**The Sniper**  
by [Liam O'Flaherty](http://everything2.com/title/Liam+O%2527Flaherty)  
*note: this work of fiction is pulic domain.*

The long [June](http://everything2.com/title/June) twilight faded into night. [Dublin](http://everything2.com/title/Dublin) lay enveloped in darkness but for the dim light of the moon that shone through fleecy [cloud](http://everything2.com/title/cloud)s, casting a pale light as of approaching dawn over the streets and the [dark waters](http://everything2.com/title/dark+waters) of the [Liffey](http://everything2.com/title/Liffey). Around the beleaguered [Four Courts](http://everything2.com/title/Four+Courts) the heavy guns roared. Here and there through the city, [machine gun](http://everything2.com/title/machine+gun)s and [rifle](http://everything2.com/title/rifle)s broke the silence of the night, spasmodically, like dogs barking on lone farms. [Republicans](http://everything2.com/title/Republicans) and [Free Staters](http://everything2.com/title/Free+Staters) were waging civil war.

On a rooftop near [O'Connell Bridge](http://everything2.com/title/O%2527Connell+Bridge), a [Republican](http://everything2.com/title/Republican) [sniper](http://everything2.com/title/sniper) lay watching. Beside him lay his [rifle](http://everything2.com/title/rifle) and over his shoulders was slung a pair of field glasses. His face was the face of a student, thin and ascetic, but his eyes had the cold gleam of the fanatic. They were deep and thoughtful, the eyes of a man who is used to looking at death.

He was eating a [sandwich](http://everything2.com/title/sandwich) hungrily. He had eaten nothing since morning. He had been too excited to eat. He finished the [sandwich](http://everything2.com/title/sandwich), and, taking a flask of whisky from his pocket, he took a short drought. Then he returned the flask to his pocket. He paused for a moment, considering whether he should risk a [smoke](http://everything2.com/title/smoke). It was dangerous. The flash might be seen in the darkness, and there were enemies watching. He decided to take the risk.

Placing a [cigarette](http://everything2.com/title/cigarette) between his lips, he struck a match, inhaled the [smoke](http://everything2.com/title/smoke) hurriedly and put out the light. Almost immediately, a [bullet](http://everything2.com/title/bullet) flattened itself against the [parapet](http://everything2.com/title/parapet) of the roof. The [sniper](http://everything2.com/title/sniper) took another whiff and put out the [cigarette](http://everything2.com/title/cigarette). Then he swore softly and crawled away to the left.

Cautiously he raised himself and peered over the [parapet](http://everything2.com/title/parapet). There was a flash and a [bullet](http://everything2.com/title/bullet) whizzed over his head. He dropped immediately. He had seen the flash. It came from the opposite side of the street.

He rolled over the roof to a chimneystack in the rear, and slowly drew himself up behind it, until his eyes were level with the top of the [parapet](http://everything2.com/title/parapet). There was nothing to be seen - just the dim outline of the opposite housetop against the blue sky. His enemy was under cover.

Just then an armored car came across the bridge and advanced slowly up the street. It stopped on the opposite side of the street, fifty yards ahead. The [sniper](http://everything2.com/title/sniper) could hear the dull panting of the motor. His heart beat faster. It was an enemy car. He wanted to fire, but he knew it was useless. His [bullet](http://everything2.com/title/bullet)s would never pierce the steel that covered the gray monster.

Then round the corner of a [side street](http://everything2.com/title/side+street) came an old woman, her head covered by a tattered shawl. She began to talk to the man in the [turret](http://everything2.com/title/turret) of the car. She was pointing to the roof where the [sniper](http://everything2.com/title/sniper) lay. An informer.

The [turret](http://everything2.com/title/turret) opened. A man's head and shoulders appeared, looking toward the [sniper](http://everything2.com/title/sniper). The [sniper](http://everything2.com/title/sniper) raised his [rifle](http://everything2.com/title/rifle) and fired. The head fell heavily on the [turret](http://everything2.com/title/turret) wall. The woman darted toward the [side street](http://everything2.com/title/side+street). The [sniper](http://everything2.com/title/sniper) fired again. The woman whirled round and fell with a shriek into the gutter.

Suddenly from the opposite roof a shot rang out and the [sniper](http://everything2.com/title/sniper) dropped his [rifle](http://everything2.com/title/rifle) with a curse. The [rifle](http://everything2.com/title/rifle) clattered to the roof. The [sniper](http://everything2.com/title/sniper) thought the noise would wake the dead. He stooped to pick the [rifle](http://everything2.com/title/rifle) up. He couldn't lift it. His forearm was dead. "I'm hit," he muttered.

Dropping flat onto the roof, he crawled back to the [parapet](http://everything2.com/title/parapet). With his left hand he felt the injured right forearm. The blood was oozing through the sleeve of his coat. There was no pain - just a deadened sensation, as if the arm had been cut off.

Quickly he drew his knife from his pocket, opened it on the breastwork of the [parapet](http://everything2.com/title/parapet), and ripped open the sleeve. There was a small hole where the [bullet](http://everything2.com/title/bullet) had entered. On the other side there was no hole. The [bullet](http://everything2.com/title/bullet) had lodged in the bone. It must have fractured it. He bent the arm below the wound. The arm bent back easily. He ground his teeth overcome the pain.

Then taking out his field dressing, he ripped open the packet with his knife. He broke the neck of the iodine bottle and let the bitter fluid drip into the wound. A paroxysm of pain swept through him. He placed the cotton wadding over the wound and wrapped the dressing over it. He tied the ends with his teeth.

Then he lay still against the [parapet](http://everything2.com/title/parapet), and, closing his eyes, he made an effort of will to overcome the pain.

In the street beneath all was still. The armored car had retired speedily over the bridge, with the [machine gun](http://everything2.com/title/machine+gun)ner's head hanging lifeless over the [turret](http://everything2.com/title/turret). The woman's corpse lay still in the gutter.

The [sniper](http://everything2.com/title/sniper) lay still for a long time nursing his wounded arm and planning escape. Morning must not find him wounded on the roof. The enemy on the opposite roof covered his escape. He must kill that enemy and he could not use his [rifle](http://everything2.com/title/rifle). He had only a revolver to do it. Then he thought of a plan.

Taking off his cap, he placed it over the muzzle of his [rifle](http://everything2.com/title/rifle). Then he pushed the [rifle](http://everything2.com/title/rifle) slowly upward over the [parapet](http://everything2.com/title/parapet), until the cap was visible from the opposite side of the street. Almost immediately there was a report, and a [bullet](http://everything2.com/title/bullet) pierced the center of the cap. The [sniper](http://everything2.com/title/sniper) slanted the [rifle](http://everything2.com/title/rifle) forward. The cap clipped down into the street. Then catching the [rifle](http://everything2.com/title/rifle) in the middle, the [sniper](http://everything2.com/title/sniper) dropped his left hand over the roof and let it hang, lifelessly. After a few moments he let the [rifle](http://everything2.com/title/rifle) drop to the street. Then he sank to the roof, dragging his hand with him.

Crawling quickly to his feet, he peered up at the corner of the roof. His ruse had succeeded. The other [sniper](http://everything2.com/title/sniper), seeing the cap and [rifle](http://everything2.com/title/rifle) fall, thought that he had killed his man. He was now standing before a row of chimney pots, looking across, with his head clearly silhouetted against the western sky.

The Republican [sniper](http://everything2.com/title/sniper) smiled and lifted his revolver above the edge of the [parapet](http://everything2.com/title/parapet). The distance was about fifty yards--a hard shot in the dim light, and his right arm was paining him like a thousand devils. He took a steady aim. His hand trembled with eagerness. Pressing his lips together, he took a deep breath through his nostrils and fired. He was almost deafened with the report and his arm shook with the recoil.

Then when the [smoke](http://everything2.com/title/smoke) cleared, he peered across and uttered a cry of joy. His enemy had been hit. He was reeling over the [parapet](http://everything2.com/title/parapet) in his death agony. He struggled to keep his feet, but he was slowly falling forward as if in a dream. The [rifle](http://everything2.com/title/rifle) fell from his grasp, hit the [parapet](http://everything2.com/title/parapet), fell over, bounded off the pole of a barber's shop beneath and then clattered on the pavement.

Then the [dying](http://everything2.com/title/dying) man on the roof crumpled up and fell forward. The body turned over and over in space and hit the ground with a dull thud. Then it lay still.

The [sniper](http://everything2.com/title/sniper) looked at his enemy falling and he shuddered. The lust of battle died in him. He became bitten by remorse. The sweat stood out in beads on his forehead. Weakened by his wound and the long summer day of fasting and watching on the roof, he revolted from the sight of the shattered mass of his dead enemy. His teeth chattered, he began to gibber to himself, cursing the war, cursing himself, cursing everybody.

He looked at the smoking revolver in his hand, and with an oath he hurled it to the roof at his feet. The revolver went off with a concussion and the [bullet](http://everything2.com/title/bullet) whizzed past the [sniper](http://everything2.com/title/sniper)'s head. He was frightened back to his senses by the shock. His nerves steadied. The [cloud](http://everything2.com/title/cloud) of fear scattered from his mind and he laughed.

Taking the whiskey flask from his pocket, he emptied it in a drought. He felt reckless under the influence of the spirit. He decided to leave the roof now and look for his company commander, to report. Everywhere around was quiet. There was not much danger in going through the streets. He picked up his revolver and put it in his pocket. Then he crawled down through the skylight to the house underneath.

When the [sniper](http://everything2.com/title/sniper) reached the laneway on the street level, he felt a sudden curiosity as to the identity of the enemy [sniper](http://everything2.com/title/sniper) whom he had killed. He decided that he was a good shot, whoever he was. He wondered did he know him. Perhaps he had been in his own company before the split in the [army](http://everything2.com/title/army). He decided to risk going over to have a look at him. He peered around the corner into [O'Connell Street](http://everything2.com/title/O%2527Connell+Street). In the upper part of the street there was heavy firing, but around here all was quiet.

The [sniper](http://everything2.com/title/sniper) darted across the street. A [machine gun](http://everything2.com/title/machine+gun) tore up the ground around him with a hail of [bullet](http://everything2.com/title/bullet)s, but he escaped. He threw himself face downward beside the corpse. The [machine gun](http://everything2.com/title/machine+gun) stopped.

Then the [sniper](http://everything2.com/title/sniper) turned over the dead body and looked into his [brother](http://everything2.com/title/brother)'s face.