[**The Sniper**](http://www.classicshorts.com/bib.html#sniper)

**by** [**LIAM O'FLAHERTY**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liam_O%27Flaherty)

The long June twilight faded into night. Dublin lay enveloped in darkness but for the dim light of the moon that shone through fleecy clouds, casting a pale light as of approaching dawn over the streets and the dark waters of the Liffey. Around the beleaguered Four Courts the heavy guns roared. Here and there through the city, machine guns and rifles broke the silence of the night, spasmodically, like dogs barking on lone farms. Republicans and Free Staters were waging civil war.

On a rooftop near O'Connell Bridge, a Republican sniper lay watching. Beside him lay his 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 hungrily. He had eaten nothing since morning. He had been too excited to eat. He finished the sandwich, and, taking a flask of whiskey 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. 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 between his lips, he struck a match, inhaled the smoke hurriedly and put out the light. Almost immediately, a bullet flattened itself against the parapet of the roof. The sniper took another whiff and put out the cigarette. Then he swore softly and crawled away to the left.

Cautiously he raised himself and peered over the parapet. There was a flash and a 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 chimney stack in the rear, and slowly drew himself up behind it, until his eyes were level with the top of the 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 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 bullets would never pierce the steel that covered the gray monster.

Then round the corner of a side street came an old woman, her head covered by a tattered shawl. She began to talk to the man in the turret of the car. She was pointing to the roof where the sniper lay. An informer.

The turret opened. A man's head and shoulders appeared, looking toward the sniper. The sniper raised his rifle and fired. The head fell heavily on the turret wall. The woman darted toward the side street. The 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 dropped his rifle with a curse. The rifle clattered to the roof. The sniper thought the noise would wake the dead. He stooped to pick the 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. 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, and ripped open the sleeve. There was a small hole where the bullet had entered. On the other side there was no hole. The 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 to 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, 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 gunner's head hanging lifeless over the turret. The woman's corpse lay still in the gutter.

The 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. 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. Then he pushed the rifle slowly upward over the parapet, until the cap was visible from the opposite side of the street. Almost immediately there was a report, and a bullet pierced the center of the cap. The sniper slanted the rifle forward. The cap clipped down into the street. Then catching the rifle in the middle, the sniper dropped his left hand over the roof and let it hang, lifelessly. After a few moments he let the 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, seeing the cap and 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 smiled and lifted his revolver above the edge of the 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 cleared, he peered across and uttered a cry of joy. His enemy had been hit. He was reeling over the parapet in his death agony. He struggled to keep his feet, but he was slowly falling forward as if in a dream. The rifle fell from his grasp, hit the parapet, fell over, bounded off the pole of a barber's shop beneath and then clattered on the pavement.

Then the 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 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 whizzed past the sniper's head. He was

frightened back to his senses by the shock. His nerves steadied. The cloud of fear scattered from his mind and he laughed.

Taking the whiskey flask from his pocket, he emptied it 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 reached the laneway on the street level, he felt a sudden curiosity as to the identity of the enemy 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.

He decided to risk going over to have a look at him. He peered around the corner into O'Connell

Street. In the upper part of the street there was heavy firing, but around here all was quiet.

The sniper darted across the street. A machine gun tore up the ground around him with a hail of bullets, but he escaped. He threw himself face downward beside the corpse. The machine gun stopped.

Then the sniper turned over the dead body and looked into his brother's face.

***The Story of an Hour* Adapted from a short story by Kate Chopin**

1 Knowing that Mrs. Mallard was afflicted with heart trouble, great care was taken to break to her as gently as possible the news of her husband’s death.

2 It was her sister Josephine who told her, in broken sentences. By trying to avoid the truth, she revealed the truth. Her husband’s friend Richard was there, too, near her. It was he who had been at the newspaper office when news of the railroad disaster was received, with Brently Mallard’s name leading the list of those killed. Richard had taken just enough time to ensure, through a second telegram, that the news of his friend’s death was true, before he hurried to prevent Mrs. Mallard from hearing the sad message from someone less careful or tender.

3 She did not respond to the story as many women would have, with a paralysed inability to accept reality. She wept at once, with sudden, wild abandonment, in her sister’s arms. When the storm of grief had spent itself she went to her room alone. She would have no one follow her.

4 There stood, facing the open window, a comfortable, roomy armchair. Into this she sank, pressed down by a physical exhaustion that haunted her body and seemed to reach her soul.

5 She could see in the open square before her house the tops of trees that were all a quiver with the new spring life. The delicious breath of rain was in the air. In the street below, children were shouting at play. The notes of a distant song which someone was singing reached her faintly, and countless sparrows were twittering in the eaves.

6 There were patches of blue sky showing here and there through the clouds that had met and piled one above the other in the west facing her window.

7 She sat with her head thrown back upon the cushion of the chair, quite motionless, except when a sob came up into her throat and shook her, as a child who has cried itself to sleep continues to sob in its dreams.

8 She was young, with a fair, calm face, whose lines revealed control and even a certain strength. But now there was a dull stare in her eyes, and her gaze was fixed on a distant point in one of those patches of blue sky. She was not reflecting or soul-searching in her stillness. She was, rather, on the verge of a brilliant thought.

9 There was something coming to her and she was waiting for it, fearfully. What was it? She did not know; it was too subtle and too mysterious to name. But she felt it, creeping out of the sky, reaching toward her through the sounds, the scents, the color that filled the air.

10 Now her bosom rose and fell tumultuously. She was beginning to recognize the thought that was creeping up on her, and she was struggling to beat it back with her will.

11 When she surrendered herself to it, a little whispered word escaped her slightly parted lips. She

said it over and over under her breath: “free, free, free!” The blank stare and the look of terror that had followed it had gone from her eyes. They were now lively and bright. Her pulses beat fast, and the coursing blood warmed and relaxed every inch of her body.

12 She knew that she would weep again when she saw his kind, tender hands folded in death, and his face, that had always looked upon her with love, now fixed and grey and dead. But she saw beyond that bitter moment the long years ahead that would belong to her entirely. And she opened and spread her arms out to them in welcome.

13 There would be no one else to live for during those coming years. She would live for herself. There would be no one controlling her life, exerting power, or intruding upon her free will. It didn’t matter whether such an act was intended to be kind or cruel – it was a crime. That was how she looked at it in that brief moment of insight.

14 And yet she had loved him – sometimes. Often she had not. What did it matter! What place did love have in this moment of self-realization which was the strongest impulse of her being!

15 “Free! Body and soul free!” She kept whispering.

16 Josephine was kneeling in front of the closed door with her lips to the keyhole, begging to be let in, “Louise, open the door! Please! You will make yourself sick with grief.” No; she was drinking the very elixir\* of life through that open window.

17 Her imagination was running through all those days ahead of her. Spring days, and summer days, and all sorts of days with blue skies that would be her own. She breathed a quick prayer that life might be long. It was only yesterday she had trembled to think that life might be long.

18 She arose finally and opened the door to her sister’s pleadings. There was a feverish triumph in her eyes, and without realizing it, she stood tall like the goddess of Victory. She put her arm around her sister’s waist and they descended the stairs. Richard stood waiting for them at the bottom.

19 Someone was turning a key in the front door. It was her husband, Brently Mallard who entered, a little rumpled and messy from travel, calmly carrying his briefcase and umbrella. He had been far from the scene of the accident, and did not even know there was one. He stood amazed at his wife’s piercing cry.

21 When the doctors came they said she had died of a heart attack – of joy that killed.

\*elixir – a potion thought to prolong life

**POETRY *The Mate***

I was only sixteen And sat trying not to cry in the woods. I had had no luck And the October sun was nearly gone.

5 Uncle Rance, over to my right, Already had a dozen partridges, And Lute McSween, a quarter of a mile to the left, A brace of ducks. I stood up, wiped my eyes,

10 And tiptoed into a little clearing With only the sound of hidden insects To accompany my ritual stalk1 and breath. Suddenly my heart leaped into my hand As I saw a movement not fifty feet away

15 The sunlight filtering through the leaves To envelop the gorgeous creature In a golden-brown haze, Strange, proud scion2 of sky and earth, Its neck firm and erect,

20 Its tuft of wing flecked with a lost-world tint Of rainbow trout in a pool of ferns. There was no sound But the beating of two wild hearts. With the ancient thirst ripe within me

25 My finger squeezed the lock of my 20-guage3 And the long-tailed ring-necked pheasant Surprised in its solitary foraging Collapsed like a rag doll The prize was mine!

30 Why did I not move? I saw something greenish-blue and red Come running from the brush In a frenzy of clucking Speaking to the lump of bone, flesh and feathers,

35 Seeking to lead it to safety. Rance called from the farther hill But I did not answer. I looked at my gun. The woods and the bird and I

40 Were equally still.

*James Stokely*

1my ritual stalk – way of hunting, slowly and cautiously

2scion -child, offspring

320-guage -a hunting rifle

Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Date:

***The Sniper* Selected Response Questions**

1. What kind of person is the sniper?

a. a careless fighter of the Republican army.

b. a smart Republican sniper who is used to looking at death.

c. innocent and kind.

d. an informer who lets others know where the snipers are located.

2. What is the dilemma (problem) the sniper is faced with in trying to shoot at the other sniper?

3. How does he overcome the problem?

5. The moment of most suspense for the reader is…

***Hint:*** *Parallel structure means using the same pattern of words to show that two or more ideas have the same level of importance. This can happen at the word, phrase, or clause level. The usual way to join parallel structures is with the use of coordinating*[*conjunctions*](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/598/01/)*such as "and" or "or."*

***The Story of an Hour* Selected Response Items: Circle the letter of the correct or BEST answer.**

1. From which point of view is this short story narrated?

a. First person

b. Second person

c. Third person limited

d. Third person omniscient

2. *“Now her bosom rose and fell tumultuously.”* (paragraph 10). Based on the context in which the word *“tumultuously”* is found, what is its meaning?

a. Joyously

b. Sadly

c. Weakly

d. Wildly

3. *“The delicious breath of rain was in the air.”* (paragraph 5). Which literary device is used to create this image?

a. Allusion

b. Juxtaposition

c. Metaphor

d. Personification

4. In the opening paragraph, the reader is told that “*Mrs. Mallard was afflicted with heart trouble.”* Which plot device has the author created in this line?

a. Climax

b. Denouement

c. Flashback

d. Foreshadowing

5. Which type of conflict is developed as the main conflict in this story?

a. External

b. Internal

c. Interpersonal

d. Societal

6. Examine the following sentence in context: *“And she opened and spread her arms out to them in welcome*.” (paragraph 12) To what does the pronoun *“them”* refer?

a. Bitter moments

b. Josephine and Richard

c. Long years ahead

d. Tender hands folded in death

7. Which stylistic device is employed in the following sentence: *“There would be no one controlling her life, exerting power, or intruding upon her free will.”* (paragraph 13)

a. Brevity

b. Parallel structure

c. Placement

d. Unusual punctuation

**Constructed Response Items: ANSWER BELOW**

1. The image of a “sky” is repeated in the story (paragraphs 6, 8, 9 and 17). What does the sky symbolize in this story? You must refer to the story in your answer and use text evidence.

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***The Mate* Selected Response Questions**

**Circle the letter of the correct or BEST answer.**

10. Who is the “mate” referred to in the title of the poem?

a. A pheasant

b. Luke McSween

c. Uncle Rance

d. The speaker

11. *“Suddenly my heart leaped into my hand.”* (line 13). Which literary device is represented in this line?

a. Apostrophe

b. Figurative language

c. Hyperbole

d. Literal language

12. Line 24 refers to *“the ancient thirst”.* To what does this allude?

a. Greed

b. Insanity

c. Instinct to kill

d. The speaker is hot and thirsty

13. What atmosphere is created through the setting of the first 23 lines?

a. Calm

b. Confusion

c. Eeriness

d. Excitement

**Linking Question: ANSWER BELOW**

14. For each of the selections, *The Sniper, The Story of an Hour,* AND *The Mate*, identify and explain the change of mood experienced by the main character. With TWO references to EACH piece, show how imagery is used to effectively illustrate these changes in mood.

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