

On Lacking the Killer Instinct

One hare, absorbed, sitting still
Right in the grassy middle of the track,
I met when I fled up into the hills, that time
My father was dying in a hospital –
I see her suddenly again, borne back
By the morning paper's prize photograph:
Two greyhounds tumbling over, absurdly gross,
While the hare shoots off to the left, her bright eye
Full not only of speed and fear
But surely in the moment a glad power,



Like my father's, running from a lorry-load of soldiers
In nineteen twenty-one, nineteen years old, never
Such gladness, he said, cornering in the narrow road
Between high hedges, in summer dusk.

The hare

Like him should never have been coursed,
But, clever, she gets off; another day
She'll fool the stupid dogs, double back
On her own scent, downhill, and choose her time
To spring away out of the frame, all while
The pack is labouring up.

The lorry was growling

And he was clever, he saw a house

And risked an open kitchen door. The soldiers

Found six people in a country kitchen, one

Drying his face, dazed-looking, the towel

Half covering his face. The lorry left,

The people let him sleep there, he came out

Into a blissful dawn. Should he have chanced that door?

If the sheltering house had been burned down, what good

Could all his bright running have done

For those that harboured him?



And I should not

Have run away, but I went back to the city

Next morning, washed in brown bog water, and

I thought about the hare, in her hour of ease.

