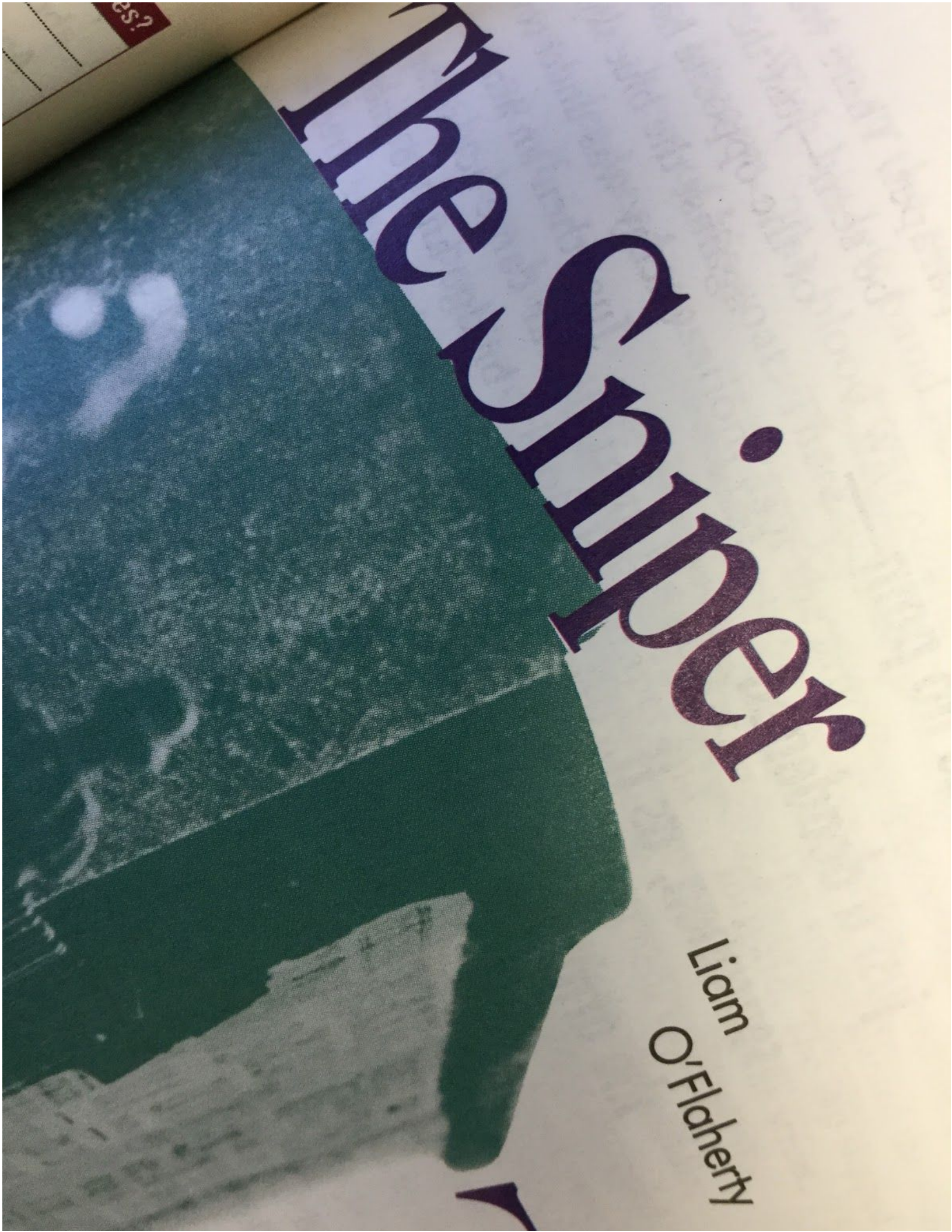


The Simple

Liam
O'Flaherty



The Sniper

Short Story by LIAM O'FLAHERTY



“There was a flash and a bullet whizzed over his head.”

Connect to Your Life

Enemies What causes people to become enemies? Why is world peace so difficult to achieve? Think about different issues that might cause one person or a group of people to become your enemy. Using a chart like the one shown, list some of these issues. Then number them to show how valid or important each one is to you, with number 1 being the most important, or most likely to make someone your enemy. Discuss your opinions with classmates.

What Causes People to Become Enemies?

Issues	Level of Importance

Build Background

Troubles “The Sniper” takes place in Dublin, Ireland, during a civil war that erupted in 1922–1923. This war, which killed many innocent civilians, resulted from internal opposition to Ireland’s move toward independence from England. The Irish Free Staters wanted Ireland to govern itself but still remain a part of the British Empire. The Irish Republican Army (or the Republicans) wanted complete independence from England.

WORDS TO KNOW Vocabulary Preview

ascetic	lodge
beleaguered	spasmodically
enveloped	reel
fanatic	remorse
identity	ruse

Focus Your Reading

LITERARY ANALYSIS SUSPENSE

Suspense is the excitement or tension that readers feel as they get involved in a story and become eager to know the outcome. Notice how the author builds suspense in this passage from the story you are about to read:

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.

As you read this story, look for ways in which O’Flaherty creates suspense.

ACTIVE READING NOTING DETAILS

To create suspense in a story, a writer usually includes **details** that are intended to arouse the reader’s curiosity about what will happen next. Your enjoyment and understanding of any story can be broadened if you pay attention to these details.



READER’S NOTEBOOK As you read this story, jot down some of the details about the setting, the characters, and the action that help create suspense.

The Sniper

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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 Courts¹ 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.

1. **Four Courts:** the central court building of Dublin—a scene of intense fighting during the Irish civil war.

WORDS **enveloped** (ĕn-vĕl'əpt) *adj.* covered; wrapped **envelop** *v.*
TO **beleaguered** (bĕ-lĕ'gĕrd) *adj.* surrounded; besieged **beleaguer** *v.*
KNOW **spasmodically** (spāz-mōd'ĭ-klĕ) *adv.* at irregular intervals; intermittently

On a roof-top near O'Connell Bridge, a Republican sniper lay watching. Beside him lay his rifle and over his shoulders were 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 draught. 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 parapet² 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

**There was no pain—
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cut off.**

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 grey 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 towards 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 stopped to pick the rifle up. He couldn't lift it. His forearm was dead. . . . He muttered, "I'm hit."

2. parapet (pär'ə-pÿt): a low wall along the edge of a roof or balcony.

Dropping flat on to 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 paroxysm³ of pain swept through him. He placed the cotton wadding over the wound and wrapped the dressing over it. He tied the end 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 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.

3. **paroxysm** (pär'ək-sīz'əm): sudden attack.

4. **report**: an explosive noise; bang.

Taking off his cap, he placed it over the muzzle of his rifle. Then he pushed the rifle slowly upwards over the parapet, until the cap was visible from the opposite side of the street. Almost immediately there was a report,⁴ and a bullet pierced the center of the cap.

The sniper slanted the rifle forward. The cap slipped 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 the left, 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



WORDS
TO
KNOW

lodge (lōj) *v.* to become embedded or stuck
ruse (rōos) *n.* a trick

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. . . . 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.⁵

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 to 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 revolted⁶ from the sight of the shattered mass of his dead enemy. His teeth chattered. He began to gibber⁷ to himself, cursing the war, cursing himself, cursing everybody.

A 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 the concussion,⁸ 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 at a draught. He felt reckless under the influence of the spirits.⁹ He decided to leave the roof 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 sky-light 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 if he knew 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 downwards beside the corpse. The machine gun stopped.

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



5. **recoil**: the jerking back of a gun when it is fired.

6. **revolted**: turned away in disgust.

7. **gibber** (jīb'ər): to speak rapidly and incoherently.

8. **concussion**: impact.

9. **spirits**: liquor.

WORDS TO KNOW **reel** (rēl) *v.* to fall off balance; lurch
remorse (rĭ-mōrs') *n.* bitter regret
identity (i-dĕn'tī-tē) *n.* the quality of being a unique person; individuality