

An excerpt from
DAYS WITHOUT END
by Sebastian Barry

The troopers came back up the hill lathered in blood and gore. Spattered with tendrils of veins. Happy as demons in the commission of demon's work. Exultant and shouting to each other. Drenched in a slaughterhouse of glory. Never heard such strange laughter. Big hill-high sky-wide laughter. Clapping of backs. Words so black they were blacker than dried blood. Remorse not a whit. Delight and life perfected. Slaughter most desirable. Vigor and life. Strength and heart's desire. Culmination of soldiering. Day of righteous reckoning. And yet in the days going back across the plains there was just deep exhaustion and queer silence. The mules drawing the guns with earnest intent. The mule-skinners herding them on. Troopers who had gathered back their mounts wearily submitting. A gopher-hole tripping up a horse enough to send a trooper falling like a greenhorn. Can't even eat their grub on the middle stop. Can't even remember their private prayers. Killing hurts the heart and soils the soul. And Captain Sowell looking as angry as old Zeus and as sick as a poisoned dog. He don't talk to no one and no one talking to him.

The other silent creature be Winona. I keeping her stuck close to me. I don't trust anyone. What we walked through was the strike-out of her kindred. Scrubbed off with a metal brush like the dirt and dried blood on a soldier's jacket. Metal brush of strange and implacable hatred. Even the major. Same would be if soldiers fell on my family in Sligo and cut out our parts. When that old ancient Cromwell come to Ireland he said he would leave nothing alive. Said the Irish were vermin and devils. Clean out the country for good people to step into. Make a paradise. Now we make this American paradise I guess. Guess it be strange so many Irish boys doing this work. Ain't that the way of the world. No such item as a virtuous people. Winona the only soul not thrown on the bonfire. She seen the worst now and seen it before. It makes her silent, so silent the silence of winter is like a clattering. No words in her now. I got to keep her close. Got to get back to John Cole and keep her close. I ask her plain what she wants me to do. I ask her three times and get no answer. Try a fourth time. Tennessee, Tennessee, she says.

UNREVISED AND UNPUBLISHED PROOF. PLEASE DO NOT QUOTE FOR
PUBLICATION UNTIL VERIFIED WITH THE FINISHED BOOK. THIS TEXT
IS NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION TO THE PUBLIC.

PUBLICATION DATE 1/24/16