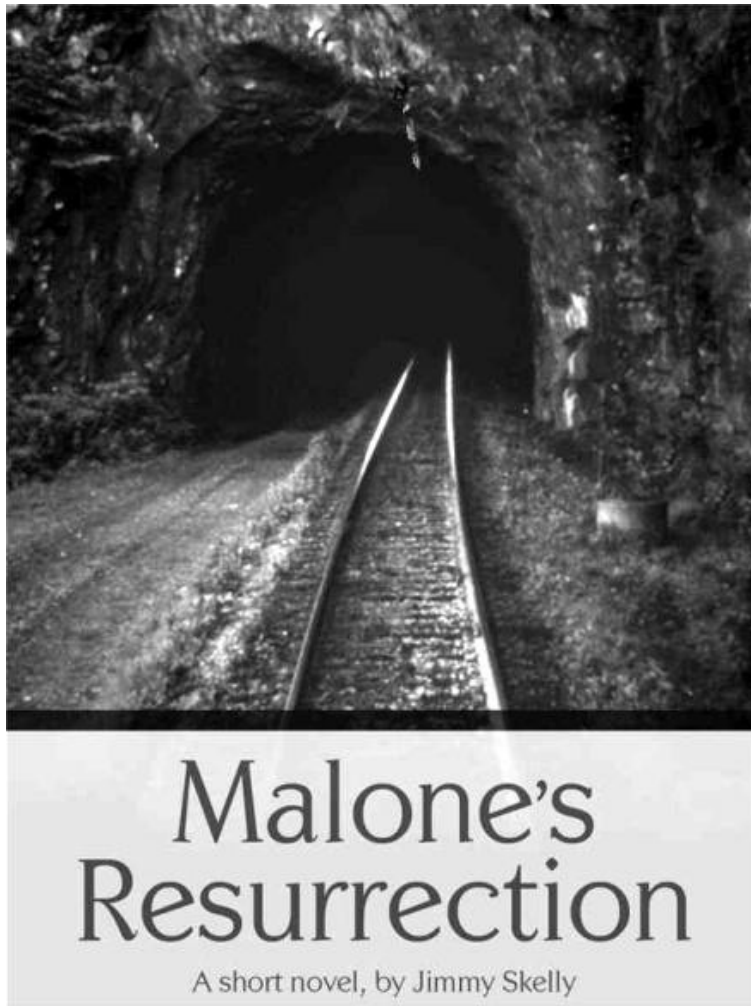




Malone's Resurrection

Chapter 1

Following one of those rare late summer days when the sun had no place to hide until after it started to fall, before the onset of dusk, the impatience of children spilt out onto the street.

Boys led by their imaginings of adventures in far off and more exciting places scrambled amid mounds rising from the rubble. For some their fights had been territorial, to gain and hold ground, to see who could remain longest king of the castle, while those younger or less inclined searched for treasure that may be hidden beneath any debris. In what appeared to be the natural order of things, while the boys fought or foraged the girls skipped or played hop-scotch on the pavement nearer to their homes.

Windows and doors almost met in pairs beneath idle chimneys lodged upon adjoining slate roofs. Passing beneath them a youth stopped when he'd reached the corner to take him into his street. He looked across at the children playing on the waste-land where a small number of terraced houses had stood. The skyline had been lowered to the rooftops that had at one time been hidden behind them and

where the shadow broke the red reflection from the sun could be seen squinting from some of the upper, facing windows.

He turned to cross the road. Stepping down from the pavement his attention was drawn to the girl sitting within the shadow of an open doorway on the floor above the step. The heels of her bare feet rested upon the pavement and her legs, stretched out before her, were slightly parted allowing the hem of a faded, floral patterned dress to dip between her knees. Her shoulders rose when she leant back on her arms splaying her hands on the floor behind and beneath the bodice of her dress her developing breasts became more noticeable. Absent-mindedly she watched the boys at play while they fought to gain and hold the highest ground. Losing his position, one boy noticed the youth before he reached the far side. He pointed.

'Look!' he yelled. 'It's Quasimodo'.

Not wishing to attract any further attention, the youth chose to ignore the boy pointing and lowered his head until he reached the pavement near where the girl sat. She changed her position to allow him to pass. He did so without speaking and his senses were awakened by the musky scent of her skin. He glanced down to briefly look upon her, her full lips, and afraid to look back he longed for any excuse to return to her until he reached his front door.

His mother led him into the vestibule, passing the first room of the two-up and two-down which overlooked the street. The door to the front room remained closed to most entering the house and the room hadn't been used since his father's passing. Inside it smelled of the geraniums his mother nurtured in pots on a low table beneath the window, also of the furniture polish which she applied constantly to the table, the veneer of an upright piano and the utility side-board. Small framed photographs of his father arrayed along the top of the mantel-piece combined with the scents in the room to become a memento mori. A narrow flight of stairs led up to the bedrooms. The other ground floor room was the living room where the boy spent most of his time reading while listening to the wireless which sat upon a green mantle covering a drop-leaf table beneath the window overlooking the backyard. The kitchen doubled as a bathroom in summer. Behind a drying rack, which could be lowered from the ceiling, a tin bath hung from a bracket fixed to the wall. In the yard outside, the lavatory was the furthest outbuilding from the house, requiring a short brisk walk to reach it during the winter evenings.

Returning from it, Timothy stripped down to wash in the kitchen sink before saying goodnight to his mother and then went up the stairs to his bedroom. He climbed out of his trousers before crawling between the sheets and recalling how it had been at school before the summer break, he preferred to turn his thoughts to more pleasant things. He turned to embrace his pillow and thought of the girl he'd walked passed while he'd been outside earlier. While he slept she approached him in a dream. The sun passed through her thin cotton dress to silhouette her adolescent frame. She came closer; lifting her bare feet above the low grass until she'd reached him. She looked towards the ground before raising the hem of her dress to kneel. Invitingly she lifted her face upwards before reclining back on her hands and parting her knees.

The next morning he awoke from an experience he longed to return to. But outside, soon the quiet that had prevailed while the schools had been closed would be replaced by the excitement of children meeting again after so long. Some would gather in small groups, others would exchange things and all chatted eagerly wanting to share their summer adventures with one another.

Churchill and Fitzpatrick – God alone only knows how – had developed a mutually exclusive relationship. Although neither could dominate the other, neither could stop trying and because they kept their rivalry private, they'd been pretty much left to their own devices. Fitzpatrick, deep in concentration, bent to one knee, coiled his right arm in an attempt to hit the marble in the gutter ahead with his own. Timothy, being of an age and difference to be left to walk alone, passed by and heard Churchill's remark of

'You're fudging.'

Because of how unbalanced Fitzpatrick had been trying to take his prize made fudging seem unworthy of his effort. His marble skedaddled from the gutter to disappear down the drain taking his attention from the game. Standing up and looking around, he became aware of how quiet everything had become. He rushed to catch up with Churchill until they got to the school gates

A teacher, standing in front of the lines of boys already assembled, was about to address them. Sneaking quietly through the gate and up the steps with a forlorn hope that they wouldn't be noticed Churchill and Fitzpatrick entered the playground. Watching them approach there was almost a collective murmur from some of those in the same class. Although their tardy appearance hadn't been anticipated, it came as no surprise.

Bearing witness to something of this the teacher made a point of letting everyone know when he checked his watch and then exclaimed loudly, 'My God, you're almost early!'

Pointing to a line of boys he continued,

'Take your places behind that fine figure of a youth at the back.'

Not by any stretch of his imagination could Timothy regard himself as such, and the teacher's unkind attempt at humour reminded him of something he would sooner ignore. At first humiliated he became annoyed while watching Churchill and Fitzpatrick ambling towards him. Their hands deep in their pockets, their shoulders hunched, but they chose to walk this way. Once they were standing in line behind Timothy, the teacher blew on his whistle.

The youngest class of boys left the playground first. Waiting beside the door until all had entered, the teacher followed Churchill into the building. The familiar sights, sounds and smells of the school building enveloped them. To those returning that familiarity brought with it the realisation that the long summer days would soon be coming to an end.

Reaching the top of the stone steps, the echoing tone of the boys' footsteps changed when they stepped onto the wooden landing overlooking the main hall. Each group of boys entered a new classroom. Those new to the school entered the first while those in their final term entered the last. Nonetheless, the arrangement of desks in each would always be the same. A bare wooden floor tiered up in four stages until reaching the burgundy-tiled wall at the back of the classroom. Aligned across each stage and going from wall to wall four desks rose one behind the other, with sufficient space either side to allow the boys or the teacher to ascend and descend between them. Once the boys had settled quietly, the teacher reached down to the ledge beneath the blackboard along the wall facing them for his cane. Holding it at either end, he bent it towards the centre in the manner of a swordsman with a rapier about to demonstrate his prowess. Releasing one end he brought the cane down to indicate, by tapping upon them, four stacks of exercise books on the front desk. The colour of their covers at that time being the only indication of what each would be used for.

'Malone, take two of each to each of the desks'.

Being brought to the attention of the class once again, but this time by being given some responsibility, made Timothy feel more assured. But there had been one who felt strongly about being overlooked. Dixon was a malicious youth and bully. He had ginger hair and his only change from an expression of contempt was a sneer, which he accompanied with a snigger whenever he'd been amused.

Returning to the front desk after his final delivery, the teacher again seconded Timothy, this time to take the ink bottle around the classroom and to carefully fill both ink-wells on each desk. Stepping down while passing Dixon presented Dixon with an opportunity he couldn't resist. His foot shot out, catching Timothy's leg as he stepped down. To prevent himself from falling or dropping the bottle, Timothy threw himself upon the desk beneath him.

'Sir, Sir'. Churchill whined. 'E's spilt ink all over our new books'.

The teacher fired a glare in their direction. 'Hughes!' Thinking he'd been caught in the act Dixon froze, but when the teacher continued with. 'Take the bottle from Malone and carry on'. It took him from his previous anxiety and he expressed it in obsequious tones, replying 'Yes, Sir'.

Neither apologising nor complaining because of the incident, Timothy returned to his desk and sat down. He felt the blood drain from his lips, but remained focused, not wanting to look up into the faces of anyone looking over towards him. When he did, he saw Dixon on his way back to his own desk, strutting gloatingly with the air of a deceitful prima Donna, his eyes directed meaningfully over towards Timothy.

There were two breaks during the morning class. The milk break had been introduced when it had been generally considered that children from poorer families would benefit from further nutrition until being withdrawn by a more inconsiderate administration. Shortly afterwards came the play break when the boys could leave the class-room to go down to the playground and toilets, known to all as the yard.

The prefects from last term had left to find their places in the adult world and had been replaced by Terry and Ely. Not that there'd been anything surprising in this, it had been an obvious choice. Not one of the boys at the school, nor the teachers for that matter, would want to fall foul of either. Ely was part African with a lineage that more than likely went back to slavery, while Terry had been of Irish descent and always smelled strongly of testosterone and nicotine. Neither would seem out of place in either a public house or a brothel.

Terry and Ely left before the class was assembled, to take up their positions on the steps down to the passageway leading into the playground. While there, their duty had been to ensure that the boys descending did so in an orderly manner and to report any misbehaviour, which they would only do if a teacher happened to witness any misdemeanour. To some extent there existed a code of honour and snitching would be considered the worst offence. If either Terry or Ely had been given a reason to report anybody, it would be because somebody had been foolish enough to do something which left them with no other choice.

Passing through the doors Timothy joined the queue to the left and behind Dixon. When the boys generally felt that they were far enough away from the teacher's attention, their steps quickened. Before reaching the third and final landing in the stairwell, Timothy purposely tripped Dixon and clattered into him, causing him to collide with Ely. Ely stopped the few remaining boys from descending by stretching his arms across the stairwell and grabbing the banisters on either side. He took Dixon aside, who immediately pointed towards Timothy and claimed that he'd been pushed. But his voice reached a few octaves higher than it would normally making his accusation seem all the more unlikely, so he continued menacingly with 'Didn't yeah?' hoping to intimidate Timothy into a confession.

Timothy turned from them shaking his head and allowed to descend with the rest of his class. But Dixon wasn't as fortunate. Ely restrained him from doing the same until Terry had joined them. The punishment for any offence on the stairs had been the same for as long as anyone could remember and known colloquially as 'the bumps'. Dixon had to make his descent down the final flight upon his coccyx. Terry and Ely assisted him by each taking one of his ankles while Dixon folded his arms behind his head to prevent it from striking the stone steps. Reaching the bottom they dropped him and left him to taste the dust rising from the rush mat. Unable to control his anger Dixon stormed from the building unmindful of anything other than gaining satisfaction for what he considered to be a blatant injustice. Finding Timothy, he pushed him hard from behind. Before Timothy could turn, Dixon sucked the mucous from his nose into his mouth. Once Timothy had turned around, he spat it with as much force as he could into Timothy's face. He kept pushing and pushing Timothy in the chest.

'Come on, you 'umpty little fucker'.

Keeping watch while Terry had a smoke, Ely noticed Dixon's ill-timed attempts to enact his revenge before it was brought to the attention of the teacher on yard duty. He called over to Terry to tell him to put his fag out before rushing over to separate them. Before the time came to return to the classroom

they all agreed on where to go later, after school hours, to resolve their dispute. The whereabouts of the venue for the occasion would soon be common knowledge to all in the class but the teacher.

During the dinner break Timothy chose to leave the school premises. Once alone he reflected upon his circumstances. He realised that he didn't have to return; he had a wealth of ready-made excuses he could use. But in the unlikely event of any deception of his not being apparent to others he would know the truth, and knowledge of this cowardice would return again and again to haunt him with every future excuse. He also realised that if not stopped now, Dixon would grow in confidence and would continue to bully him.

Returning from the dinner break, those anticipating the fight became heedless to what remained of the day's lessons, but the afternoon for Timothy passed far more quickly than he would have liked. He'd been no stranger to minor skirmishes in and out of school, but prior to this he'd never been the main attraction, unlike his father.

Throughout two world wars and prohibition, from the age of fourteen to fifty years, Paddy Malone had shovelled coal into the furnaces in the bellies of the boats crossing the North Atlantic. He'd grown to become a man while evading German torpedoes and between the wars, the US coast guard whenever the crew illicitly brought spirits into the states. Right through it all, and for as long as he could, at boxing tournaments he'd represented the boats in which he'd sailed. He'd been twenty years senior to Emily, Timothy's mother, and had been proud of his son for showing the courage he had in trying to overcome kyphosis. The pain and isolation had been a consequence of procedures that Timothy and his family were hoping would eventually allow Timothy to stand straight. His father had been his guide until the black dust and shag tobacco cruelly took him from his family.

Outside the school gates the boys gathered, meandering to and fro across the cobbled road from old pops corner shop. At that time his shop would always be full of boys. The smaller ones reaching up to buy flying-saucers filled with sherbet, liquorice straws or anything from an assortment of novelty confectionery, while those taller could reach over them to buy loosies, which were cigarettes taken from their packets to be sold individually. Also bubble-gum with glamour pin-ups inside their wrappers which they could swap amongst themselves whenever someone received one that he already had in his collection. How it would be in the shop, and how quiet it would be between school hours, would remain unknown to those leaving now.

Following a short distance behind the other boys Timothy felt isolated and became adrift to all but his purpose. He clenched his fist, stiffened the muscles from his chest to his wrist trying to remember what his father had told him. Watching Dixon striding confidently while being congratulated before the fight had started, Timothy became all the more determined.

Between the wall before the railway cutting and the fire escape at the back of the furniture factory, they came to a place hidden from those not knowing of its whereabouts. It had become a place given for such occasions and after dark to young lovers, by the inaccuracy of the Luftwaffe. Behind the wall a sandstone gorge fell beyond the bank. The width and depth probably helped to protect the railway lines at the bottom of it from falling bombs.

Once they'd reached the waste-land the boys formed a circle around Timothy and Dixon. They began chanting at either one or both. Giving Timothy no time to compose himself, Dixon rushed at him, grappling into the crowd before being pushed forward, their Spartan efforts throwing each other into the dirt. They rolled and rolled, each trying to gain the upper position, until, finally, Dixon using an outstretched leg managed to rise above Timothy. But his punches were ineffectual, his hail of blows deflected by the continual movement of Timothy's arms and hands. Given the chance, when Dixon rose up lifting one of his knees to strike down more effectively, Timothy quickly turned around, pushing him aside and scrabbling to his feet before Dixon could. Given the opportunity, Dixon also found his feet and responded as quickly. He grabbed hold of Timothy's arms and brought his head down sharply to butt him. Taking the only evasive action he could Timothy lowered his head, which fortunately for him, was

to Dixon's disadvantage when they clashed. Releasing Timothy he lifted his hands instinctively to staunch the blood running from his nose. Recalling all that his father had taught him, Timothy delivered a perfect boxer's punch. To the amazement of everyone it was over in seconds. Dixon's head shot up and his body buckled in a manner suggesting that he wouldn't be able to rise anytime soon. A stunned silence followed, during which a couple of boys went to assist Dixon to his feet. Timothy turned from a gathering murmur. Dixon's reign came to an end, and with those ready to follow Timothy, an allegiance was drawn and a hero had been born.

Chapter 2

To be aware of being talked about in an exaggerated manner, but within the realms of probability, would seem to be an acceptable part of kudos. To respond to those doing so and to continue in such a manner would be to participate in bullshit.

With little to say to those who expected something more after yesterday's affray with Dixon, Timothy managed to leave the playground. It had been his intention to return home, to be alone in the glory of the respect he'd gained, to be one with others in his comics, books and the stories he heard on the wireless. But seeing him leave, Terry called him over. He placed an arm around Timothy's shoulder with an invitation that would make Timothy's further adventures not solely imaginary.

Unable to refuse Timothy followed Terry and Ely, taking the same direction as they had the previous evening. A little further on from the factory they came to an alley, referred to colloquially as 'a jigger'. A wall at the back of the remaining terraces, interrupted by the backyard doors and bin holes, continued with the railway wall facing, which reached a little higher. The short distance between them made it possible to defeat the purpose of the taller wall. With hands and feet pressed hard against both they could straddle up until stepping onto the top of the back yard wall which enabled them to reach over the bevelled coping stone running along the top of the railway wall. From there they could jump and swing themselves over to the other side. Dropping down onto the bank on the far side appeared to be a far more daunting experience because the bank extended no more than five feet from the wall to meet with a vicious fall to the tracks. They continued on an excursion fraught with dangers and none more so than the mounds of soot tipped over by the chimney sweeps. Some were obvious, but many had subsided under the weight of falling rain and proved to be perfect bedding for moss.

Ely had taken it upon himself to lead. Acting as vanguard he stepped gingerly over or around the slippery deposits, and wherever the ground rose, he first tested it with his foot before allowing it to take his full weight. They continued cautiously until reaching a fissure in the rock known as the Devil's Staircase. As imposing as this sounds they descended without too much difficulty. Although the steps had been uneven and varied in distance from one down to the other, the split was broad. Facing it they could easily come to terms with the terrain. They stepped down gripping the rock with their hands while lowering their feet. Reaching the tracks they had no place to hide and from then onwards had to hurry, each aware of the five pound penalty imposed upon anyone caught trespassing until leading Timothy to an abandoned station. Discovering it after it had been forgotten for so long still intact seemed a little strange. There'd been no indication on the street above that this place had existed and the wall above the tunnel which hid the buildings behind had been blackened with soot.

The windows and entrances to the waiting room and toilets on the platform had been replaced with bricks, the only exception being a steel door behind the building, which at some time in the past had been forced open. Terry reached behind it for a paraffin lamp, lighting it before leading them into the dark. Inside their shadows grew long on the walls and across the ceiling, stuttering to the flame like

macabre silhouettes in some demonic place. This continued while they stumbled about until they found a suitable place where they could put the lamp.

The dank atmosphere stank of the defecation and urination from an infestation of rats, which seemed to be immediately dispelled when they began smoking.

Leaving the platform, which sloped to the shingle bedding in the sleepers that supported the tracks, they entered the tunnel. They stepped carefully from sleeper to sleeper to avoid slipping on the tar and oil that dripped from locomotives passing over them. Terry explained to Timothy that before entering the trains would whistle, and that would be a signal to take refuge in one of the many bolt holes recessed in the walls. Surely enough, before they'd caught sight of daylight, a whistle blew. Having just passed one of the recesses, Timothy returned to it and pushed from the balls of his feet, pinning his shoulders to the wall and felt a fur of soot covering the brickwork behind him with his palms.

Following a hellish red fire reflected from the underbelly of passing smoke and the overwhelming power of thundering steel the low loaders passed. They continued for some time known only by their sound and vibration until all that remained was the disappearing clickity-click of their wheels. Leaving the tunnel took them from the taste of smoke, steam and oil, to the summer evening. The light appeared brighter than it had before they'd entered and the air was sweet, locked in the quiet between night and day when smaller sounds could intrude.

The tracks had almost levelled to their surroundings when they left them. Upon the slight slope of an embankment grew a variety of plants vying with the waist-high grass. Insects, that had previously been uninterrupted, danced before them. They reached the top to find a barrier of old railway sleepers erected vertically. Both Terry and Ely pulled themselves to the top after stepping up from Timothy's cupped hands, and then reached to assist him before dropping down the other side.

Away from the terraces, factories and main thoroughfares – everything appeared to be new and much cleaner in comparison. The side roads weren't cobbled. The polished tar-macadam surface made the paving stones seem almost white, and the houses which had pebble dashed walls were set back behind front gardens. Outside some, cars or motorcycles with sidecars were parked on the roads. With no apparent bomb damage, it would appear that the German high command, like the council, had had a greater respect for this part of suburbia.

They came to a footbridge over another set of tracks where a small number of train spotters had gathered. Timothy discovered later that they would gather there at that time to witness the passing of a particular class of train-engine.

Taking one from a small number of bikes leant against the wall Terry pushed it over the gravel path towards them. Establishing who the bike belonged to Terry told him that he wanted to have a ride on it. He skipped with one foot to the floor and the other on the pedal, until gathering sufficient momentum to throw his other leg over the saddle. Returning after several minutes, he brought the bike to a standstill after skidding by braking solely on the back wheel before applying the front brake and hopping off.

To the owner's further anxiety Terry strolled past him, pushing the bike towards Timothy and suggesting to him that he should try riding it. This furthered Timothy's unease in Terry wrongly assuming that he could. Timothy became less anxious when the boy finally found the nerve to establish his ownership and right to say who could or could not ride it. But before Timothy could agree to his claim by handing it to him, Ely interjected, making it apparent that they were intent on a confrontation. He implied that his refusal to let Timothy ride it after allowing Terry to would be prejudicial and if it applied to Timothy it would further apply to him. Rapidly losing interest in their reason for being there, the other boys turned their attention to their bicycles with a preference to ignore what was going on. Ely continued to goad the boy and egg Timothy on until the boy snatched the bike from him and pushed him aside. Timothy responded without thinking and kept moving forward shoving him continuously with both hands with enough force to keep him moving backwards. Eventually the boy had to drop his bike,

but whatever had been aroused within him the boy went, as expressed gleefully by Ely, the colour of boiled shite. He came at Timothy, his fists flailing wildly and persistently, giving Timothy no choice other than to hit him. Once, twice, three times before dropping him, but not for long. Driven by the demons previously awakened he rose immediately and rushed at Timothy, forcing him against the iron wall beneath the high mesh fence. He kept scratching, biting and kicking until Timothy could break free of him. To avoid coming under attack again Timothy had to act quickly and struck as hard as he could. The boy, to his further humiliation, dropped. This time he hadn't any inclination to rise up and began to sob. Beaten, shamed and alone without empathy or help from his chosen company he remained there. Both Terry and Ely pushed him with the soles of their feet before leaving.

Returning home and once alone within his thoughts, Timothy recalled how he felt during his moments of isolation. He couldn't help but feel that he understood to a point of empathy how his opponent on the bridge must have been feeling. Unlike his confrontation with Dixon he'd had nothing to defend. The boy had been bullied, then beaten into submission and the temerity he'd shown had been to his credit. There'd been no reason for their actions earlier. Had there been could only be to establish that they were in some ways superior to those they were made to feel inferior to. What disturbed him further had been that the fight hadn't been of his choosing or that of the other boy, and yet under the circumstances it couldn't be avoided.

The following day, to the concern of some, Timothy kept himself to himself and left school declining further invitations. With the intention of finding some redemption to ease his troubled conscience he returned to the footbridge. More boys had gathered there than had the previous evening in the event of a possible further conflict. When Timothy turned the corner to try to reason over yesterday's activities, he heard a murmur of 'that's one of them'.

Realising his mistake, Timothy turned and ran, but they were in immediate pursuit, some on bikes the rest on foot. With no chance of escaping them on the open road, Timothy cut through the gates of a recreation ground in the hope that crossing a field would slow them down. Those on foot followed, while those on bikes minimised his chances of escape by cycling along the footpaths either side. With nowhere left to turn, Timothy had to stand his ground and realising how futile his efforts would be, he succumbed to them. They forced him down until his face touched the grass and then dragged him by his ankles. Whenever he tried to rise up on his hands someone would stamp on the lump on one side of his shoulders. When coming to a stop, they turned him, swung him and threw him. Before leaving, they stuffed sods covered in dog shit into his mouth and each bid him goodbye with a perfunctory kick.