

War of Independence: unrecorded incident

Willy Murphy is not in the war.
He carts gravel and clay
along the birdsong roads of Kildare,
milks a cow, can shoe a horse
draws turf from the Bog of Allen.
He is not in the war. The Tans do not know this,
nor do they care: all are guilty.
When he hears the lorries stop outside
he leaves his bed at midnight,
flits by the hedge of the field
to the sheltered pond at the far corner, slips in.
He thinks of men dragged behind lorries,
torment in the barracks, an infant shot for sport.
The lorries start up. Engines fade towards the Hill of Caragh.
But sometimes they leave men with guns behind, to wait.
He waits. Mud seeks to suck him into its black mouth
whispers your time came then, you have no business here.
The lorries do not come back.
The dark lightens and a bird sings.
Another day in the story begins.

From Padraig O'Morain's collection The Blue Guitar (Salmon, 2011)

Note: This poem recounts my grandfather Willy Murphy's night hiding in a pond in a sheltered corner of a field after the Black and Tans arrived at his home during the War of Independence. The Black and Tans, members of a paramilitary force established by the British Prime Minister Lloyd George, were known and feared for their violations of human rights.