

# EIGHT



I already know the camp on the moors. It was here that Himmelstoss gave Tjaden his education. But now I know hardly anyone here; as ever, all is altered. There are only a few people that I have occasionally met before.

I go through the routine mechanically. In the evenings I generally go to the Soldiers' Home, where the newspapers are laid out, but I do not read them; still there is a piano there that I am glad enough to play on. Two girls are in attendance, one of them is young.

The camp is surrounded with high barbed-wire fences. If we come back late from the Soldiers' Home we have to show passes. But those

who are on good terms with the guard can get through, of course.

Among the junipers and the birch trees on the moor we practise company drill each day. It is bearable if one expects nothing better. We advance at a run, fling ourselves down, and our panting breath moves the stalks of the grasses and the flowers of the heather to and fro. Looked at so closely one sees the fine sand is composed of millions of the tiniest pebbles, as clear as if they had been made in a laboratory. It is strangely inviting to dig one's hands into it.

But most beautiful are the woods with their line of birch trees. Their colour changes with every minute. Now the stems gleam purest white, and between them airy and silken, hangs the pastel-green of the leaves; the next moment all changes to an opalescent blue, as the shivering breezes pass down from the heights and touch the green lightly away; and again in one place it deepens almost to black as a cloud passes over the sun. And this shadow moves like a ghost through the dim trunks and rides far out over the moor to the sky—then the birches stand out again like gay banners on white poles, with their red and gold patches of autumn-tinted leaves.

I often become so lost in the play of soft light and transparent shadow, that I almost fail to

hear the commands. It is when one is alone that one begins to observe Nature and to love her. And here I have not much companionship, and do not even desire it. We are too little acquainted with one another to do more than joke a bit and play poker or nap in the evenings.

Alongside our camp is the big Russian prison camp. It is separated from us by a wire fence, but in spite of this the prisoners come across to us. They seem nervous and fearful, though most of them are big fellows with beards—they look like meek, scolded, St. Bernard dogs.

They slink about our camp and pick over the garbage tins. One can imagine what they find there. With us food is pretty scarce and none too good at that—turnips cut into six pieces and boiled in water, and unwashed carrot tops—mouldy potatoes are tit-bits, and the chief luxury is a thin rice soup in which float little bits of beef-sinew, but these are cut up so small that they take a lot of finding.

Everything gets eaten, notwithstanding, and if ever anyone is so well off as not to want all his share, there are a dozen others standing by ready to relieve him of it. Only the dregs that the ladle cannot reach are tipped out and thrown into the garbage tins. Along with that there sometimes

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go a few turnip peelings, mouldy bread crusts and all kinds of muck.

This thin, miserable, dirty garbage is the objective of the prisoners. They pick it out of the stinking tins greedily and go off with it under their blouses.

It is strange to see these enemies of ours so close up. They have faces that make one think—honest peasant faces, broad foreheads, broad noses, broad mouths, broad hands, and thick hair.

They ought to be put to threshing, reaping, and apple picking. They look just as kindly as our own peasants in Friesland.

It is distressing to watch their movements, to see them begging for something to eat. They are all rather feeble, for they only get enough nourishment to keep them from starving. Ourselves we have not had sufficient to eat for long enough. They have dysentery; furtively many of them display the blood-stained tails of their shirts. Their backs, their necks are bent, their knees sag, their heads droop as they stretch out their hands and beg in the few words of German that they know—beg with those soft, deep, musical voices, that are like warm stoves and cosy rooms at home.

Some men there are who give them a kick, so

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that they fall over;—but those are not many. The majority do nothing to them, just ignore them. Occasionally, when they are too grovelling, it makes a man mad and then he kicks them. If only they would not look at one so—What great misery can be in two such small spots, no bigger than a man's thumb—in their eyes!

They come over to the camp in the evenings and trade. They exchange whatever they possess for bread. Often they have fair success, because they have very good boots and ours are bad. The leather of their knee boots is wonderfully soft, like suede. The peasants among us who get bits sent from home can afford to trade. The price of a pair of boots is about two or three loaves of army bread, or a loaf of bread and a small, tough ham sausage.

But most of the Russians have long since parted with whatever things they had. Now they wear only the most pitiful clothing, and try to exchange little carvings and objects that they have made out of shell fragments and copper driving bands. Of course, they don't get much for such things, though they may have taken immense pains with them—they go for a slice or two of bread. Our peasants are hard and cunning when they bargain. They hold the piece of bread or sausage right under the nose of the Russian

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till he grows pale with greed and his eyes bulge and then he will give anything for it. The peasants wrap up their booty with the utmost solemnity, and then get out their big pocket knives, and slowly and deliberately cut off a slice of bread for themselves from their supply and with every mouthful take a piece of the good tough sausage and so reward themselves with a good feed. It is distressing to watch them take their afternoon meal thus; one would like to crack them over their thick pates. They rarely give anything away. How little we understand one another.

I am often on guard over the Russians. In the darkness one sees their forms move like sick storks, like great birds. They come close up to the wire fence and lean their faces against it; their fingers hook round the mesh. Often many stand side by side, and breathe the wind that comes down from the moors and the forest.

They rarely speak and then only a few words. They are more human and more brotherly towards one another, it seems to me, than we are. But perhaps that is merely because they feel themselves to be more unfortunate than us. Anyway the war is over so far as they are concerned.

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But to wait for dysentery is not much of a life either.

The territorials who are in charge of them say that they were much more lively at first. They used to have intrigues among themselves, as always happens, and it would often come to blows and knives. But now they are quite apathetic and listless; most of them do not masturbate any more, they are so feeble, though otherwise things come to such a pass that whole huts full of them do it.

They stand at the wire fence; sometimes one goes away and then another at once takes his place in the line. Most of them are silent; occasionally one begs a cigarette butt.

I see their dark forms, their beards move in the wind. I know nothing of them except that they are prisoners; and that is exactly what troubles me. Their life is obscure and guiltless;—if I could know more of them, what their names are, how they live, what they are waiting for, what their burdens are, then my emotion would have an object and might become sympathy. But as it is I perceive behind them only the suffering of the creature, the awful melancholy of life and the pitilessness of men.

A word of command has made these silent figures our enemies; a word of command might

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transform them into our friends. At some table a document is signed by some persons whom none of us knows, and then for years together that very crime on which formerly the world's condemnation and severest penalty fall, becomes our highest aim. But who can draw such a distinction when he looks at these quiet men with their childlike faces and apostles' beards. Any non-commissioned officer is more of an enemy to a recruit, any schoolmaster to a pupil, than they are to us. And yet we would shoot at them again and they at us if they were free.

I am frightened: I dare think this way no more. This way lies the abyss. It is not now the time but I will not lose these thoughts, I will keep them, shut them away until the war is ended. My heart beats fast: this is the aim, the great, the sole aim, that I have thought of in the trenches; that I have looked for as the only possibility of existence after this annihilation of all human feeling; this is a task that will make life afterward worthy of these hideous years.

I take out my cigarettes, break each one in half and give them to the Russians. They bow to me and then light the cigarettes. Now red points glow in every face. They comfort me; it looks as though there were little windows in dark village cottages saying that behind them are rooms full of peace.

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The days go by. On a foggy morning another of the Russians is buried; almost every day one of them dies. I am on guard during the burial. The prisoners saying a chorale, they sing in parts, and it sounds almost as if there were no voices, but an organ far away on the moor.

The burial is quickly over.

In the evening they stand again at the wire fence and the wind comes down to them from the beech woods. The stars are cold.

I now know a few of those who speak a little German. There is a musician amongst them, he says he used to be a violinist in Berlin. When he hears that I can play the piano he fetches his violin and plays. The others sit down and lean their backs against the fence. He stands up and plays, sometimes he has that absent expression which violinists get when they close their eyes, or again he sways the instrument to the rhythm and smiles across to me.

He plays mostly folk songs and the others hum with him. They are like a country of dark hills that sing far down under the ground. The sound of the violin stands like a slender girl above it and is clear and alone. The voices cease and the violin continues alone. In the night it is so thin it sounds frozen; one must stand close up; it would

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be much better in a room—out here it makes a man grow sad.

Because I have already had a long leave I get none on Sundays. So the last Sunday before I go back to the front my father and eldest sister come over to see me. All day we sit in the Soldiers' Home. Where else could we go? We don't want to stay in the camp. About midday we go for a stroll on the moors.

The hours are a torture; we do not know what to talk about, so we speak of my mother's illness. It is now definitely cancer, she is already in the hospital and will be operated on shortly. The doctors hope she will recover, but we have never heard of cancer being cured.

"Where is she then?" I ask.

"In the Luisa Hospital," says my father.

"In which class?"

"Third. We must wait till we know what the operation costs. She wanted to be in the third herself. She said that then she would have some company. And besides it is cheaper."

"So she is lying there with all those people. If only she could sleep properly."

My father nods. His face is broken and full of furrows. My mother has always been sickly; and though she has only gone to the hospital when

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she has been compelled to, it has cost a great deal of money, and my father's life has been practically given up to it.

"If only I knew how much the operation costs," says he.

"Have you not asked?"

"Not directly. I cannot do that—the surgeon might take it amiss and that would not do; he must operate on Mother."

Yes, I think bitterly, that's how it is with us, and with all poor people. They don't dare ask the price, but worry themselves dreadfully beforehand about it; but the others, for whom it is not important, they settle the price first as a matter of course. And the doctor does not take it amiss from them.

"The dressings afterwards are so expensive," says my father.

"Doesn't the Invalid's Fund pay anything toward it, then?" I ask.

"Mother has been ill too long."

"Have you any money at all?"

He shakes his head: "No, but I can do some overtime."

I know. He will stand at his desk folding and pasting and cutting until twelve o'clock at night. At eight o'clock in the evening he will eat some miserable rubbish they get in exchange for their

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food tickets, then he will take a powder for his headache and work on.

In order to cheer him up a bit I tell him a few stories, soldiers' jokes and the like, about generals and sergeant-majors.

Afterwards I accompany them both to the railway station. They give me a pot of jam and a bag of potato-cakes that my mother has made for me.

Then they go off and I return to the camp.

In the evening I spread the jam on the cakes and eat some. But I have no taste for them. So I go out to give them to the Russians. Then it occurs to me that my mother cooked them herself and that she was probably in pain as she stood before the hot stove. I put the bag back in my pack and take only two cakes to the Russians.

# NINE

We travel for several days. The first aeroplanes appear in the sky. We roll on past transport lines. Guns, guns. The light railway picks us up. I search for my regiment. No one knows exactly where it lies. Somewhere or other I put up for the night, somewhere or other I receive provisions and a few vague instructions. And so with my pack and my rifle I set out again on the way.

By the time I come up they are no longer in the devastated place. I hear we have become one of the flying divisions that are pushed in wherever it is hottest. That does not sound cheerful to me. They tell me of heavy losses that we have

been having. I inquire after Kat and Albert. No one knows anything of them.

I search farther and wander about here and there; it is a strange feeling. One night more and then another I camp out like a Red Indian. Then at last I get some definite information, and by the afternoon I am able to report to the Orderly Room.

The sergeant-major detains me there. The company comes back in two days' time. There is no object in sending me up now.

"What was it like on leave?" he asks, "pretty good, eh?"

"In parts," I say.

"Yes," he sighs, "yes, if a man didn't have to come away again. The second half is always rather messed up by that."

I loaf around until the company comes back in the early morning, grey, dirty, soured, and gloomy. Then I jump up, push in amongst them, my eyes searching. There is Tjaden, there is Müller blowing his nose, and there are Kat and Kropp. We arrange our sacks of straw side by side. I have an uneasy conscience when I look at them, and yet without any good reason. Before we turn in I bring out the rest of the potato-cakes and jam so that they can have some too.

The outer cakes are mouldy, still it is possible

to eat them. I keep those for myself and give the fresh one to Kat and Kropp.

Kat chews and says: "These are from your mother?"

I nod.

"Good," says he, "I can tell by the taste."

I could almost weep. I can hardly control myself any longer. But it will soon be all right again back here with Kat and Albert. This is where I belong.

"You've been lucky," whispers Kropp to me before we drop off to sleep, "they say we are going to Russia."

To Russia? It's not much of a war over there.

In the distance the front thunders. The walls of the hut rattle.

There's a great deal of polishing being done. We are inspected at every turn. Everything that is torn is exchanged for new. I score a spotless new tunic out of it and Kat, of course, an entire outfit. A rumour is going round that there may be peace, but the other story is more likely—that we are bound for Russia. Still, what do we need new things for in Russia? At last it leaks out—the Kaiser is coming to review us. Hence all the inspections.

For eight whole days one would suppose we



were in a base-camp, there is so much drill and fuss. Everyone is peevish and touchy, we do not take kindly to all this polishing, much less to the full-dress parades. Such things exasperate a soldier more than the front-line.

At last the moment arrives. We stand to attention and the Kaiser appears. We are curious to see what he looks like. He stalks along the line, and I am really rather disappointed; judging from his pictures I imagined him to be bigger and more powerfully built, and above all to have a thundering voice.

He distributes Iron Crosses, speaks to this man and that. Then we march off.

Afterwards we discuss it. Tjaden says with astonishment:

"So that is the All-Highest! And everyone, bar nobody, has to stand up stiff in front of him!" He meditates: "Hindenburg too, he has to stand up stiff to him, eh?"

"Sure," says Kat.

Tjaden hasn't finished yet. He thinks for a while and then asks: "And would a king have to stand up stiff to an emperor?"

None of us is quite sure about it, but we don't suppose so. They are both so exalted that standing strictly to attention is probably not insisted on.

"What rot you do hatch out," says Kat. "The

main point is that you have to stand stiff yourself."

But Tjaden is quite fascinated. His otherwise prosy fancy is blowing bubbles. "But look," he announces, "I simply can't believe that an emperor has to go to the latrine the same as I have."

"You can bet your boots on it."

"Four and a half-wit make seven," says Kat. "You've got a maggot in your brain, Tjaden, just you run along to the latrine quick, and get your head clear, so that you don't talk like a two-year-old."

Tjaden disappears.

"But what I would like to know," says Albert, "is whether there would not have been a war if the Kaiser had said No."

"I'm sure there would," I interject, "he was against it from the first."

"Well, if not him alone, then perhaps if twenty or thirty people in the world had said No."

"That's probable," I agree, "but they damned well said Yes."

"It's queer, when one thinks about it," goes on Kropp, "we are here to protect our fatherland. And the French are over there to protect their fatherland. Now who's in the right?"

"Perhaps both," say I without believing it.

"Yes, well now," pursues Albert, and I see that he means to drive me into a corner, "but our pro-

fessors and parsons and newspapers say that we are the only ones that are right, and let's hope so;—but the French professors and parsons and newspapers say that the right is on their side, now what about that?"

"That I don't know," I say, "but whichever way is there's war all the same and every month more countries coming in."

Tjaden reappears. He is still quite excited and again joins the conversation, wondering just how a war gets started.

"Mostly by one country badly offending another," answers Albert with a slight air of superiority.

The Tjaden pretends to be obtuse. "A country? I don't follow. A mountain in Germany cannot offend a mountain in France. Or a river, or a wood, or a field of wheat."

"Are you really as stupid as that, or are you just pulling my leg?" growls Kropp. "I don't mean that at all. One people offends the other——"

"Then I haven't any business here at all," replies Tjaden, "I don't feel myself offended."

"Well, let me tell you," says Albert sourly, "it doesn't apply to tramps like you."

"Then I can be going home right away," retorts Tjaden, and we all laugh.

"Ach, man! he means the people as a whole, the State——" exclaims Müller.

"State, State"—Tjaden snaps his fingers contemptuously, "Gendarmes, police, taxes, that's your State;—if that's what you are talking about, no, thank you."

"That's right," says Kat, "you've said something for once, Tjaden. State and home-country, there's a big difference."

"But they go together," insists Kropp, "without the State there wouldn't be any home-country."

"True, but just you consider, almost all of us are simple folk. And in France, too, the majority of men are labourers, workmen, or poor clerks. Now just why would a French blacksmith or a French shoemaker want to attack us? No, it is merely the rulers. I had never seen a Frenchman before I came here, and it will be just the same with the majority of Frenchmen as regards us. They weren't asked about it any more than we were."

"Then what exactly is the war for?" asks Tjaden.

Kat shrugs his shoulders. "There must be some people to whom the war is useful."

"Well, I'm not one of them," grins Tjaden.

"Not you, nor anybody else here."

"Who are they then?" persists Tjaden. "It isn't any use to the Kaiser either. He has everything he can want already."

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"I'm not so sure about that," contradicts Kat, "he has not had a war up till now. And every full-grown emperor requires at least one war, otherwise he would not become famous. You look in your school books."

"And generals too," adds Detering, "they become famous through war."

"Even more famous than emperors," adds Kat.

"There are other people back behind there who profit by the war, that's certain," growls Detering.

"I think it is more of a kind of fever," says Albert. "No one in particular wants it, and then all at once there it is. We didn't want the war, the others say the same thing—and yet half the world is in it all the same."

"But there are more lies told by the other side than by us," say I; "just think of those pamphlets the prisoners have on them, where it says that we eat Belgian children. The fellows who write those lies ought to go out and hang themselves. They are real culprits."

Müller gets up. "Anyway, it is better that the war is here instead of in Germany. Just you look at the shell-holes."

"True," assents Tjaden, "but no war at all would be better still."

He is quite proud of himself because he has scored for once over us volunteers. And his

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opinion is quite typical, here one meets it time and again, and there is nothing with which one can properly counter it, because that is the limit of their comprehension of the factors involved. The national feeling of the tommy resolves itself into this—here he is. But that is the end of it; everything else he criticizes from his own practical point of view.

Albert lies down on the grass and growls angrily: "The best thing is not to talk about the rotten business."

"It won't make any difference, that's sure," agrees Kat.

To make matters worse, we have to return almost all the new things and take back our old rags again. The good ones were merely for the inspection.

Instead of going to Russia, we go up the line again. On the way we pass through a devastated wood with the tree trunks shattered and the ground ploughed up.

At several places there are tremendous craters. "Great guns, something's hit that," I say to Kat.

"Trench mortars," he replies, and then points up at one of the trees.

In the branches dead men are hanging. A

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naked soldier is squatting in the fork of a tree, he still has his helmet on, otherwise he is entirely unclad. There is only half of him sitting up there, the top half, the legs are missing.

"What can that mean?" I ask.

"He's been blown out of his clothes," mutters Tjaden.

"It's funny," says Kat, "we have seen that several times now. If a mortar gets you it blows you clean out of your clothes. It's the concussion that does it."

I search around. And so it is. Here hang bits of uniform, and somewhere else is plastered a bloody mess that was once a human limb. Over there lies a body with nothing but a piece of the underpants on one leg and the collar of the tunic around its neck. Otherwise it is naked and the clothes are hanging up in the tree. Both arms are missing as though they had been pulled out. I discover one of them twenty yards off in a shrub.

The dead man lies on his face. There, where the arm wounds are, the earth is black with blood. Underfoot the leaves are scratched up as though the man had been kicking.

"That's no joke, Kat," says I.

"No more is a shell splinter in the belly," he replies, shrugging his shoulders.

"But don't get tender-hearted," says Tjaden.

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All this can only have happened a little while ago, the blood is still fresh. As everybody we see there is dead we do not waste any more time, but report the affair at the next stretcher-bearers' post. After all it is not our business to take these stretcher-bearers' jobs away from them.

A patrol has to be sent out to discover just how strongly the enemy position is manned. Since my leave I feel a certain strange attachment to the other fellows, and so I volunteer to go with them. We agree on a plan, slip out through the wire and then divide and creep forward separately. After a while I find a shallow shell-hole and crawl into it. From here I peer forward.

There is moderate machine-gun fire. It sweeps across from all directions, not very heavy, but always sufficient to make one keep down.

A parachute star-shell opens out. The ground lies stark in the pale light, and then the darkness shuts down again blacker than ever. In the trenches we were told there were black troops in front of us. That is nasty, it is hard to see them; they are very good at patrolling, too. And oddly enough they are often quite stupid; for instance, both Kat and Kropp were once able to shoot down a black enemy patrol because the fellows in their

enthusiasm for cigarettes smoked while they were creeping about. Kat and Albert had simply to aim at the glowing ends of the cigarettes.

A bomb or something lands close beside me. I have not heard it coming and am terrified. At the same moment a senseless fear takes hold of me. Here I am alone and almost helpless in the dark —perhaps two other eyes have been watching me for a long while from another shell-hole in front of me, and a bomb lies ready to blow me to pieces. I try to pull myself together. It is not my first patrol and not a particularly risky one. But it is the first since my leave, and besides, the lie of the land is still rather strange to me.

I tell myself that my alarm is absurd, that there is probably nothing at all there in the darkness watching me, otherwise they would not be firing so low.

It is in vain. In whirling confusion my thoughts hum in my brain—I hear the warning voice of my mother, I see the Russians with the flowing beards leaning against the wire fence, I have a bright picture of a canteen with stools, of a cinema in Valenciennes; tormented, terrified, in my imagination I see the grey, implacable muzzle of a rifle which moves noiselessly before me whichever way I try to turn my head. The sweat breaks out from every pore.

I still continue to lie in the shallow bowl. I

look at the time; only a few minutes have passed. My forehead is wet, the sockets of my eyes are damp, my hands tremble, and I am panting softly. It is nothing but an awful spasm of fear, a simple animal fear of poking out my head and crawling on farther.

All my efforts subside like froth into the one desire to be able just to stay lying there. My limbs are glued to the earth. I make a vain attempt;—they refuse to come away. I press myself down on the earth, I cannot go forward, I make up my mind to stay lying there.

But immediately the wave floods over me anew, a mingled sense of shame, of remorse, and yet at the same time of security. I raise myself up a little to take a look round.

My eyes burn with staring into the dark. A star-shell goes up;—I duck down again.

I wage a wild and senseless fight, I want to get out of the hollow and yet slide back into it again; I say "You must, it is your comrades, it is not an idiotic command," and again: "What does it matter to me, I have only one life to lose——"

That is the result of all this leave, I plead in extenuation. But I cannot reassure myself; I become terribly faint. I raise myself slowly and reach forward with my arms, dragging my body after me and then lie on the edge of the shell-hole, half in and half out.

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There I hear sounds and drop back. Suspicious sounds can be detected clearly despite the noise of the artillery-fire. I listen; the sound is behind me. They are our people moving along the trench. Now I hear muffled voices. To judge by the tone that might be Kat talking.

At once a new warmth flows through me. These voices, these quiet words, these footsteps in the trench behind me recall me at a bound from the terrible loneliness and fear of death by which I had been almost destroyed. They are more to me than life, these voices, they are more than motherliness and more than fear; they are the strongest, most comforting thing there is anywhere: they are the voices of my comrades.

I am no longer a shuddering speck of existence, alone in the darkness;—I belong to them and they to me; we all share the same fear and the same life, we are nearer than lovers, in a simpler, a harder way; I could bury my face in them, in these voices, these words that have saved me and will stand by me.

Cautiously I glide out over the edge and snake my way forward. I shuffle along on all fours a bit farther, I keep track of my bearings, look around me and observe the distribution of the gunfire so

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as to able to find my way back. Then I try to get in touch with the others.

I am still afraid, but it is an intelligent fear, an extraordinarily heightened caution. The night is windy and shadows flit hither and thither in the flicker of the gunfire. It reveals too little and too much. Often I pause, stock still, motionless, and always for nothing. Thus I advance a long way and then turn back in a wide curve. I have not established touch with the others. Every yard nearer our trench fills me with confidence—and with haste, too. It would be bad to get hit now.

Then a new fear lays hold of me. I can no longer remember the direction. Quiet, I squat in a shell-hole and try to locate myself. More than once it has happened that some fellow has jumped joyfully into a trench, only then to discover that it was the wrong one.

After a little time I listen again, but still I am not sure. The confusion of shell-holes now seems so bewildering that I can no longer tell in my agitation which way I should go. Perhaps I am crawling parallel to the lines, and that might go on forever. So I crawl round once again in a wide curve.

These damned rockets! They seem to burn for an hour, and a man cannot make the least move-

ment without bringing the bullets whistling round.

But there is nothing for it, I must get out. Falteringly I work my way farther, I move off over the ground like a crab and rip my hands sorely on the jagged splinters, as sharp as razor blades. Often I think that the sky is becoming lighter on the horizon, but it may be merely my imagination. Then gradually I realize that to crawl in the right direction is a matter of life or death.

A shell crashes. Almost immediately two others. And then it begins in earnest. A bombardment. Machine-guns rattle. Now there is nothing for it but to stay lying low. Apparently an attack is coming. Everywhere the rockets shoot up. Unceasing.

I lie huddled in a large shell-hole, my legs in the water up to the belly. When the attack starts I will let myself fall into the water, with my face as deep in the mud as I can keep it without suffocating. I must pretend to be dead.

Suddenly I hear the barrage lift. At once I slip down into the water, my helmet on the nape of my neck and my mouth just clear so that I can get a breath of air.

I lie motionless;—somewhere something clanks, it stamps and stumbles nearer—all my nerves become taut and icy. It clatters over me and away, the first wave has passed. I have but

this one shattering thought: What will you do if someone jumps into your shell-hole?—Swiftly I pull out my little dagger, grasp it fast and bury it in my hand once again under the mud. If anyone jumps in here I will go for him. It hammers in my forehead; at once, stab him clean through the throat, so that he cannot call out; that's the only way; he will be just as frightened as I am; when in terror we fall upon one another, then I must be first.

Now our batteries are firing. A shell lands near me. That makes me savage with fury, all it needs now is to be killed by our own shells; I curse and grind my teeth in the mud; it is a raging frenzy; in the end all I can do is groan and pray.

The crash of the shells bursts in my ears. If our fellows make a counter-raid I will be saved. I press my head against the earth and listen to the muffled thunder, like the explosions of quarrying—and raise it again to listen for the sounds on top.

The machine-guns rattle. I know our barbed wire entanglements are strong and almost undamaged;—parts of them are charged with a powerful electric current. The rifle fire increases. They have not broken through; they have to retreat.

I sink down again, huddled, strained to the ut-

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termost. The banging, the creeping, the clanging becomes audible. One single cry yelling amongst it all. They are raked with fire, the attack is repulsed.

Already it has become somewhat lighter. Steps hasten over me. The first. Gone. Again, another. The rattle of machine-guns becomes an unbroken chain. Just as I am about to turn round a little, something heavy stumbles, and with a crash a body falls over me into the shell-hole, slips down, and lies across me—

I do not think at all, I make no decision—I strike madly at home, and feel only how the body suddenly convulses, then becomes limp, and collapses. When I recover myself, my hand is sticky and wet.

The man gurgles. It sounds to me as though he bellows, every gasping breath is like a cry, a thunder—but it is not only my heart pounding. I want to stop his mouth, stuff it with earth, stab him again, he must be quiet, he is betraying me; now at last I regain control of myself, but have suddenly become so feeble that I cannot any more lift my hand against him.

So I crawl away to the farthest corner and stay there, my eyes glued on him, my hand grasping the knife—ready, if he stirs, to spring at him

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again. But he won't do so any more, I can hear that already in his gurgling.

I can see him indistinctly. I have but one desire, to get away. If it is not soon it will be too light; it will be difficult enough now. Then as I try to raise up my head I see it is impossible already. The machine-gunfire so sweeps the ground that I should be shot through and through before I could make one jump.

I test it once with my helmet, which I take off and hold up to find out the level of the shots. The next moment it is knocked out of my hand by a bullet. The fire is sweeping very low to the ground. I am not far enough from the enemy line to escape being picked off by one of the snipers if I attempt to get away.

The light increases. Burning I wait for our attack. My hands are white at the knuckles, I clench them so tightly in my longing for the fire to cease so that my comrades may come.

Minute after minute trickles away. I dare not look again at the dark figure in the shell-hole. With an effort I look past it and wait, wait. The bullets hiss, they make a steel net, never ceasing, never ceasing.

Then I notice my bloody hand and suddenly feel nauseated. I take some earth and rub the skin with it; now my hand is muddy and the blood cannot be seen any more.



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The fire does not diminish. It is equally heavy from both sides. Our fellows have probably given me up for lost long ago.

It is early morning, clear and grey. The gurgling continues, I stop my ears, but soon take my fingers away again, because then I cannot hear the other sound.

The figure opposite me moves. I shrink together and involuntarily look at it. Then my eyes remain glued to it. A man with a small pointed beard lies there; his head is fallen to one side, one arm is halfbent, his head rests helplessly upon it. The other hand lies on his chest, it is bloody.

He is dead, I say to myself, he must be dead, he doesn't feel anything any more; it is only the body that is gurgling there. Then the head tries to raise itself, for a moment the groaning becomes louder, his forehead sinks back upon his arm. The man is not dead, he is dying, but he is not dead. I drag myself toward him, hesitate, support myself on my hands, creep a bit farther, wait, again a terrible journey. At last I am beside him.

Then he opens his eyes. He must have heard me, for he gazes at me with a look of utter terror. The body lies still, but in the eyes there is such

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an extraordinary expression of fright that for a moment I think they have power enough to carry the body off with them. Hundreds of miles away with one bound. The body is still perfectly still, without a sound, the gurgle has ceased, but the eyes cry out, yell, all the life is gathered together in them for one tremendous effort to flee, gathered together there in a dreadful terror of death, of me.

My legs give way and I drop on my elbows. "No, no," I whisper.

The eyes follow me. I am powerless to move so long as they are there.

Then his hand slips slowly from his breast, only a little bit, it sinks just a few inches, but this movement breaks the power of the eyes. I bend forward, shake my head and whisper: "No, no, no," I raise one hand, I must show him that I want to help him, I stroke his forehead.

The eyes shrink back as the hand comes, then they lose their stare, the eyelids droop lower, the tension is past. I open his collar and place his head more comfortably.

His mouth stands half open, it tries to form words. The lips are dry. My water bottle is not there. I have not brought it with me. But there is water in the mud, down at the bottom of the crater. I climb down, take out my handkerchief, spread it out, push it under and scoop up the yel-

low water that strains through into the hollow of my hand.

He gulps it down. I fetch some more. Then I unbutton his tunic in order to bandage him if it is possible. In any case I must do it, so that if the fellows over there capture me they will see that I wanted to help him, and so will not shoot me. He tries to resist, but his hand is too feeble. The shirt is stuck and will not come away, it is buttoned at the back. So there is nothing for it but to cut it open.

I look for the knife and find it again. But when I begin to cut the shirt the eyes open once more and the cry is in them again and the demented expression, so that I must close them, press them shut and whisper: "I want to help you, Comrade, camerade, camerade——" eagerly repeating the word, to make him understand.

There are three stabs. My field dressing covers them, the blood runs out under it, I press it tighter; there; he groans.

That is all I can do. Now we must wait, wait.

These hours... The gurgling starts again—but how slowly a man dies! For this I know—he cannot be saved, I have, indeed, tried to tell myself that he will be, but at noon this pretence breaks down and melts before his groans. If only I had

not lost my revolver crawling about, I would shoot him. Stab him I cannot.

By noon I am groping on the outer limits of reason. Hunger devours me, I could almost weep for something to eat, I cannot struggle against it. Again and again I fetch water for the dying man and drink some myself.

This is the first time I have killed with my hands, whom I can see close at hand, whose death is my doing. Kat and Kropp and Müller have experienced it already, when they have hit someone; it happens to many, in hand-to-hand fighting especially—

But every gasp lays my heart bare. This dying man has time with him, he has an invisible dagger with which he stabs me: Time and my thoughts.

I would give much if he would but stay alive. It is hard to lie here and to have to see and hear him.

In the afternoon, about three, he is dead.

I breathe freely again. But only for a short time. Soon the silence is more unbearable than the groans. I wish the gurgling were there again, gasping hoarse, now whistling softly and again hoarse and loud.

It is mad, what I do. But I must do something. I prop the dead man up again so that he lies comfortably, although he feels nothing any more. I

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close his eyes. They are brown, his hair is black and a bit curly at the sides.

The mouth is full and soft beneath his moustache; the nose is slightly arched, the skin brownish; it is now not so pale as it was before, when he was still alive. For a moment the face seems almost healthy;—then it collapses suddenly into the strange face of the dead that I have so often seen, strange faces, all alike.

No doubt his wife still thinks of him; she does not know what happened. He looks as if he would have often written to her;—she will still be getting mail from him—To-morrow, in a week's time—perhaps even a stray letter a month hence. She will read it, and in it he will be speaking to her.

My state is getting worse, I can no longer control my thoughts. What would his wife look like? Like the little brunette on the other side of the canal? Does she belong to me now? Perhaps by this act she becomes mine. I wish Kantorek were sitting here beside me. If my mother could see me—. The dead man might have had thirty more years of life if only I had impressed the way back to our trench more sharply on my memory. If only he had run two yards farther to the left, he might now be sitting in the trench over there and writing a fresh letter to his wife.

But I will get no further that way; for that is

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the fate of all of us: if Kemmerich's leg had been six inches to the right: if Haie Westhus had bent his back three inches further forward—

The silence spreads. I talk and must talk. So I speak to him and to say to him: "Comrade, I did not want to kill you. If you jumped in here again, I would not do it, if you would be sensible too. But you were only an idea to me before, an abstraction that lived in my mind and called forth its appropriate response. It was that abstraction I stabbed. But now, for the first time, I see you are a man like me. I thought of your hand-grenades, of your bayonet, of your rifle; now I see your wife and your face and our fellowship. Forgive me, comrade. We always see it too late. Why do they never tell us that you are poor devils like us, that your mothers are just as anxious as ours, and that we have the same fear of death, and the same dying and the same agony—Forgive me, comrade; how could you be my enemy? If we threw away these rifles and this uniform you could be my brother just like Kat and Albert. Take twenty years of my life, comrade, and stand up—take more, for I do not know what I can even attempt to do with it now."

It is quiet, the front is still except for the crackle of rifle fire. The bullets rain over, they

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are not fired haphazard, but shrewdly aimed from all sides. I cannot get out.

"I will write to your wife," I say hastily to the dead man, "I will write to her, she must hear it from me, I will tell her everything I have told you, she shall not suffer, I will help her, and your parents too, and your child——"

His tunic is half open. The pocket-book is easy to find. But I hesitate to open it. In it is the book with his name. So long as I do not know his name perhaps I may still forget him, time will obliterate it, this picture. But his name, it is a nail that will be hammered into me and never come out again. It has the power to recall this forever, it will always come back and stand before me.

Irresolutely I take the wallet in my hand. It slips out of my hand and falls open. Some pictures and letters drop out. I gather them up and want to put them back again, but the strain I am under, the uncertainty, the hunger, the danger, these hours with the dead man have made me desperate, I want to hasten the relief, to intensify and to end the torture, as one strikes an unendurably painful hand against the trunk of a tree, regardless of everything.

There are portraits of a woman and a little girl, small amateur photographs taken against an ivy-clad wall. Along with them are letters. I

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take them out and try to read them. Most of it I do not understand, it is so hard to decipher and I scarcely know any French. But each word I translate pierces me like a shot in the chest;—like a stab in the chest.

My brain is taxed beyond endurance. But I realize this much, that I will never dare to write to these people as I intended. Impossible. I look at the portraits once more; they are clearly not rich people. I might send them money anonymously if I earn anything later on. I seize upon that, it is at least something to hold on to. This dead man is bound up with my life, therefore I must do everything, promise everything in order to save myself; I swear blindly that I mean to live only for his sake and his family, with wet lips I try to placate him—and deep down in me lies the hope that I may buy myself off in this way and perhaps even get out of this; it is a little stratagem: if only I am allowed to escape, then I will see to it. So I open the book and read slowly:—Gérard Duval, compositor.

With the dead man's pencil I write the address on an envelope, then swiftly thrust everything back into his tunic.

I have killed the printer, Gérard Duval. I must be a printer, I think confusedly, be a printer, printer——

\* \* \*

By afternoon I am calmer. My fear was groundless. The name troubles me no more. The madness passes. "Comrade," I say to the dead man, but I say it calmly, "to-day you, to-morrow me. But if I come out of it, comrade, I will fight against this, that has struck us both down; from you, taken life—and from me—? Life also. I promise you, comrade. It shall never happen again."

The sun strikes low, I am stupefied with exhaustion and hunger. Yesterday is like a fog to me, there is no hope of ever getting out of this. I fall into a doze and do not at first realize that evening is approaching. The twilight comes. It seems to me to come quickly now. One hour more. If it were summer, it would be three hours more. One hour more.

Now suddenly I begin to tremble; something might happen in the interval. I think no more of the dead man, he is of no consequence to me now. With one bound the lust to live flares up again and everything that has filled my thoughts goes down before it. Now, merely to avert any ill-luck, I babble mechanically: "I will fulfil everything, fulfil everything I have promised you——" but already I know that I shall not do so.

Suddenly it occurs to me that my own

comrades may fire on me as I creep up; they do not know I am coming. I will call out as soon as I can so that they will recognize me. I will stay lying in front of the trench until they answer me.

The first star. The front remains quiet. I breathe deeply and talk to myself in my excitement: "No foolishness now, Paul—Quiet, Paul, quiet—then you will be saved, Paul." When I use my Christian name it works as though someone else spoke it to me, it has more power.

The darkness grows. My excitement subsides, I wait cautiously until the first rocket goes up. Then I crawl out of the shell-hole. I have forgotten the dead man. Before me lies the oncoming night and the pale gleaming field. I fix my eyes on a shell-hole; the moment the light dies I scurry over into it, grope farther, spring into the next, duck down, scramble onward.

I come nearer. There, by the light of the rocket I see something move in the wire, then it stiffens and I lie still. Next time I see it again, yes, they are men from our trench. But I am suspicious until I recognize our helmets. Then I call. And immediately an answer rings out, my name: "Paul—Paul——"

I call again in answer. It is Kat and Albert who have come out with a stretcher to look for me.

"Are you wounded?"

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"No, no——"

We drop into the trench. I ask for something to eat and wolf it down. Müller gives me a cigarette. In a few words I tell what happened. There is nothing new about it; it happens quite often. The night attack is the only unusual feature of the business. In Russia Kat once lay for two days behind the enemy lines before he could make his way back.

I do not mention the dead printer.

But by next morning I can keep it to myself no longer. I must tell Kat and Albert. They both try to calm me. "You can't do anything about it. What else could you have done? That is what you are here for."

I listen to them and feel comforted, reassured by their presence. It was mere drivelling nonsense that I talked out there in the shell-hole.

"Look there for instance," points Kat.

On the fire-step stand some snipers. They rest their rifles with telescopic sights on the parapet and watch the enemy front. Once and again a shot cracks out.

Then we hear the cry: "That's found a billet!" "Did you see how he leapt in the air?" Sergeant Oellrich turns round proudly and scores his point. He heads the shooting list for to-day with three unquestionable hits.

"What do you say to that?" asks Kat.

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I nod.

"If he keeps that up he will get a little colored bird for his buttonhole by this evening," says Albert.

"Or rather he will soon be made acting sergeant-major," says Kat.

We look at one another. "I would not do it," I say.

"All the same," says Kat, "it's very good for you to see it just now."

Sergeant Oellrich returns to the fire-step. The muzzle of his rifle searches to and fro.

"You don't need to lose any sleep over your affair," nods Albert.

And now I hardly understand it myself any more.

"It was only because I had to lie there with him so long," I say. "After all, war is war."

Oellrich's rifle cracks out sharply and dry.

# TEN

We have dropped in for a good job. Eight of us have to guard a village that has been abandoned because it is being shelled too heavily.

In particular we have to watch the supply dump as that is not empty yet. We are supposed to provision ourselves from the same store. We are just the right people for that;—Kat, Albert, Müller, Tjaden, Detering, our whole gang is there. Haie is dead, though. But we are mighty lucky all the same, all the other squads have had more casualties than we have.

We select, as a dug-out, a reinforced concrete cellar into which steps lead down from above.

The entrance is protected by a separate concrete wall.

Now we develop an immense industry. This is an opportunity not only to stretch one's legs, but to stretch one's soul also. We make the best use of such opportunities. The war is too desperate to allow us to be sentimental for long. That is only possible so long as things are not going too badly. After all, we cannot afford to be anything but matter-of-fact. So matter-of-fact, indeed, that I often shudder when a thought from the days before the war comes momentarily into my head. But it does not stay long.

We have to take things as lightly as we can, so we make the most of every opportunity, and non-sense stands stark and immediate beside horror. It cannot be otherwise, that is how we hearten ourselves. So we zealously set to work to create an idyll—an idyll of eating and sleeping of course.

The floor is first covered with mattresses which we haul in from the houses. Even a soldier's behind likes to sit soft. Only in the middle of the floor is there any clear space. Then we furnish ourselves with blankets, and eiderdowns, luxurious soft affairs. There is plenty of everything to be had in the village. Albert and I find a mahogany bed which can be taken to pieces with a sky of blue silk and a lace coverlet. We sweat

like monkeys moving it in, but a man cannot let a thing like that slip, and it would certainly be shot to pieces in a day or two.

Kat and I do a little patrolling through the houses. In very short time we have collected a dozen eggs and two pounds of fairly fresh butter. Suddenly there is a crash in the drawing-room, and an iron stove hurtles through the wall past us and on, a yard from us out through the wall behind. Two holes. It comes from the house opposite where a shell has just landed. "The swine," grimes Kat, and we continue our search. All at once we prick up our ears, hurry across, and suddenly stand petrified—there running up and down in a little sty are two live sucking pigs. We rub our eyes and look once again to make certain. Yes, they are still there. We seize hold of them—no doubt about it, two real young pigs.

This will make a grand feed. About twenty yards from our dug-out there is a small house that was used as an officers' billet. In the kitchen is an immense fireplace with two ranges, pots, pans, and kettles—everything, even to a stack of small chopped wood in an outhouse—a regular cook's paradise.

Two of our fellows have been out in the fields all the morning hunting for potatoes, carrots and green peas. We are quite uppish and sniff at the tinned stuff in the supply dump, we want fresh



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vegetables. In the dining-room there are already two heads of cauliflower.

The sucking pigs are slaughtered. Kat sees to them. We want to make potato-cakes to go with the roast. But we cannot find a grater for the potatoes. However, the difficulty is soon got over. With a nail we punch a lot of holes in a pot lid and there we have a grater. Three fellows put on thick gloves to protect their fingers against the grater, two others peel the potatoes, and the business gets going.

Kat takes charge of the sucking pigs, the carrots, the peas, and the cauliflower. He even mixes a white sauce for the cauliflower. I fry the pancakes, four at a time. After ten minutes I get the knack of tossing the pan so that the pancakes which are done on one side sail up, turn in the air and are caught again as they come down. The sucking pigs are roasted whole. We all stand round them as before an altar.

In the meantime we receive visitors, a couple of wireless-men, who are generously invited to the feed. They sit in the living-room where there is a piano. One of them plays, the other sings "An der Weser." He sings feelingly, but with a rather Saxon accent. All the same it moves us as we stand at the fireplace preparing the good things.

Then we begin to realize we are in for trouble. The observation balloons have spotted the smoke

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from our chimney, and the shells start to drop on us. They are those damned spraying little daisy-cutters that make only a small hole and scatter widely close to the ground. They keep dropping closer and closer all round us; still we cannot leave the grub in the lurch. A couple of splinters whizz through the top of the kitchen window. The roast is ready. But frying the pancakes is getting difficult. The explosions come so fast that the splinters strike again and again against the wall of the house and sweep in through the window. Whenever I hear a shell coming I drop down on one knee with the pan and the pancakes, and duck behind the wall of the window. Immediately afterwards I am up again and going on with the frying.

The Saxon stops singing—a fragment has smashed the piano. At last everything is ready and we organize the transport of it back to the dug-out. After the next explosion two men dash across the fifty yards to the dug-out with the pots of vegetables. We see them disappear.

The next shot. Everyone ducks and then two more trot off, each with a big can of finest grade coffee, and reach the dug-out before the next explosion.

Then Kat and Kropp seize the masterpiece—the big dish with the brown, roasted sucking

pigs. A screech, a knee bend, and away they race over the fifty yards of open country.

I stay to finish my last four pancakes; twice I have to drop to the floor;—after all, it means four pancakes more, and they are my favourite dish.

Then I grab the plate with the great pile of cakes and squeeze myself behind the house door. A hiss, a crash, and I gallop off with the plate clamped against my chest with both hands. I am almost in, there is a rising screech, I bound, I run like a deer, sweep round the wall, fragments clatter against the concrete, I tumble down the cellar steps, my elbows are skinned, but I have not lost a single pancake, nor even upset the plate.

At two o'clock we start the meal. It lasts till six. We drink coffee until half-past six—officer's coffee from the supply dump—and smoke officer's cigars and cigarettes—also from the supply dump. Punctually at half-past six we begin supper. At ten o'clock we throw the bones of the sucking pigs outside the door. Then there is cognac and rum—also from the blessed supply dump—and once again long, fat cigars with belly-bands. Tjaden says that it lacks only one thing: Girls from an officer's brothel.

Late in the evening we hear mewing. A little grey cat sits in the entrance. We entice it in and give it something to eat. And that wakes up our

own appetites once more. Still chewing, we lie down to sleep.

But the night is bad. We have eaten too much fat. Fresh baby pig is very griping to the bowels. There is an everlasting coming and going in the dug-out. Two, three men with their pants down are always sitting about outside and cursing. I have been out nine times myself. About four o'clock in the morning we reach a record: all eleven men, guards and visitors, are squatting outside.

Burning houses stand out like torches against the night. Shells lumber across and crash down. Munition columns tear along the street. On one side the supply dump has been ripped open. In spite of all the flying fragments the drivers of the munition columns pour in like a swarm of bees and pounce on the bread. We let them have their own way. If we said anything it would only mean a good hiding for us. So we go differently about it. We explain that we are the guard and so know our way about, we get hold of the tinned stuff and exchange it for things we are short of. What does it matter anyhow—in a while it will all be blown to pieces. For ourselves we take some chocolate from the depot and eat it in slabs. Kat says it is good for loose bowels.

Almost a fortnight passes thus in eating, drinking and roaming about. No one disturbs us.

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The village gradually vanishes under the shells and we lead a charmed life. So long as any part of the supply dump still stands we don't worry, we desire nothing better than to stay here till the end of the war.

Tjaden has become so fastidious that he only half smokes his cigars. With his nose in the air he explains to us that he was brought up that way. And Kat is most cheerful. In the morning his first call is: "Emil, bring in the caviare and coffee." We put on extraordinary airs, every man treats the other as his valet, bounces him and gives him orders. "There is something itching under my foot; Kropp my man, catch that louse at once," says Leer, poking out his leg at him like a ballet girl, and Albert drags him up the stairs by the foot. "Tjaden!"—"What?"—"Stand at ease, Tjaden; and what's more, don't say 'What,' say 'Yes, Sir,'—now: Tjaden!" Tjaden retorts in the well-known phrase from Goethe's "Götz von Berlichingen," with which he is always free.

After eight more days we receive orders to go back. The palmy days are over. Two big motor lorries take us away. They are stacked high with planks. Nevertheless, Albert and I erect on top our four-poster bed complete with blue silk canopy, mattress, and two lace coverlets. And behind it at the head is stowed a bag full of choicest edibles. We often dip into it, and the tough ham sau-

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sages, the tins of liver sausages, the conserves, the boxes of cigarettes rejoice our hearts. Each man has a bag to himself.

Kropp and I have rescued two big red arm-chairs as well. They stand inside the bed, and we sprawl back in them as in a theatre box. Above us swells the silken cover like a baldaquin. Each man has a long cigar in his mouth. And thus from aloft we survey the scene.

Between us stands a parrot cage that we found for the cat. She is coming with us, and lies in the cage before her saucer of meat, and purrs.

Slowly the lorries roll down the road. We sing. Behind us shells are sending up fountains from the now utterly abandoned village.

A few days later we are sent to evacuate a village. On the way we meet the fleeing inhabitants trundling their goods and chattels along with them in wheelbarrows, in perambulators, and on their backs. Their figures are bent, their faces full of grief, despair, haste, and resignation. The children hold on to their mothers' hands, and often an older girl leads the little ones who stumble onward and are for ever looking back. A few carry miserable-looking dolls. All are silent as they pass us by.

We are marching in column; the French cer-

tainly will not fire on a town in which there are still inhabitants. But a few minutes later the air screams, the earth heaves, cries ring out; a shell has landed among our rear squad. We scatter and fling ourselves down on the ground, but at that moment I feel the instinctive alertness leave me which hitherto has always made me do unconsciously the right thing under fire; the thought leaps up with a terrible throttling fear: "You are lost"—and the next moment a blow sweeps like a whip over my left leg. I hear Albert cry out; he is beside me.

"Quick, up, Albert!" I yell, for we are lying unsheltered in the open field.

He staggers up and runs. I keep beside him. We have to get over a hedge; it is higher than we are. Kropp seizes a branch, I heave him up by the leg, he cries out, I give him a swing and he flies over. With one bound I follow him and fall into a ditch that lies behind the hedge.

Our faces are smothered with duck-weed and mud, but the cover is good. So we wade in up to our necks. Whenever a shell whistles we duck our heads under the water. After we have done this a dozen times, I am exhausted.

"Let's get away, or I'll fall in and drown," groans Albert.

"Where has it got you?" I ask him.

"In the knee I think."

"Can you run?"

"I think——"

"Then out!"

We make for the ditch beside the road, and stooping, run along it. The shelling follows us. The road leads towards the munition dump. If that goes up there won't be so much as a boot-lace left of us. So we change our plan and run diagonally across country.

Albert begins to drag. "You go, I'll come on after," he says, and throws himself down.

I seize him by the arm and shake him. "Up, Albert, if once you lie down you'll never get any farther. Quick, I'll hold you up."

At last we reach a small dug-out. Kropp pitches in and I bandage him up. The shot is just a little above his knee. Then I take a look at myself. My trousers are bloody and my arm, too. Albert binds up my wound with his field dressing. Already he is no longer able to move his leg, and we both wonder how we managed to get this far. Fear alone made it possible; we should have run even if our feet had been shot off;—we would have run on the stumps.

I can still crawl a little. I call out to a passing ambulance wagon which picks us up. It is full of wounded. There is an army medical lance-corporal with it who sticks an anti-tetanus needle into our chests.

At the dressing station we arrange matters so that we lie side by side. They give us a thin soup which we spoon down greedily and scornfully, because we are accustomed to better times but are hungry all the same.

"Now for home, Albert," I say.

"Let's hope so," he replies, "I only wish I knew what I've got."

The pain increases. The bandages burn like fire. We drink and drink, one glass of water after another.

"How far above the knee am I hit?" asks Kropp.

"At least four inches, Albert," I answer. Actually it is perhaps one.

"I've made up my mind," he says after a while, "if they take off my leg, I'll put an end to it. I won't go through life as a cripple."

So we lie there with our thoughts and wait.

In the evening we are hauled on to the chopping-block. I am frightened and think quickly what I ought to do; for everyone knows that the surgeons in the dressing stations amputate on the slightest provocation. Under the great business that is much simpler than complicated patching. I think of Kemmerich. Whatever happens I will

not let them chloroform me, even if I have to crack a couple of their skulls.

It is all right. The surgeon pokes around in the wound and a blackness comes before my eyes. "Don't carry on so," he says gruffly, and hacks away. The instruments gleam in the bright light like marvelous animals. The pain is insufferable. Two orderlies hold my arms fast, but I break loose with one of them and try to crash into the surgeon's spectacles just as he notices and springs back. "Chloroform the scoundrel," he roars madly.

Then I become quiet. "Pardon me, Herr Doctor, I will keep still but do not chloroform me."

"Well now," he cackles and takes up his instrument again. He is a fair fellow, not more than thirty years old, with scars and disgusting gold spectacles. Now I see that he is tormenting me, he is merely raking about in the wound and looking up surreptitiously at me over his glasses. My hands squeeze around the grips, I'll kick the bucket before he will get a squeak out of me.

He has fished out a piece of shell and tosses it to me. Apparently he is pleased at my self-control, for he now sets my leg carefully in splints and says: "To-morrow you'll be off home." Then I am put in plaster. When I am back again

with Kropp I tell him apparently a hospital train comes in tomorrow morning.

"We must work the army medical sergeant-major so that we can keep together, Albert."

I manage to slip the sergeant-major two of my cigars with belly-bands, and then tip the word to him. He smells the cigars and says: "Have you got any more of them?"

"Another good handful," I say, "and my comrade," I point to Kropp, "he has some as well. We might possibly be glad to hand them to you out of the window of the hospital train in the morning."

He understands, of course, smells them once again and says: "Done."

We cannot get a minute's sleep all night. One of them sings hymns in a high cracked tenor before he begins to gurgle. Another has crept out of his bed to the window. He lies in front of it as though he wants to look out for the last time.

Our stretchers stand on the platform. We wait for the train. It rains and the station has no roof. Our blankets are thin. We have waited already two hours.

The sergeant-major looks after us like a mother. Although I feel pretty bad I do not let our scheme out of my mind. Casually I let him

see the packet and give him one cigar in advance. In exchange the sergeant-major covers us over with a waterproof sheet.

"Albert, old man," I suddenly bethink myself, "our four-poster and the cat——"

"And the club chairs," he adds.

Yes, the club chairs with red plush. In the evening we used to sit in them like lords, and intended later on to let them out by the hour. One cigarette per hour. It might have turned into a regular business, a real good living.

"And our bags of grub, too, Albert."

We grow melancholy. We might have made some use of the things. If only the train left one day later Kat would be sure to find us and bring us the stuff.

What damned hard luck! In our bellies there is gruel, mean hospital stuff, and in our bags roast pork. But we are so weak that we cannot work up any more excitement about it.

The stretchers are sopping wet by the time the train arrives in the morning. The sergeant-major sees to it that we are put in the same car. There is a crowd of red-cross nurses. Kropp is stowed in below. I am lifted up and told to get into the bed above him.

"Good God!" I exclaim suddenly.

"What is it?" asks the sister.

I cast a glance at the bed. It is covered with

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clean snow-white linen, that even has got the marks of the iron still on it. And my shirt has gone six weeks without being washed and is terribly muddy.

"Can't you get in by yourself?" asks the sister gently.

"Why yes," I say in a sweat, "but take off the bed cover first."

"What for?"

I feel like a pig. Must I get in there?—"It will get——" I hesitate.

"A little bit dirty?" she suggests helpfully. "That doesn't matter, we will wash it again afterwards."

"No, no, not that——" I say excitedly. I am not equal to such overwhelming refinement.

"When you have been lying out there in the trenches, surely we can wash a sheet," she goes on.

I look at her, she is young and crisp, spotless and neat, like everything here; a man cannot realize that it isn't for officers only, and feels himself strange and in some way even alarmed.

All the same the woman is a tormentor, she is going to force me to say it. "It is only——" I try again, surely she must know what I mean.

"What is it then?"

"Because of the lice," I bawl out at last.

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She laughs. "Well, they must have a good day for once, too."

Now I don't care any more. I scramble into bed and pull up the covers.

A hand gropes over the bed-cover. The sergeant-major. He goes off with the cigars.

An hour later we notice we are moving.

I wake up during the night. Kropp is restless too. The train rides easily over the rails. I cannot realize it all yet; a bed, a train, home. "Albert!" I whisper.

"Yes——"

"Do you know where the latrine is?"

"The door is on the right, I think."

"I'm going to have a look." It is dark, I grope for the edge of the bed and cautiously try to slide down. But my foot finds no support, I begin to slip, the plaster leg is no help, and with a crash I lie on the floor.

"Damn!" I say.

"Have you bumped yourself?" asks Kropp.

"You could hear that well enough for yourself," I growl, "my head——"

A door opens at the rear of the car. The sister comes with a light and looks at me.

"He has fallen out of bed——"

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She feels my pulse and smooths my forehead. "You haven't any fever, though."

"No," I agree.

"Have you been dreaming then?" she asks.

"Perhaps——" I evade. The interrogation starts again. She looks at me with her clear eyes, and the more wonderful and sweet she is the less am I able to tell her what I want.

I am lifted up into bed again. That will be all right. As soon as she goes I must try to climb down again. If she were an old woman, it might be easier to say what a man wants, but she is so very young, at the most twenty-five, it can't be done, I cannot possibly tell her.

Then Albert comes to my rescue, he is not bashful, it makes no difference to him who is upset. He calls to the sister. She turns round. "Sister, he wants——" but no more does Albert know how to express it modestly and decently. Out there we say it in a single word, but here, to such a lady——All at once he remembers his school days and finishes hastily: "He wants to leave the room, sister."

"Ah!" says the sister, "but he shouldn't climb out of his bed with plaster bandage. What do you want then?" she says turning to me.

I am in mortal terror at this turn, for I haven't any idea what the things are called professionally. She comes to my help.

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"Little or big?"

Shocking business! I sweat like a pig and say shyly: "Well, only quite a little one——"

At any rate it produces the effect.

I get a bottle. After a few hours I am no longer the only one, and by morning we are quite accustomed to it and ask for what we want without any false modesty.

The train travels slowly. Sometimes it halts and the dead are unloaded. It halts often.

Albert is feverish. I don't feel too bad; I have some pain, but the worst of it is that apparently there are still lice under the plaster bandage. They itch terribly, and I cannot scratch myself.

We sleep through the days. The country glides quietly past the window. The third night we reach Herbesthal. I hear from the sister that Albert is to be put off at the next station because of his fever. "How far does the train go?" I ask.

"To Cologne."

"Albert," I say "we stick together; you see."

On the sister's next round I hold my breath and press it up into my head. My face swells and turns red. She stops. "Are you in pain?"

"Yes," I groan, "all of a sudden."

She gives me a thermometer and goes on. I would not have been under Kat's tuition if I did not know what to do now. These army thermometers are not made for old soldiers. All one has to



do is to drive the quicksilver up and then it stays without falling again.

I stick the thermometer under my arm at a slant, and flip it steadily with my forefinger. Then I give it a shake. I send it up to 100.2°. But that is not enough. A match held cautiously near to it brings it up to 101.6°.

As the sister comes back, I blow myself out, breathe in short gasps, goggle at her with vacant eyes, toss about restlessly, and mutter in a whisper: "I can't bear it any longer——"

She notes me down on a slip of paper. I know perfectly well my plaster bandage will not be reopened if it can be avoided.

Albert and I are put off together.

We are in the same room in a Catholic Hospital. That is a piece of luck, the Catholic infirmaries are noted for their good treatment and good food. The hospital has been filled up from our train, there are a great many bed cases amongst them. We do not get examined to-day because there are too few surgeons. The flat trolleys with the rubber wheels pass continually along the corridor, and always with someone stretched at full length upon them. A damnable position, stretched out full length like that;—the only time it is good is when one is asleep.

The night is very disturbed. No one can sleep. Toward morning we doze a little. I wake up just as it grows light. The doors stand open and I hear voices from the corridor. The others wake up too. One fellow who has been there a couple of days already explains it to us: "Up here in the corridor every morning the sisters say prayers. They call it Morning Devotion. And so that you can get your share, they leave the door open."

No doubt it is well meant, but it gives us aches in our heads and bones.

"Such an absurdity!" I say, "just when a man dropped off to sleep."

"All the light cases are up here, that's why they do it here," he replies.

Albert groans. I get furious and call out: "Be quiet out there!"

A minute later a sister appears. In her black and white dress she looks like a beautiful tea-cosy. "Shut the door, will you, sister?" says someone.

"We are saying prayers, that is why the door is open," she responds.

"But we want to go on sleeping——"

"Prayer is better than sleeping," she stands there and smiles innocently. "And it is seven o'clock already."

Albert groans again. "Shut the door," I snort. She is quite disconcerted. Apparently she can-

not understand. "But we are saying prayers for you too."

"Shut the door, anyway."

She disappears, leaving the door open. The intoning of the litany proceeds.

I feel savage, and say: "I'm going to count up to three. If it doesn't stop before then I'll let something fly."

"Me too," says another.

I count up to five. Then I take hold of a bottle, aim, and heave it through the door into the corridor. It smashes into a thousand pieces. The praying stops. A swarm of sisters appear and reproach us in concert.

"Shut the door!" we yell.

They withdraw. The little one who came first is the last to go. "Heathen," she chirps but shuts the door all the same. We have won.

At noon the hospital inspector arrives and abuses us. He threatens us with clink and all the rest of it. But a hospital inspector is just the same as a commissariat inspector, or any one else who wears a long sword and shoulder straps, but is really a clerk, and is never considered even by a recruit as a real officer. So we let him talk. What could they do to us anyway—

"Who threw the bottle?" he asks.

Before I can think whether I should report myself, someone says: "I did."

A man with a bristling beard sits up. Everyone is excited; why should he report himself? "You?"

"Yes. I was annoyed because we were waked up unnecessarily and lost my senses so that I did not know what I was doing."

He talks like a book.

"What is your name?"

"Reinforcement-Reservist Josef Hamacher."

The inspector departs.

We are all curious. "But why did you say you did it? It wasn't you at all."

He grins. "That doesn't matter. I have a shooting license."

Then of course, we all understand. Whoever has a shooting license can do just whatever he pleases.

"Yes," he explains. "I got a crack in the head and they presented me with a certificate to say that I was periodically not responsible for my actions. Ever since then I've had a grand time. No one dares to annoy me. And nobody does anything to me."

"I reported myself because the shot amused

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me. If they open the door again to-morrow we will pitch another."

We are overjoyed. With Josef Hamacher in our midst we can now risk anything.

Then come the soundless, flat trollies to take us away.

The bandages are stuck fast. We bellow like steers.

There are eight men in our room. Peter, a curly black-haired fellow, has the worst injury;— a severe lung wound. Franz Wächter, alongside him, has a shot in the arm which didn't look too bad at first. But the third night he calls out to us, telling us to ring, he thinks he has a haemorrhage.

I ring loudly. The night sister does not come. We have been making rather heavy demands on her during the night, because we have all been freshly bandaged, and so have a good deal of pain. One wants his leg placed so, another so, a third wants water, a fourth wants her to shake his pillow;—in the end the buxom old body grumbled bad-temperedly and slammed the doors. Now no doubt she thinks it is something of the same sort and so she is not coming.

We wait. Then Franz says: "Ring again."

I do so. Still she does not put in an appearance.

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In our wing there is only one night sister, perhaps she has something to do in one of the other rooms. "Franz, are you quite sure you are bleeding?" I ask. "Otherwise we shall be getting cursed again."

"The bandage is wet. Can't anybody make a light?"

That cannot be done either. The switch is by the door and none of us can stand up. I hold my thumb against the button of the bell till it becomes numb. Perhaps the sister has fallen asleep. They certainly have a great deal to do and are all overworked day after day. And added to that is the everlasting praying.

"Should we smash a bottle?" asks Josef Hamacher of the shooting license.

"She wouldn't hear that any more than the bell."

At last the door opens. The old lady appears, mumbling. When she perceives Franz's trouble she begins to bustle, and says: "Why did not someone say I was wanted?"

"We did ring. And none of us here can walk."

He has been bleeding badly and she binds him up. In the morning we look at his face, it has become sharp and yellow, whereas the evening before he looked almost healthy. Now a sister comes oftener.

\* \* \*

Sometimes there are red-cross voluntary aid sisters. They are pleasant, but often rather unskilled. They frequently give us pain when re-making our beds, and then are so frightened that they hurt us still more.

The nuns are more reliable. They know how they must take hold of us, but we would be better pleased if they were somewhat more cheerful. A few of them have real spirit, they are superb. There is no one but would do anything for Sister Libertine, this marvelous sister, who spreads good cheer through the whole wing even when she can only be seen in the distance. And there are others like her. We would go through fire for her. A man cannot really complain, here he is treated by the nuns exactly like a civilian. And just to think of a garrison hospital gives one the creeps.

Franz Wächter does not regain his strength. One day he is taken away and does not come back. Josef Hamacher knows all about it: "We shan't see him again. They have put him in the Dead Room."

"What do you mean, Dead Room?" asks Kropp.

"Well, Dying Room——"

"What is that, then?"

"A little room at the corner of the building. Whoever is about to kick the bucket is put in there. There are two beds in it. It is generally called the Dying Room."

"But what do they do that for?"

"They don't have so much work to do afterwards. It is more convenient, too, because it lies right beside the lift to the mortuary. Perhaps they do it for the sake of the others also, so that no one in the ward dies in sympathy. And they can look after him better, too, if he is by himself."

"But what about him?"

Josef shrugs his shoulders. "Usually he doesn't take much notice any more."

"Does everybody know about it then?"

"Anyone who has been here long enough knows, of course."

In the afternoon Franz Wächter's bed has a fresh occupant. A couple of days later they take the new man away, too. Josef makes a significant glance. We see many come and go.

Often relatives sit by the beds and weep or talk softly and awkwardly. One old woman will not go away, but she cannot stay there the whole night through. The next morning she comes very early, but not early enough; for when she goes up,

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to the bed, someone else is in it already. She has to go to the mortuary. The apples that she has brought with her she gives to us.

And then little Peter begins to get worse. His temperature chart looks bad, and one day the flat trolley stands beside his bed. "Where to?" he asks.

"To the bandaging ward."

He is lifted out. But the sister makes the mistake of removing his tunic from the hook and putting it on the trolley, too, so that she should not have to make two journeys. Peter understands immediately and tries to roll off the trolley. "I'm stopping here!"

They push him back. He cries out feebly with his shattered lung: "I won't go to the Dying Room."

"But we are going to the bandaging ward."

"Then what do you want my tunic for?" He can speak no more. Hoarse, agitated, he whispers: "Stopping here!"

They do not answer but wheel him out. At the door he tries to raise himself up. His black curly head sways, his eyes are full of tears. "I will come back again! I will come back again!" he cries.

The door shuts. We are all excited; but we say nothing. At last Josef says: "Many a man has said that. Once a man is in there, he never comes through."

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I am operated on and vomit for two days. My bones will not grow together, so the surgeons' secretary says. Another fellow's have grown crooked; his are broken again. It is damnable.

Among our new arrivals there are two young soldiers with flat feet. The chief surgeon discovers them on his rounds, and is overjoyed. "We'll soon put that right," he tells them, "we will just do a small operation, and then you will have perfectly sound feet. Enter them down, sister."

As soon as he is gone, Josef, who knows everything, warns them: "Don't you let him operate on you! That is a special scientific stunt of the old boy's. He goes absolutely crazy whenever he can get hold of anyone to do it on. He operates on you for flat feet, and there's no mistake, you don't have them anymore; you have club feet instead, and have to walk all the rest of your life on sticks."

"What should a man do, then?" asks one of them.

"Say No. You are here to be cured of your wound, not your flat feet. Did you have any trouble with them in the field? No, well, there you are! At present you can still walk, but if once the old boy gets you under the knife you'll be crippled. What he wants is little dogs to experiment with, so the war is a glorious time for him, as it is for all the surgeons.

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You take a look down below at the staff; there are a dozen fellows hobbling around that he has operated on. A lot of them have been here all the time since 'fourteen and 'fifteen. Not a single one of them can walk better than he could before, almost all of them worse, and most only with plaster legs. Every six months he catches them again and breaks their bones afresh, and every time is going to be the successful one. You take my word, he won't dare to do it if you say No."

"Ach, man," says one of the two wearily, "better your feet than your brain-box. There's no telling what you'll get if you go back out there again. They can do with me just as they please, so long as I get back home. Better to have a club foot than be dead."

The other, a young fellow like ourselves, won't have it done. The next morning the old man has the two hauled up and lectures and jaws at them so long that in the end they consent. What else could they do?—They are mere privates, and he is a big bug. They are brought back chloroformed and plastered.

It is going badly with Albert. They have taken him and amputated his leg. The whole leg has been taken off from the thigh. Now he will hardly speak any more. Once he says he will

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shoot himself the first time he can get hold of his revolver again.

A new convoy arrives. Our room gets two blind men. One of them is a very youthful musician. The sisters never have a knife with them when they feed him; he has already snatched one from a sister. But in spite of this caution there is an incident. In the evening, while he is being fed, the sister is called away, and leaves the plate with the fork on his table. He gropes for the fork, seizes it and drives it with all his force against his heart, then he snatches up a shoe and strikes with it against the handle as hard as he can. We call for help and three men are necessary to take the fork away from him. The blunt prongs had already penetrated deep. He abuses us all night so that no one can go to sleep. In the morning he has lock-jaw.

Again beds are empty. Day after day goes by with pain and fear, groans and death gurgles. Even the Death Room is no use any more, it is too small; fellows die during the night in our room. They go even faster than the sisters can cope with them.

But one day the door flies open, the flat trolley rolls in, and there on the stretcher, pale, thin, upright and triumphant, with his shaggy head of curls sits Peter. Sister Libertine with beaming looks pushes him over to his former bed. He is

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back from the Dying Room. We have long supposed him dead.

He looks round: "What do you say now?"

And Josef has to admit that it is the first time he has ever known of such a thing.

Gradually a few of us are allowed to get up. And I am given crutches to hobble around on. But I do not make much use of them; I cannot bear Albert's gaze as I move about the room. His eyes always follow me with such a strange look. So I sometimes escape to the corridor;—there I can move about more freely.

On the next floor below are the abdominal and spine cases, head wounds and double amputations. On the right side of the wing are the jaw wounds, wounds in the joints, wounds in the kidneys, wounds in the testicles, wounds in the intestines. Here a man realizes for the first time in how many places a man can get hit.

Two fellows die of tetanus. Their skin turns pale, their limbs stiffen, at last only their eyes live—stubbornly. Many of the wounded have their shattered limbs hanging free in the air from a gallows; underneath the wound a basin is placed into which drips the pus. Every two or three hours the vessel is emptied. Other men lie in stretching bandages with heavy weights

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hanging from the end of the bed. I see intestine wounds that are constantly full of excreta. The surgeon's clerk shows me X-ray photographs of completely smashed hipbones, knees and shoulders.

A man cannot realize that above such shattered bodies there are still human faces in which life goes its daily round. And this is only one hospital, one single station; there are hundreds of thousands in Germany, hundreds of thousands in France, hundreds of thousands in Russia. How senseless is everything that can ever be written, done, or thought, when such things are possible. It must be all lies and of no account when the culture of a thousand years could not prevent this stream of blood being poured out, these torture-chambers in their hundreds of thousands. A hospital alone shows what war is.

I am young, I am twenty years old; yet I know nothing of life but despair, death, fear, and fatuous superficiality cast over an abyss of sorrow. I see how peoples are set against one another, and in silence, unknowingly, foolishly, obediently, innocently slay one another. I see that the keenest brains of the world invent weapons and words to make it yet more refined and enduring. And all men of my age, here and over there, throughout the whole world see these things; all my generation is experiencing these things with me. What

would our fathers do if we suddenly stood up and came before them and proffered our account? What do they expect of us if a time ever comes when the war is over? Through the years our business has been killing;—it was our first calling in life. Our knowledge of life is limited to death. What will happen afterwards? And what shall come out of us?

The oldest man in our room is Lewandowski. He is forty, and has already lain ten months in the hospital with a severe abdominal wound. Just in the last few weeks he has improved sufficiently to be able to hobble about doubled up.

For some days past he has been in great excitement. His wife has written to him from the little home in Poland where she lives, telling him that she has saved up enough money to pay for the fare and is coming to see him.

She is already on the way and may arrive any day. Lewandowski has lost his appetite, he even gives away red cabbage and sausage after he has had a couple of mouthfuls. He goes round the room perpetually with the letter. Everyone has already read it a dozen times, the post-marks have been examined heaven knows how often, the address is hardly legible any longer for spots

of grease and thumb-marks, and in the end what is sure to happen, happens. Lewandowski develops a fever, and has to go back to bed.

He has not seen his wife for two years. In the meantime she has given birth to a child, whom she is bringing with her. But something else occupies Lewandowski's thoughts. He had hoped to get permission to go out when his old woman came; for obviously seeing is all very well, but when a man gets his wife again after such a long time, if at all possible, a man wants something else besides.

Lewandowski has discussed it all with us at great length; in the army there are no secrets about such things. And what's more, nobody finds anything objectionable in it. Those of us who are already able to go out have told him of a couple of very good spots in the town, parks and squares, where he would not be disturbed; one of us even knows of a little room.

But what is the use, there Lewandowski lies in bed with his troubles. Life holds no more joy for him if he has to forgo this affair. We console him and promise to get over the difficulty somehow or other.

The next afternoon his wife appears, a tousled little woman with anxious, quick eyes like a bird,



in a sort of black crinkly mantilla with ribbons; heaven knows where she inherited the thing.

She murmurs something softly and stands shyly in the doorway. It terrifies her that there are six of us men present.

"Well, Marja," says Lewandowski, and gulps dangerously with his Adam's apple "you can come in all right, they won't hurt you."

She goes round and proffers each of us her hand. Then she produces the child, which in the intervals has done something in its napkin. From a large handbag embroidered with beads she takes out a clean one and makes the child fresh and presentable. This dispels her first embarrassment, and the two begin to talk.

Lewandowski is very fidgety, every now and then he squints across at us most unhappily with his round goggle eyes.

The time is favourable, the doctor's visit is over, at the most one of the sisters might come in. So one of us goes out to prospect. He comes back and nods. "Not a soul to be seen. Now's your chance, Johann, set to."

The two speak together in an undertone. The woman turns a little red and looks embarrassed. We grin good-naturedly and make pooh-poohing gestures, what does it matter! The devil take all conventions, they were made for other times;

here lies the carpenter Johann Lewandowski, a soldier shot to a cripple, and there is his wife; who knows when he will see her again? He wants to have her, and he should have her, good.

Two men stand at the door to forestall the sisters and keep them occupied if they chance to come along. They agree to stand guard for a quarter of an hour or thereabouts.

Lewandowski can only lie on his side, so one of us props a couple of pillows against his side, Albert gets the child to hold, we all turn round a bit, the black mantilla disappears under the bedclothes, we make a great clatter and play skat noisily.

All goes well. I hold a club solo with four jacks which nearly goes the round. In the process we almost forget Lewandowski. After a while the child begins to squall, although Albert, in desperation, rocks it to and fro. There is a bit of creaking and rustling, and as we look up casually we see that the child has the bottle in its mouth and is back again with its mother. The business is over.

We now feel ourselves like one big family, the woman is happy, and Lewandowski lies there sweating and beaming.

He unpacks the embroidered handbag, and some good sausages come to light; Lewandowski

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takes up the knife with a flourish and saws the meat into slices.

With a handsome gesture he waves toward us—and the little woman goes from one to another and smiles at us and hands round the sausage; she now looks quite handsome. We call her Mother, she is pleased and shakes up our pillows for us.

After a few weeks I have to go each morning to the massage department. There my leg is hardened up and made to move. The arm has healed long since.

New convoys arrive from the line. The bandages are no longer made of cloth, but of white crêpe paper. Rag bandages have become scarce at the front.

Albert's stump heals well. The wound is almost closed. In a few weeks he should go off to an institute for artificial limbs. He continues not to talk much, and is much more solemn than formerly. He often breaks off in his speech and stares in front of him. If he were not here with us he would have shot himself long ago. But now he is over the worst of it, and he often looks on while we play skat.

I get convalescent leave.

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My mother does not want to let me go away. She is feeble. It is all much worse than it was last time.

Then I am recalled to my regiment and return once more to the line.

Parting from my friend Albert Kropp was very hard. But a man gets used to that sort of thing in the army.

# ELEVEN



We count the weeks no more. It was winter when I came up, and when the shells exploded the frozen clods of earth were just as dangerous as the fragments. Now the trees are green again. Our life alternates between billets and the front. We have almost grown accustomed to it; war is the cause of death like cancer and tuberculosis, like influenza and dysentery. The deaths are merely more frequent, more varied and terrible.

Our thoughts are clay, they are moulded with the changes of the days;—when we are resting they are good; under fire, they are dead. Fields of craters within and without.

Everyone is so, not only ourselves here—the

things that existed before are no longer valid, and one practically knows them no more. Distinctions, breeding, education are changed, are almost blotted out and hardly recognizable any longer.

Sometimes they give an advantage for profiting by a situation;— but they also bring consequences along with them, in that they arouse prejudices which have to be overcome. It is as though formerly we were coins of different provinces; and now we are melted down, and all bear the same stamp. To rediscover the old distinctions, the metal itself must be tested. First we are soldiers and afterwards, in a strange and shamefaced fashion, individual men as well.

It is a great brotherhood, which adds something of the good-fellowship of the folk-song, of the feeling of solidarity of convicts, and of the desperate loyalty to one another of men condemned to death, to a condition of life arising out of the midst of danger, out of the tension and forlornness of death—seeking in a wholly unpathetic way a fleeting enjoyment of the hours as they come. If one wants to appraise it, it is at once heroic and banal—but who wants to do that?

It is this, for example, that makes Tjaden spoon down his ham-and-pea soup in such tearing haste when an enemy attack is reported, simply because he cannot be sure that in an hour's

time he will be alive. We have discussed it at length, whether it is right or not to do so. Kat condemns it, because, he says, a man has to reckon with the possibility of an abdominal wound, and that is more dangerous on a full stomach than on an empty one.

Such things are real problems, they are serious matters to us, they cannot be otherwise. Here, on the borders of death, life follows an amazingly simple course, it is limited to what is most necessary, all else lies buried in gloomy sleep;—in that besides our primitiveness and our survival. Were we more subtly differentiated we must long since have gone mad, have deserted, or have fallen. As in a polar expedition, every expression of life must serve only the preservation of existence, and is absolutely focused on that. All else is banished because it would consume energies unnecessarily. That is the only way to save ourselves. In the quiet hours when the puzzling reflection of former days like a blurred mirror, projects beyond me the figure of my present existence, I often sit over against myself, as before a stranger, and wonder how the unnameable active principle that calls itself to life has adapted itself even to this form. All other expressions lie in a winter sleep, life is simply one continual watch against the menace of death;—it has transformed us into unthinking animals in

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order to give us the weapon of instinct—it has reinforced us with dullness, so that we do not go to pieces before the horror, which would overwhelm us if we had clear, conscious thought—it has awakened in us the sense of comradeship, so that we escape the abyss of solitude—it has lent us the indifference of wild creatures, so that in spite of all, we perceive the positive in every moment, and store it up as a reserve against the onslaught of nothingness. Thus we live a closed, hard existence of the utmost superficiality, and rarely does an incident strike out a spark. But then unexpectedly a flame of grievous and terrible yearning flares up.

Those are the dangerous moments. They show us that the adjustment is only artificial, that it is not simple rest, but sharpest struggle for rest. In the outward form of our life we are hardly distinguishable from Bushmen; but whereas the latter can be so always, because they are so truly, and at best may develop further by exertion of their spiritual forces, with us it is the reverse;—our inner forces are not exerted toward regeneration, but toward degeneration. The Bushmen are primitive and naturally so, but we are primitive in an artificial sense, and by virtue of the utmost effort.

And at night, waking out of a dream, overwhelmed and bewitched by the crowding apparitions,

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tions, a man perceives with alarm how slight is the support, how thin the boundary that divides him from the darkness. We are little flames poorly sheltered by frail walls against the storm of dissolution and madness, in which we flicker and sometimes almost go out. Then the muffled roar of the battle becomes a ring that encircles us, we creep in upon ourselves, and with big eyes stare into the night. Our only comfort is the steady breathing of our comrades asleep, and thus we wait for the morning.

Every day and every hour, every shell and every death cuts into this thin support, and the years waste it rapidly. I see how it is already gradually breaking down around me.

There is the mad story of Detering.

He was one of those who kept himself to himself. His misfortune was that he saw a cherry tree in a garden. We were just coming back from the front line, and at a turning of the road near our billets, marvellous in the morning twilight, stood this cherry tree before us. It had no leaves, but was one white mass of blossom.

In the evening Detering was not to be seen. Then at last he came back and had a couple of branches of cherry blossom in his hand. We made fun of him, and asked whether he was going to a

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wedding. He made no answer, but lay down on his bed. During the night I heard him making a noise, he seemed to be packing. I sensed something amiss and went over to him. He made out it was nothing, and I said to him: "Don't do anything silly, Detering."

"Ach, why—it's merely that I can't sleep——"

"What did you pick the cherry branches for?"

"Surely I can pick cherry blossom if I want to!" he replied evasively—and after a while: "I have a big orchard with cherry trees at home. When they are in blossom, from the hay loft they look like one single sheet, so white. It is just the time."

"Perhaps you will get leave soon. You may even be sent back as a farmer."

He nodded but he was far away. When these peasants are excited they have a curious expression, a mixture of cow and yearning god, half stupid and half rapt. In order to turn him away from his thoughts I asked him for a piece of bread. He gave it to me without a murmur. That was suspicious, for he is usually tight-fisted. So I stayed awake. Nothing happened; in the morning he was as usual.

Apparently he had noticed that I had been watching him;—but the second morning he was gone. I noticed it, but said nothing, in order to

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give him time; he might perhaps get through. Various fellows have already got into Holland.

But at roll call he was missed. A week after we heard that he had been caught by the field gendarmes, those despicable military police. He had headed toward Germany, that was hopeless, of course—and, of course, he did everything else just as idiotically. Anyone might have known that his flight was only homesickness and a momentary aberration. But what does a court-martial a hundred miles behind the front-line know about it? We have heard nothing more of Detering.

But sometimes it broke out in other ways, this danger, these pent-up things, as from an overheated boiler. It will be enough to tell how Berger met his end.

Our trenches have now for some time been shot to pieces, and we have an elastic line, so that there is practically no longer any proper trench warfare. When attack and counter-attack have waged backwards and forwards there remains a broken line and a bitter struggle from crater to crater. The front-line has been penetrated, and everywhere small groups have established themselves, the fight is carried on from clusters of shell-holes.

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We are in a crater, the English are coming down obliquely, they are turning our flank and working in behind us. We are surrounded. It is not easy to surrender, fog and smoke hang over us, no one would recognize that we wanted to give ourselves up, and perhaps we don't want to, a man doesn't even know himself at such moments. We hear the explosions of the hand-grenades coming towards us. Our machine-gun sweeps over the semicircle in front of us. The cooling-water evaporates, we hastily pass round the case, every man pisses in it, and thus we again have water, and are able to continue firing. But behind us the attack crashes ever nearer.

A few minutes and we are lost.

Then, at closest range, a second machine-gun bursts out. It is set up in a crater alongside us; Berger has fetched it, and now the counter-attack comes over from behind; we are set free and make contact with the rear.

Afterwards, as we lie in comparatively good cover, one of the food-carriers reports that a couple of hundred yards distant there lies a wounded messenger-dog.

"Where?" asks Berger.

The other describes the place to him. Berger goes off either to fetch the beast in or to shoot it. Six months ago he would not have cared, he would have been reasonable. We try to prevent

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him. Then, as he goes off grimly, all we can say is: "You're mad," and let him go. For these cases of front-line madness become dangerous if one is not able to fling the man to the ground and hold him fast. And Berger is six feet and the most powerful man in the company.

He is absolutely mad for he has to pass through the barrage; but this lightning that lowers somewhere above us has struck him and made him demented. It affects others so that they begin to rave, to run away—there was one man who even tried to dig himself into the ground with hands, feet, and teeth.

It is true, such things are often simulated, but the pretence itself is a symptom. Berger, who means to finish off the dog, is carried away with a wound in the pelvis, and one of the fellows who carry him gets a bullet in the leg while doing it.

Müller is dead. Someone shot him point-blank in the stomach with a Verey light. He lived for half an hour, quite conscious, and in terrible pain.

Before he died he handed over his pocket-book to me, and bequeathed me his boots—the same that he once inherited from Kemmerich. I wear them, for they fit me quite well. After me Tjaden will get them, I have promised them to him.

We have been able to bury Müller, but he is

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not likely to remain long undisturbed. Our lines are falling back. There are too many fresh English and American regiments over there. There's too much corned beef and white wheaten bread. Too many new guns. Too many aeroplanes.

But we are emaciated and starved. Our food is bad and mixed up with so much substitute stuff that it makes us ill. The factory owners in Germany have grown wealthy;—dysentery dissolves our bowels. The latrine poles are always densely crowded; the people at home ought to be shown these grey, yellow, miserable, wasted faces here, these bent figures from whose bodies the colic wrings out the blood, and who with lips trembling and distorted with pain, grin at one another and say:

“It is not much sense pulling up one's trousers again——”

Our artillery is fired out, it has too few shells and the barrels are so worn that they shoot uncertainly, and scatter so widely as even to fall on ourselves. We have too few horses. Our fresh troops are anaemic boys in need of rest, who cannot carry a pack, but merely know how to die. By thousands. They understand nothing about warfare, they simply go on and let themselves be shot down. A single flyer routed two companies of them for a joke, just as they came fresh from the

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train—before they had ever heard of such a thing as cover.

“Germany ought to be empty soon,” says Kat.

We have given up hope that some day an end may come. We never think so far. A man can stop a bullet and be killed; he can get wounded, and then the hospital is his next stop. There, if they do not amputate him, he sooner or later falls into the hands of one of those staff surgeons who, with the War Service Cross in his button-hole, says to him: “What, one leg a bit short? If you have any pluck you don't need to run at the front. The man is A1. Dismiss!”

Kat tells a story that has travelled the whole length of the front from the Vosges to Flanders;—of the staff surgeon who reads the names on the list, and when a man comes before him, without looking up, says: “A1. We need soldiers up there.” A fellow with a wooden leg comes up before him, the staff surgeon again says A1——“And then,” Kat raises his voice, “the fellow says to him: ‘I already have a wooden leg, but when I go back again and they shoot off my head, then I will get a wooden head made and become a staff surgeon.’” This answer tickles us all immensely.

There may be good doctors, and there are, lots of them; all the same, every soldier some time during his hundreds of inspections falls into the



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clutches of one of these countless hero-grabbers who pride themselves on changing as many C3's and B3's as possible into A1's.

There are many such stories, they are mostly far more bitter. All the same, they have nothing to do with mutiny or lead-swinging. They are merely honest and call a thing by its name; for there is a very great deal of fraud, injustice, and baseness in the army. It is nothing that regiment after regiment returns again and again to the ever more hopeless struggle, that attack follows attack along the weakening, retreating, crumbling line.

From a mockery the tanks have become a terrible weapon. Armoured they come rolling on in long lines, more than anything else embody for us the horror of war.

We do not see the guns that bombard us; the attacking lines of the enemy infantry are men like ourselves; but these tanks are machines, their caterpillars run on as endless as the war, they are annihilation, they roll without feeling into the craters, and climb up again without stopping, a fleet of roaring, smoke-belching armour-clads, invulnerable steel beasts squashing the dead and the wounded—we shrivel up in our thin skin before them, against their colossal

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weight our arms are sticks of straw, and our hand-grenades matches.

Shells, gas clouds, and flotillas of tanks—shattering, corroding, death.

Dysentery, influenza, typhus—scalding, choking, death.

Trenches, hospitals, the common grave—there are no other possibilities.

In one attack our Company Commander, Bertinck, falls. He was one of those superb front-line officers who are foremost in every hot place. He was with us for two years without being wounded, so that something had to happen in the end.

We occupy a crater and get surrounded. The stink of petroleum or oil blows across with the fumes of powder. Two fellows with a flame-thrower are seen, one carries the tin on his back, the other has the hose in his hands from which the fire spouts. If they get so near that they can reach us we are done for, we cannot retreat yet.

We open fire on them. But they work nearer and things begin to look bad. Bertinck is lying in the hole with us. When he sees that we cannot hit them because under the sharp fire we have to think too much about keeping under cover, he

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takes a rifle, crawls out of the hole, and lying down propped on his elbows, he takes aim. He fires—the same moment a bullet smacks into him, they have got him. Still he lies and aims again;—once he shifts and again takes aim; at last the rifle cracks. Bertinck lets the gun drop and says: "Good," and slips back into the hole. The hindermost of the two flame-throwers is hit, he falls, the hose slips away from the other fellow, the fire squirts about on all sides and the man burns.

Bertinck has a chest wound. After a while a fragment smashes away his chin, and the same fragment has sufficient force to tear open Leer's hip. Leer groans as he supports himself on his arm, he bleeds quickly, no one can help him. Like an emptying tube, after a couple of minutes he collapses.

What use is it to him now that he was such a good mathematician at school.

The months pass by. The summer of 1918 is the most bloody and the most terrible. The days stand like angels in blue and gold, incomprehensible, above the ring of annihilation. Every man here knows that we are losing the war. Not much is said about it, we are falling back, we will not

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be able to attack again after this big offensive, we have no more men and no more ammunition.

Still the campaign goes on—the dying goes on—

Summer of 1918—Never has life in its nigardiness seemed to us so desirable as now;—the red poppies in the meadows round our billets, the smooth beetles on the blades of grass, the warm evenings in the cool, dim rooms, the black mysterious trees of the twilight, the stars and the flowing waters, dreams and long sleep—O Life, life, life!

Summer of 1918—Never was so much silently suffered as in the moment when we depart once again for the front-line. Wild, tormenting rumours of an armistice and peace are in the air, they lay hold on our hearts and make the return to the front harder than ever.

Summer of 1918—Never was life in the line more bitter and full of horror than in the hours of the bombardment, when the blanched faces lie in the dirt and the hands clutch at the one thought: No! No! Not now! Not now at the last moment!

Summer of 1918—Breath of hope that sweeps over the scorched fields, raging fever of impatience, of disappointment, of the most agonizing terror of death, insensate question: Why? Why do

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they make an end? And why do these rumours of an end fly about?

There are so many airmen here, and they are so sure of themselves that they give chase to single individuals, just as though they were hares. For every one German plane there come at least five English and American. For one hungry, wretched German soldier come five of the enemy, fresh and fit. For one German army loaf there are fifty tins of canned beef over there. We are not beaten, for as soldiers we are better and more experienced; we are simply crushed and driven back by overwhelming superior forces.

Behind us lay rainy weeks—grey sky, grey fluid earth, grey dying. If we go out, the rain at once soaks through our overcoat and clothing;—and we remain wet all the time we are in the line. We never get dry. Those who will wear high boots tie sand bags round the tops so that the mud does not pour in so fast. The rifles are caked, the uniforms caked, everything is fluid and dissolved, the earth one dripping, soaked, oily mass in which lie yellow pools with red spiral streams of blood and into which the dead, wounded, and survivors slowly sink down.

The storm lashes us, out of the confusion of grey and yellow the hail of splinters whips forth

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the child-like cries of the wounded, and in the night shattered life groans painfully into silence.

Our hands are earth, our bodies clay and our eyes pools of rain. We do not know whether we still live.

Then the heat sinks heavily into our shell-holes like a jelly fish, moist and oppressive and on one of these late summer days, while bringing food, Kat falls. We two are alone. I bind up his wound; his shin seems to be smashed. It has got the bone, and Kat groans desperately: "At last—just at the last——"

I comfort him. "Who knows how long this mess will go on yet! Now you are saved——"

The wound begins to bleed fast. Kat cannot be left by himself while I try to find a stretcher. Anyway, I don't know of a stretcher-bearer's post in the neighborhood.

Kat is not very heavy; so I take him up on my back and start off to the dressing station with him.

Twice we rest. He suffers acutely on the way. We do not speak much. I have opened the collar of my tunic and breathe heavily, I sweat and my face is swollen with the strain of carrying. All the same I urge him to let us go on, for the place is dangerous.

"Shall we go on again Kat?"

"Must, Paul."

"Then come."

I raise him up, he stands on the uninjured leg and supports himself against a tree. I take up the wounded leg carefully, then he gives a jump and I take the knee of the sound leg also under my arm.

The going is more difficult. Often a shell whistles across. I go as quickly as I can, for the blood from Kat's wound drips to the ground. We cannot shelter ourselves properly for the explosions; before we can take cover the danger is all over.

We lie down in a small hole to wait till the shelling is over. I give Kat some tea from my water bottle. We smoke a cigarette. "Well, Kat," I say gloomily, "We are going to be separated at last."

He is silent and looks at me.

"Do you remember, Kat, how we commanded the goose? And how you brought me out of the barrage when I was still a young recruit and was wounded for the first time? I cried then. Kat, that is almost three years ago."

He nods.

The anguish of solitude rises up in me. When Kat is taken away I will not have one friend left.

"Kat, in any case we must see one another again, if it is peace-time before you come back."

"Do you think that I will be marked A1 again with this leg?" he asks bitterly.

"With rest it will get better. The joint is quite sound. It may get all right again."

"Give me another cigarette," he says.

"Perhaps we could do something together later on, Kat." I am very miserable, it is impossible that Kat—Kat my friend, Kat with the drooping shoulders and the poor, thin moustache, Kat, whom I know as I know no other man, Kat with whom I have shared these years—it is impossible that perhaps I shall not see Kat again.

"In any case give me your address at home, Kat. And here is mine, I will write it down for you."

I write his address in my pocket book. How forlorn I am already, though he still sits here beside me. Couldn't I shoot myself quickly in the foot so as to be able to go with him.

Suddenly Kat gurgles and turns green and yellow, "Let us go on," he stammers.

I jump up, eager to help him, I take him up and start off at a run, a slow, steady pace, so as not to jolt his leg too much.

My throat is parched; everything dances red and black before my eyes, I stagger on doggedly and pitilessly and at last reach the dressing station.

There I drop down on my knees, but have still enough strength to fall on to the side where Kat's sound leg is. After a few minutes I straighten

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myself up again. My legs and my hands tremble. I have trouble in finding my water bottle, to take a pull. My lips tremble as I try to think. But I smile—Kat is saved.

After a while I begin to sort out the confusion of voices that falls on my ears.

"You might have spared yourself that," says an orderly.

I look at him without comprehending.

He points to Kat. "He is stone dead."

I do not understand him. "He has been hit in the shin," I say.

The orderly stands still. "That as well."

I turn round. My eyes are still dulled, the sweat breaks out on me again, it runs over my eyelids. I wipe it away and peer at Kat. He lies still. "Fainted," I say quickly.

The orderly whistles softly. "I know better than that. He is dead. I'll lay any money on that."

I shake my head: "Not possible. Only ten minutes ago I was talking to him. He has fainted."

Kat's hands are warm, I pass my hand under his shoulders in order to rub his temples with some tea. I feel my fingers become moist. As I draw them away from behind his head, they are bloody. "You see——" The orderly whistles once more through his teeth.

On the way without my having noticed it, Kat

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has caught a splinter in the head. There is just one little hole, it must have been a very tiny, stray splinter. But it has sufficed. Kat is dead. Slowly I get up.

"Would you like to take his paybook and his things?" the lance-corporal asks me.

I nod and he gives them to me.

The orderly is mystified. "You are not related, are you?"

No, we are not related. No, we are not related.

Do I walk? Have I feet still? I raise my eyes, I let them move round, and turn myself with them, one circle, one circle, and I stand in the midst. All is as usual. Only the Militiaman Stanislaus Katzinsky has died.

Then I know nothing more.

# TWELVE



It is autumn. There are not many of the old hands left. I am the last of the seven fellows from our class.

Everyone talks of peace and armistice. All wait. If it again proves an illusion, then they will break up; hope is high, it cannot be taken away again without an upheaval. If there is not peace, then there will be revolution.

I have fourteen days rest, because I have swallowed a bit of gas; in the little garden I sit the whole day long in the sun. The armistice is coming soon, I believe it now too. Then we will go home.

Here my thoughts stop and will not go any far-

ther. All that meets me, all that floods over me are but feelings—greed of life, love of home, yearning for the blood, intoxication of deliverance. But no aims.

Had we returned home in 1916, out of the suffering and the strength of our experience we might have unleashed a storm. Now if we go back we will be weary, broken, burnt out, rootless, and without hope. We will not be able to find our way any more.

And men will not understand us—for the generation that grew up before us, though it has passed these years with us already had a home and a calling; now it will return to its old occupations, and the war will be forgotten—and the generation that has grown up after us will be strange to us and push us aside. We will be superfluous even to ourselves, we will grow older, a few will adapt themselves, some others will merely submit, and most will be bewildered,—the years will pass by and in the end we shall fall into ruin.

But perhaps all this that I think is mere melancholy and dismay, which will fly away as the dust, when I stand once again beneath the poplars and listen to the rustling of their leaves. It cannot be that it has gone, the yearning that made our blood unquiet, the unknown, the perplexing, the oncoming things, the thousand faces

of the future, the melodies from dreams and from books, the whispers and divinations of women; it cannot be that this has vanished in bombardment, in despair, in brothels.

Here the trees show gay and golden, the berries of the rowan stand red among the leaves, country roads run white out to the sky line, and the canteens hum like beehives with rumours of peace.

I stand up.

I am very quiet. Let the months and years come, they can take nothing from me, they can take nothing more. I am so alone, and so without hope that I can confront them without fear. The life that has borne me through these years is still in my hands and my eyes. Whether I have subdued it, I know not. But so long as it is there it will seek its own way out, heedless of the will that is within me.

## About the Author

ERICH MARIA REMARQUE (1898-1970) was himself in combat during World War I, and was wounded five times, the last time very severely. During the postwar years he taught briefly, became a stonecutter in the cemetery of Osnabruck where he had been born in 1898, and served as an assistant editor of *Sportsbild*. Remarque came to the United States in 1939 and remained for the duration of World War II, but returned to Switzerland afterward.

ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT made him rich and world-famous at thirty-three, but these consequences did not still his intense determination to concentrate in his fiction upon the worst horrors of the age, war and inhumanity, with which nearly all of his nine subsequent novels have been concerned. Fawcett published Remarque's BOBBY DEERFIELD in 1978.

He fell in October 1918, on a day that was so quiet and still on the whole front, that the army report confined itself to the single sentence: All quiet on the Western Front.

He had fallen forward and lay on the earth as though sleeping. Turning him over one saw that he could not have suffered long; his face had an expression of calm, as though almost glad the end had come.