it to me. "This can blow daylight all the way through a man!" I took the rifle from him. "It's a high-velocity weapon," he explained. "The bullets explode inside you!" I remember how cold it felt in my hands. "Here," the Bull said, "I'll show you how to load it!" He pulled out a carton of bullets and shot one into a slot in the side of the rifle. "Simple, isn't it?" he asked. He smiled. He could see that I was interested. "Some day I'll show you how the whole thing goes together," he said. He stocked the rifle back in the crate and pulled the lid over it. "The Brits would love to get their hands on this haul," he said. "But they'll have to do it over my dead body!" We climbed back out of the Bunker. As we walked across the field towards the farmhouse the Bull slipped his arm around my shoulder. I hated him for doing that. "I promise you I'll make a man of you," he said. "I'll make a real man of you!"

The shadowy men came to the house that evening and the Bull did not order me upstairs straight away. He made me shake their hands, one by one, and introduced them to me by their first names. "This lad will be joining the fight soon!" he told them. "It'll do Pat good to hear that!" one of them barked. They let me sit with them for about twenty minutes. They sat around the table and the Bull asked who had the "agenda". They conducted their meeting like a business meeting. They referred to each other by their military titles. A report was given on the planning, execution and success of a recent mission. The conduct of a young volunteer under pressure was highly commended. Then I was sent to bed. I had been offered a tantalising taste of what went on. I had been inducted into the solemnity of their discussions. I had been allowed to sniff the glamour of it; and then sent to bed while the real business was seen to.

The next day, after my mother had lit the fire and gone to town, the Bull said he was going to bring me on a job with him, that I was to dress in neutral clothes, ones I could afford to throw away later. "What are we going to do?" I asked him. "No need to know more than you need to!" he said. "What are we going to do?" I persisted. The Bull glared at me, "Don't ask fucking questions," he said. "You follow orders, that's all that's about it!" This was it then. I looked him straight in the face. "No," I said quietly. The Bull couldn't take it in. I'd never said, No, to him in my entire life before. This was a new experience for him. "What the fuck?" he demanded uncertainly. I waited; it was up to him where we went from here. The Bull took a short,

tentative step towards me. "You little cunt!" he said. "What are you saying? What's the fucking idea? I asked you nicely to change your clothes on and come with me... Now what's up with you?" He was almost within reach of me; if he took one more step... "No," I said again, and he stopped dead in his tracks. For a moment, for just a moment, a look of immense hurt flickered in his eyes. Then his face went red with anger. "No one says, No, to me," he roared. His fingers, like lightning-fast, tearing claws, ripped the air in front of my face. I took one step backwards. Then he came at me. I was caught in a swirl of arms and legs. I was kicked from one end of the kitchen to the other. I rolled under the table. The Bull danced around the table, kicking its legs, smashing it with his big boots. The legs of the table went flying and the table collapsed on me. I crept round the room with the top of the table resting on my back like a shell. I saw the Bull's feet running and jumping, and disappearing in the air above me; he came down with the weight and thunder of a brick wall on the table top and I was crushed to the ground. He pulled the table-top away and knelt beside me. He caught me by the hair and dragged me towards the fire. He threw me down in front of the burning turf. He sat on my back. He wheezed and snorted down the back of my neck. He stretched his fingers round my throat and gripped tightly. He squeezed harder and harder all the time. He pushed my face into the hot ash of the fireplace. The turf burned my eyes. "I'm going to burn your fucking face off!" he roared. No! I didn't want to die like that. Not like that. I only did what I did to

save myself. I could not have done it otherwise. The Bull pushed me further into the flames. I could smell my own flesh burning. I could smell my own flesh roasting like a piece of meat in the fire. I had to do something. I reached my hands out in front of me and caught a fragment of the flaming turf. Jesus, don't ask me how I did it! I just did it! I stretched my arm back as far as I could and slipped the red-hot ember inside the open neck of the Bull's shirt. With a searing cry of terror and hurt the Bull vanished off my back. I curled away from the fire like a scorched leaf. Then I screamed my pain as loud as I could and washed my hand in my own tears. The Bull was standing in the middle of the floor. He had ripped his shirt off. A scarlet crescent left by the burning turf descended from his right shoulder over his chest and ribs. I scuppered across the floor on my hands and knees. I held my hand under the flowing cold water of the kitchen tap. I did not care any longer about the Bull. There was a sharp kitchen knife hanging on the wall in front of me. If he came near me I was going to rip his guts out. "Are you going to come with me?" he asked. You'd think we were back where we'd started from and nothing at all had happened. I turned towards the Bull. "No!" I screamed. "No! No! No!" I held my red and swollen hand up to his face. "Never!" My lungs almost burst with the effort of it. The Bull flinched. He moved back as if I'd hurled a stone in his face. "No, never!" I repeated. He spat on the ground. "You're no son of mine then," he said. I laughed. "What would your brother Pat think of you?" he said. "Fuck Pat!" I told him. "And fuck you!" I took the shining knife

down off the wall. "Now, get out of the fucking way," I told him. The Bull laughed. "Oh, you're the big man now, aren't you?" he snorted. "Bigger than you'll ever fucking be anyway," I said. He was highly amused. "The big little man!" he said and repeated. "The big little man! The fucking runt of the litter! The Bull calf!" I had to do it. I had to walk by him. He let me go. He made that mistake too! He had me in his power, and he let me go! Why? Is a mortal enemy, in some way, untouchable? "Don't think I'll forget this," he warned. I walked out the door into the chilly sunlight. I started across the fields. I began to cry. I couldn't stop crying. I cried all the way to the Bunker. I cried for everything, for everything that had ever happened in my life. I cried for Cissie, I cried for Pat, I cried for my mother, I cried for myself; I even cried for the Bull. My tears were infinite and left nobody out. They burned me more than the turf had burned; they left scorching trails all down my face. I will never forget the devouring fire of those tears. I do not know whether they were tears of hate or tears of love; all I know is that they burned through my heart and left an emptiness inside me forever.

In the Bunker I found the rifle still intact. I cradled it in my arms and carried it back down across the fields. The Bull was still standing in the middle of the kitchen. "Oh, here's the big little man back!" he said. He laughed out loud when he saw the rifle in my arms. "Look what the big man has found!" I tilted the gun towards him. He was still laughing when I pulled the trigger. I saw the trajectory of the bullet as it blazed

into his laughing mouth and exploded inside his head. The Bull's laughter disintegrated in immense sadness; headless, his body crashed to the floor; his blood poured out of him like liquid out of a bottle turned over. I stepped over him and with the tip of the rifle wrote three words in the blood that pooled under his gaping neck. Those words were, "Ulster says No!" That's how I got my nickname. That's why everyone in the prison calls me, "Ulster". When my mother came back from the town, she collapsed on the floor and lay beside the Bull and held him in her arms. She cried, I heard her sobbing. "I didn't think you'd miss him!" I said to her. "You'll never be the man he was!" she said. "You'll never be anything like him!" "I wouldn't want to be!" I told her, and I ran from the house. It was late, it was getting dark. I didn't know where to go. I ran towards the school. The school was in darkness. There was nobody there. At the back of the school there was the English graveyard. I climbed over the wall and crept in amongst the graves. I came to Wilson's grave, and it seemed to welcome me, it seemed to say, "you can rest here". There was just a faint trace of sunset left but it was getting cold. I wanted to shelter somewhere, to hide away from everything. I saw a chink in the stone surround of Wilson's tomb and using a rusted metal bar I found, I widened it, scrambling the loose stonework away until I had made a hole big enough to climb into. It was warm inside. I curled up and went to sleep. I wanted to sleep so badly. I didn't dream. When I woke Wilson was sitting beside me. He had made a moist dressing of decayed leaf for my hand. "It will heal," he said,

"in a day or two!" He was so kind and his accent so sweet. "The same thing happened to me when I was in the war," he said softly. I sat up, and my tears starting to flow again, told him, "I was in a war too!" He blinked incredulously as if I had brought him the strangest, the most unexpected news. "Do they still fight wars up there then?" he asked me. He was interested, and I was eager to satisfy his interest. "Oh, yes!" I said. "You wouldn't believe it..." He leaned towards me all ears. "Let me tell you," I offered, and he nodded assent. "Let me tell you all about the war I fought with the Bull!"

I couldn't stay underground forever. Wilson knew this. "You have a life," he said. "You have to live it!" But I liked it where I was, in Wilson's dark tomb, with only the creeping of little animals or the rustling of the leaves on the trees to disturb us. Life seemed idyllic to me there. "But it's not life!" Wilson reminded me. "It's death!" Gradually he talked me out into the open. In the evenings, when the orange glow of sunset had faded from the air, we slipped out of the grave into the bark-scented night of the graveyard. We walked amongst the tombstones. Wilson explained away the dead. "When we went to war," he said, "we were invulnerable! When we came back we were mortal!" The dead seemed to have so much to say; so much seemed hidden in their silence. I wondered what story the Bull would tell to the Ghosts he encountered. "I don't want to leave you, Wilson!" I said. "But you must go!" he told me. I resisted him. He did not like that. "But why?" I persisted. "Because you don't

belong here!" he said finally. "And if you don't go, I'll have to throw you out!" I almost cried. "For the first time in my life I've found somewhere where I do belong!" I told him. He shook his head. He pointed up through the roof of the tomb at the world outside. "You have to go back!" he said. "You can't stay!" In the end I accepted this, though going back into the world did not please me. When the time came to say our goodbyes, Wilson was as sad as I was. "I'll go some of the way with you," he said then. "I don't understand!" I told him. "How can you go with me?" He knelt on the ground and rattled his bones together. "These things," he said. I laughed. "Won't you miss them?" I asked. Wilson laughed. "They have some sentimental value," he said, "that's all! And anyway, someone will bring them back! Tell them they belong to young Wilson who fought in the Boer War!" He bundled his bones together like sticks for the fire and handed them to me. "Now go on!" he said. "And don't lose any of them!"

The night air was cool. I scaled the wall by the school and ran through the school yard. I climbed the school railings and ran towards the town. I ran on the road; I ran straight down the middle of the road. I ran through the pools of yellow light cast down by the streetlamps. My feet splashed through the sickly yellow pools. Wilson's bones rattled under my arms as I ran, like a weird sound of castanets accompanying my run. On either side of the road people stood to look at me. Some of them pointed and shouted after me: "Look it's the Bull's son! It's

the Bull's son!" I ran and ran and ran. The streets and roads of the town opened out like a huge, interminable labyrinth through which I ran; an infinitely intricate, infinitely insidious labyrinth which wove around and through itself; which, when it reached its limits turned back into its own centre and made itself inescapable. I ran in ever-increasing, ever-decreasing circles, until they caught me and carried me screaming to my cell. And they gathered around me, and pulled Wilson's bones out of my hands, and pointed at me and shouted that I, "was the Bull's son! The Bull's son!" But I said, "I'm not! I'm not! I'm not!" And when they pulled and dragged me I said, "I'm not the Bull's son!" I said, "The Bull is dead! He's dead!" I said, "I slew the Bull! I slew him!" And if it drove me mad, I said, it was worth it, if that's what life cost me in the end. But nothing I ever said meant anything to them. They only looked at me with blank eyes and vacant faces, and stared at Wilson's bones as if waiting for them to speak.

The End.