

# All Quiet on the Western Front

ERICH MARIA REMARQUE

Translated from the German by  
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**This book is to be neither an accusation nor a confession, and least of all an adventure, for death is not an adventure to those who stand face to face with it. It will try simply to tell of a generation of men who, even though they may have escaped shells, were destroyed by the war.**

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# ONE



We are at rest five miles behind the front. Yesterday we were relieved, and now our bellies are full of beef and haricot beans. We are satisfied and at peace. Each man has another mess-tin full for the evening; and, what is more, there is a double ration of sausage and bread. That puts a man in fine trim. We have not had such luck as this for a long time. The cook with his carrot head is begging us to eat; he beckons with his ladle to every one that passes, and spoons him out a great dollop. He does not see how he can empty his stew-pot in time for coffee. Tjaden and Müller have produced two washbasins and had them filled up to the brim as a reserve. In Tjaden this is vorac-

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ity, in Müller it is foresight. Where Tjaden puts it all is a mystery, for he is and always will be as thin as a rake.

What's more important still is the issue of a double ration of smokes. Ten cigars, twenty cigarettes, and two quids of chew per man; now that is decent. I have exchanged my chewing tobacco with Katzinsky for his cigarettes, which means I have forty altogether. That's enough for a day.

It is true we have no right to this windfall. The Prussian is not so generous. We have only a mis-calculation to thank for it.

Fourteen days ago we had to go up and relieve the front line. It was fairly quiet on our sector, so the quartermaster who remained in the rear had requisitioned the usual quantity of rations and provided for the full company of one hundred and fifty men. But on the last day an astonishing number of English heavies opened up on us with high-explosive, drumming ceaselessly on our position, so that we suffered severely and came back only eighty strong.

Last night we moved back and settled down to get a good sleep for once: Katzinsky is right when he says it would not be such a bad war if only one could get a little more sleep. In the line we have had next to none, and fourteen days is a long time at one stretch.

It was noon before the first of us crawled out of

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our quarters. Half an hour later every man had his mess-tin and we gathered at the cook-house, which smelt greasy and nourishing. At the head of the queue of course were the hungriest—little Albert Kropp, the clearest thinker among us and therefore only a lance-corporal; Müller, who still carries his school textbooks with him, dreams of examinations, and during a bombardment mutters propositions in physics; Leer, who wears a full beard and has a preference for the girls from officers' brothels. He swears that they are obliged by an army order to wear silk chemises and to bathe before entertaining guests of the rank of captain and upwards. And as the fourth, myself, Paul Bäumer. All four are nineteen years of age, and all four joined up from the same class as volunteers for the war.

Close behind us were our friends: Tjaden, a skinny locksmith of our own age, the biggest eater of the company. He sits down to eat as thin as a grasshopper and gets up as big as a bug in the family way; Haie Westhus, of the same age, a peat-digger, who can easily hold a ration-loaf in his hand and say: Guess what I've got in my fist; then Detering, a peasant, who thinks of nothing but his farm-yard and his wife; and finally Stanislaus Katzinsky, the leader of our group, shrewd, cunning, and hard-bitten, forty years of age, with a face of the soil, blue eyes, bent

shoulders, and a remarkable nose for dirty weather, good food, and soft jobs.

Our gang formed the head of the queue before the cook-house. We were growing impatient, for the cook paid no attention to us.

Finally Katzinsky called to him: "Say, Heinrich, open up the soup-kitchen. Anyone can see the beans are done."

He shook his head sleepily: "You must all be there first." Tjaden grinned: "We are all here."

The sergeant-cook still took no notice. "That may do for you," he said. "But where are the others?"

"They won't be fed by you to-day. They're either in the dressing-station or pushing up daisies."

The cook was quite disconcerted as the facts dawned on him. He was staggered. "And I have cooked for one hundred and fifty men——"

Kropp poked him in the ribs. "Then for once we'll have enough. Come on, begin!"

Suddenly a vision came over Tjaden. His sharp, mousy features began to shine, his eyes grew small with cunning, his jaws twitched, and he whispered hoarsely: "Man! then you've got bread for one hundred and fifty men too, eh?"

The sergeant-cook nodded absent-minded, and bewildered.

Tjaden seized him by the tunic. "And sausage?"

Ginger nodded again.

Tjaden's chaps quivered. "Tobacco too?"

"Yes, everything."

Tjaden beamed: "What a bean-feast! That's all for us! Each man gets—wait a bit—yes, practically two issues."

Then Ginger stirred himself and said: "That won't do."

We got excited and began to crowd around.

"Why won't that do, you old carrot?" demanded Katzinsky.

"Eighty men can't have what is meant for a hundred and fifty."

"We'll soon show you," growled Müller.

"I don't care about the stew, but I can only issue rations for eighty men," persisted Ginger.

Katzinsky got angry. "You might be generous for once. You haven't drawn food for eighty men. You've drawn it for the Second Company. Good. Let's have it then. We are the Second Company."

We began to jostle the fellow. No one felt kindly toward him, for it was his fault that the food often came up to us in the line too late and cold. Under shellfire he wouldn't bring his kitchen up near enough, so that our soup-carriers had to go much farther than those of the other companies. Now Bulcke of the First Company is

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a much better fellow. He is as fat as a hamster in winter, but he trundles his pots when it comes to that right up to the very front-line.

We were in just the right mood, and there would certainly have been a dust-up if our company commander had not appeared. He informed himself of the dispute, and only remarked: "Yes, we did have heavy losses yesterday."

He glanced into the dixie. "The beans look good."

Ginger nodded. "Cooked with meat and fat."

The lieutenant looked at us. He knew what we were thinking. And he knew many other things too, because he came to the company as a non-com. and was promoted from the ranks. He lifted the lid from the dixie again and sniffed. Then passing on he said: "Bring me a plate full. Serve out all the rations. We can do with them."

Ginger looked sheepish as Tjaden danced round him.

"It doesn't cost you anything! Anyone would think the quartermaster's store belonged to him! And now get on with it, you old blubber-sticker, and don't you miscount either."

"You be hanged!" spat out Ginger. When things get beyond him he throws up the sponge altogether; he just goes to pieces. And as if to show that all things were equal to him, of his

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own free will he issued in addition half a pound of synthetic honey to each man.

To-day is wonderfully good. The mail has come, and almost every man has a few letters and papers. We stroll over to the meadow behind the billets. Kropp has the round lid of a margarine tub under his arm.

On the right side of the meadow a large common latrine has been built, a roofed and durable construction. But that is for recruits who as yet have not learned how to make the most of whatever comes their way. We want something better. Scattered about everywhere there are separate, individual boxes for the same purpose. They are square, neat boxes with wooden sides all round, and have unimpeachably satisfactory seats. On the sides are hand grips enabling one to shift them about.

We move three together in a ring and sit down comfortably. And it will be two hours before we get up again.

I well remember how embarrassed we were as recruits in barracks when we had to use the general latrine. There were no doors and twenty men sat side by side as in a railway carriage, so that they could be reviewed all at one glance, for soldiers must always be under supervision.

Since then we have learned better than to be shy about such trifling immodesties. In time things far worse than that came easy to us.

Here in the open air though, the business is entirely a pleasure. I no longer understand why we should always have shied at these things before. They are, in fact, just as natural as eating and drinking. We might perhaps have paid no particular attention to them had they not figured so large in our experience, nor been such novelties to our minds—to the old hands they had long been a mere matter of course.

The soldier is on friendlier terms than other men with his stomach and intestines. Three-quarters of his vocabulary is derived from these regions, and they give an intimate flavour to expressions of his greatest joy as well as of his deepest indignation. It is impossible to express oneself in any other way so clearly and pithily. Our families and our teachers will be shocked when we go home, but here it is the universal language.

Enforced publicity has in our eyes restored the character of complete innocence to all these things. More than that, they are so much a matter of course that their comfortable performance is fully as much enjoyed as the playing of a safe top running flush. Not for nothing was the word

“latrine-rumour” invented; these places are the regimental gossip-shop and common-rooms.

We feel ourselves for the time being better off than in any palatial white-tiled “convenience.” *There* it can only be hygienic; *here* it is beautiful.

These are wonderfully care-free hours. Over us is the blue sky. On the horizon float the bright yellow, sunlit observation-balloons, and the many little white clouds of the anti-aircraft shells. Often they rise in a sheaf as they follow after an airman. We hear the muffled rumble of the front only as very distant thunder, bumblebees droning by quite drown it. Around us stretches the flowery meadow. The grasses sway their tall spears; the white butterflies flutter around and float on the soft warm wind of the late summer. We read letters and newspapers and smoke. We take off our caps and lay them down beside us. The wind plays with our hair; it plays with our words and thoughts. The three boxes stand in the midst of the glowing, red field-poppies.

We set the lid of the margarine tub on our knees and so have a good table for a game of skat. Kropp has the cards with him. After every *misère ouverte* we have a round of nap. One could sit like this for ever.

The notes of an accordion float across from the billets. Often we lay aside the cards and look

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about us. One of us will say: "Well, boys...." Or "It was a near thing that time...." And for a moment we fall silent. There is in each of us a feeling of constraint. We are all sensible of it; it needs no words to communicate it. It might easily have happened that we should not be sitting here on our boxes to-day; it came damn near to that. And so everything is new and brave, red poppies and good food, cigarettes and summer breeze.

Kropp asks: "Anyone seen Kemmerich lately?"

"He's up at St. Joseph's," I tell him.

Müller explains that he has a flesh wound in his thigh; a good blighty.

We decide to go and see him this afternoon.

Kropp pulls out a letter. "Kantorek sends you all his best wishes."

We laugh. Müller throws his cigarette away and says: "I wish he was here."

Kantorek had been our schoolmaster, a stern little man in a grey tail-coat, with a face like a shrew mouse. He was about the same size as Corporal Himmelstoss, the "terror of Klosterberg." It is very queer that the unhappiness of the world is so often brought on by small men. They are so much more energetic and uncompromising than the big fellows. I have always taken good care to

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keep out of sections with small company commanders. They are mostly confounded little mar-tinets.

During drill-time Kantorek gave us long lectures until the whole of our class went, under his shepherding, to the District Commandant and volunteered. I can see him now, as he used to glare at us through his spectacles and say in a moving voice: "Won't you join up, Comrades?"

These teachers always carry their feelings ready in their waistcoat pockets, and trot them out by the hour. But we didn't think of that then.

There was, indeed, one of us who hesitated and did not want to fall into line. That was Joseph Behm, a plump, homely fellow. But he did allow himself to be persuaded, otherwise he would have been ostracized. And perhaps more of us thought as he did, but no one could very well stand out, because at that time even one's parents were ready with the word "coward"; no one had the vaguest idea what we were in for. The wisest were just the poor and simple people. They knew the war to be a misfortune, whereas those who were better off, and should have been able to see more clearly what the consequences would be, were beside themselves with joy.

Katczinsky said that was a result of their upbringing. It made them stupid. And what Kat said, he had thought about.



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Strange to say, Behm was one of the first to fall. He got hit in the eye during an attack, and we left him lying for dead. We couldn't bring him with us, because we had to come back helter-skelter. In the afternoon suddenly we heard him call, and saw him crawling about in No Man's Land. He had only been knocked unconscious. Because he could not see, and was mad with pain, he failed to keep under cover, and so was shot down before anyone could go and fetch him in.

Naturally we couldn't blame Kantorek for this. Where would the world be if one brought every man to book? There were thousands of Kantoreks, all of whom were convinced that they were acting for the best—in a way that cost them nothing.

And that is why they let us down so badly.

For us lads of eighteen they ought to have been mediators and guides to the world of maturity, the world of work, of duty, of culture, of progress—to the future. We often made fun of them and played jokes on them, but in our hearts we trusted them. The idea of authority, which they represented, was associated in our minds with a greater insight and a more humane wisdom. But the first death we saw shattered this belief. We had to recognize that our generation was more to be trusted than theirs. They surpassed us only in

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phrases and in cleverness. The first bombardment showed us our mistake, and under it the world as they had taught it to us broke in pieces.

While they continued to write and talk, we saw the wounded and dying. While they taught that duty to one's country is the greatest thing, we already knew that death-throes are stronger. But for all that we were no mutineers, no deserters, no cowards—they were very free with all these expressions. We loved our country as much as they; we went courageously into every action; but also we distinguished the false from true, we had suddenly learned to see. And we saw that there was nothing of their world left. We were all at once terribly alone; and alone we must see it through.

Before going over to see Kemmerich we pack up his things: he will need them on the way back.

In the dressing station there is great activity: it reeks as ever of carbolic, pus, and sweat. We are accustomed to a good deal in the billets, but this makes us feel faint. We ask for Kemmerich. He lies in a large room and receives us with feeble expressions of joy and helpless agitation. While he was unconscious someone had stolen his watch.

Müller shakes his head: "I always told you

that nobody should carry as good a watch as that."

Müller is rather crude and tactless, otherwise he would hold his tongue, for anybody can see that Kemmerich will never come out of this place again. Whether he finds his watch or not will make no difference, at the most one will only be able to send it to his people.

"How goes it, Franz?" asks Kropp.

Kemmerich's head sinks.

"Not so bad... but I have such a damned pain in my foot."

We look at his bed covering. His leg lies under a wire basket. The bed covering arches over it. I kick Müller on the shin, for he is just about to tell Kemmerich what the orderlies told us outside: that Kemmerich has lost his foot. The leg is amputated. He looks ghastly, yellow and wan. In his face there are already the strained lines that we know so well, we have seen them now hundreds of times. They are not so much lines as marks. Under the skin the life no longer pulses, it has already pressed out the boundaries of the body. Death is working through from within. It already has command in the eyes. Here lies our comrade, Kemmerich, who a little while ago was roasting horse flesh with us and squatting in the shell-holes. He it is still and yet it is not he any longer. His features have become uncertain and

faint, like a photographic plate from which two pictures have been taken. Even his voice sounds like ashes.

I think of the time when we went away. His mother, a good plump matron, brought him to the station. She wept continually, her face was bloated and swollen. Kemmerich felt embarrassed, for she was the least composed of all; she simply dissolved into fat and water. Then she caught sight of me and took hold of my arm again and again, and implored me to look after Franz out there. Indeed he did have a face like a child, and such frail bones that after four weeks' pack-carrying he already had flat feet. But how can a man look after anyone in the field!

"Now you will soon be going home," says Kropp. "You would have had to wait at least three or four months for your leave."

Kemmerich nods. I cannot bear to look at his hands, they are like wax. Under the nails is the dirt of the trenches, it shows through blue-black like poison. It strikes me that these nails will continue to grow like lean fantastic cellars plants long after Kemmerich breathes no more. I see the picture before me. They twist themselves into corkscrews and grow and grow, and with them the hair on the decaying skull, just like grass in a good soil, just like grass, how can it be possible——

Müller leans over. "We have brought your things, Franz."

Kemmerich signs with his hands. "Put them under the bed."

Müller does so. Kemmerich starts on again about the watch. How can one calm him without making him suspicious?

Müller reappears with a pair of airman's boots. They are fine English boots of soft, yellow leather which reach to the knees and lace up all the way—they are things to be coveted.

Müller is delighted at the sight of them. He matches their soles against his own clumsy boots and says: "Will you be taking them with you then, Franz?"

We all three have the same thought; even if he should get better, he would be able to use only one—they are no use to him. But as things are now it is a pity that they should stay here; the orderlies will of course grab them as soon as he is dead.

"Won't you leave them with us?" Müller repeats.

Kemmerich doesn't want to. They are his most prized possessions.

"Well, we could exchange," suggests Müller again. "Out here one can make some use of them." Still Kemmerich is not to be moved.

I tread on Müller's foot; reluctantly he puts the fine boots back again under the bed.

We talk a little more and then take our leave. "Cheerio, Franz."

I promise him to come back in the morning. Müller talks of doing so, too. He is thinking of the lace-up boots and means to be on the spot.

Kemmerich groans. He is feverish. We get hold of an orderly outside and ask him to give Kemmerich a dose of morphia.

He refuses. "If we were to give morphia to everyone we would have to have tubs full——"

"You only attend to officers properly," says Kropp viciously.

I hastily intervene and give him a cigarette. He takes it.

"Are you usually allowed to give it, then?" I ask him.

He is annoyed. "If you don't think so, then why do you ask?"

I press a few more cigarettes into his hand. "Do us the favour——"

"Well, all right," he says.

Kropp goes in with him. He doesn't trust him and wants to see. We wait outside.

Müller returns to the subject of the boots. "They would fit me perfectly. In these boots I get blister after blister. Do you think he will last till

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tomorrow after drill? If he passes out in the night, we know where the boots——"

Kropp returns. "Do you think——?" he asks.

"Done for," said Müller emphatically.

We go back to the huts. I think of the letter that I must write to-morrow to Kemmerich's mother. I am freezing. I could do with a tot of rum. Müller pulls up some grass and chews it. Suddenly little Kropp throws his cigarette away, stamps on it savagely, and looking around him with a broken and distracted face, stammers "Damned shit, the damned shit!"

We walk on for a long time. Kropp has calmed himself; we understand, he saw red; out there every man gets like that sometime.

"What has Kantorek written to you?" Müller asks him.

He laughs. "We are the Iron Youth."

We all three smile bitterly, Kropp rails: he is glad that he can speak.

Yes, that's the way they think, these hundred thousand Kantoreks! Iron Youth! Youth! We are none of us more than twenty years old. But young? Youth? That is long ago. We are old folk.

# TWO



It is strange to think that at home in the drawer of my writing table there lies the beginning of a play called "Saul" and a bundle of poems. Many an evening I have worked over them—we all did something of the kind—but that has become so unreal to me I cannot comprehend it any more. Our early life is cut off from the moment we came here, and that without our lifting a hand. We often try to look back on it and to find an explanation, but never quite succeed. For us young men of twenty everything is extraordinarily vague, for Kropp, Müller, Leer, and for me, for all of us whom Kantorek calls the "Iron Youth." All the older men are linked up with their pre-

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vious life. They have wives, children, occupations, and interests, they have a background which is so strong that the war cannot obliterate it. We young men of twenty, however, have only our parents, and some, perhaps, a girl—that is not much, for at our age the influence of parents is at its weakest and girls have not yet got a hold over us. Besides this there was little else—some enthusiasm, a few hobbies, and our school. Beyond this our life did not extend. And of this nothing remains.

Kantorek would say that we stood on the threshold of life. And so it would seem. We had as yet taken no root. The war swept us away. For the others, the older men, it is but an interruption. They are able to think beyond it. We, however, have been gripped by it and do not know what the end may be. We know only that in some strange and melancholy way we have become a waste land. All the same, we are not often sad.

Though Müller would be delighted to have Kemmerich's boots, he is really quite as sympathetic as another who could not bear to think of such a thing for grief. He merely sees things clearly. Were Kemmerich able to make any use of the boots, then Müller would rather go bare-foot over barbed wire than scheme how to get hold of

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them. But as it is the boots are quite inappropriate to Kemmerich's circumstances, whereas Müller can make good use of them. Kemmerich will die; it is immaterial who gets them. Why, then, should Müller not succeed to them? He has more right than a hospital orderly. When Kemmerich is dead it will be too late. Therefore Müller is already on the watch.

We have lost all sense of other considerations, because they are artificial. Only the facts are real and important for us. And good boots are scarce.

Once it was different. When we went to the district commandant to enlist, we were a class of twenty young men, many of whom proudly shaved for the first time before going to the barracks. We had no definite plans for our future. Our thoughts of a career and occupation were as yet of too unpractical a character to furnish any scheme of life. We were still crammed full of vague ideas which gave to life, and to the war also an ideal and almost romantic character. We were trained in the army for ten weeks and in this time more profoundly influenced than by ten years at school. We learned that a bright button is weightier than four volumes of Schopenhauer. At first astonished, then embittered, and finally

indifferent, we recognized that what matters is not the mind but the boot brush, not intelligence but the system, not freedom but drill. We became soldiers with eagerness and enthusiasm, but they have done everything to knock that out of us. After three weeks it was no longer incomprehensible to us that a braided postman should have more authority over us than had formerly our parents, our teachers, and the whole gamut of culture from Plato to Goethe. With our young, awakened eyes we saw that the classical conception of the Fatherland held by our teachers resolved itself here into a renunciation of personality such as one would not ask of the meanest servants—salutes, springing to attention, parade-marches, presenting arms, right wheel, left wheel, clicking the heels, insults, and a thousand pettifogging details. We had fancied our task would be different, only to find we were to be trained for heroism as though we were circus-ponies. But we soon accustomed ourselves to it. We learned in fact that some of these things were necessary, but the rest merely show. Soldiers have a fine nose for such distinctions.

By threes and fours our class was scattered over the platoons amongst Frisian fishermen, peasants, and labourers with whom we soon made

friends. Kropp, Muller, Kemmerich, and I went to No. 9 platoon under Corporal Himmelstoss.

He had the reputation of being the strictest disciplinarian in the camp, and was proud of it. He was a small undersized fellow with a foxy, waxed moustache, who had seen twelve years' service and was in civil life a postman. He had a special dislike of Kropp, Tjaden, Westhus, and me, because he sensed a quiet defiance.

I have remade his bed fourteen times in one morning. Each time he had some fault to find and pulled it to pieces. I have kneaded a pair of prehistoric boots that were as hard as iron for twenty hours—with intervals of course—until they became as soft as butter and not even Himmelstoss could find anything more to do to them; under his orders I have scrubbed out the Corporals' Mess with a tooth-brush. Kropp and I were given the job of clearing the barrack-square of snow with a hand-broom and a dust-pan, and we would have gone on till we were frozen had not a lieutenant accidentally appeared who sent us off, and hauled Himmelstoss over the coals. But the only result of this was to make Himmelstoss hate us more. For six weeks consecutively I did guard every Sunday and was hut-orderly for the same length of time. With a full pack and rifle I have had to practise on a wet, soft, newly-ploughed field the "Prepare to advance, ad-

vance!" and the "Lie down!" until I was one lump of mud and finally collapsed. Four hours later I had to report to Himmelstoss with my clothes scrubbed clean, my hands chafed and bleeding. Together with Kropp, Westhus, and Tjaden I have stood at attention in a hard frost without gloves for a quarter of an hour at a stretch, while Himmelstoss watched for the slightest movement of our bare fingers on the steel barrel of the rifle. I have run eight times from the top floor of the barracks down to the courtyard in my shirt at two o'clock in the morning because my drawers projected three inches beyond the edge of the stool on which one had to stack all one's things. Alongside me ran the corporal, Himmelstoss, and trod on my bare toes. At bayonet-practice I had constantly to fight with Himmelstoss, I with a heavy iron weapon, whilst he had a handy wooden one with which he easily struck my arms till they were black and blue. Once, indeed, I became so infuriated that I ran at him blindly and gave him a mighty jab in the stomach and knocked him down. When he reported me the company commander laughed at him and told him he ought to keep his eyes open; he understood Himmelstoss, and apparently was not displeased at his discomfiture. I became a past master on the parallel bars and excelled at physical jerks;—we have trembled at the mere sound

of his voice, but his runaway post-horse never got the better of us.

One Sunday as Kropp and I were lugging a latrine-bucket on a pole across the barrack-yard, Himmelstoss came by, all polished up and spry for going out. He planted himself in front of us and asked how we liked the job. In spite of ourselves we tripped and emptied the bucket over his legs. He raved, but the limit had been reached.

"That means clink," he yelled.

But Kropp had had enough. "There'll be an inquiry first," he said, "and then we'll unload."

"Mind how you speak to a non-commissioned officer!" bawled Himmelstoss. "Have you lost your senses? You wait till you're spoken to. What will you do, anyway?"

"Show you up, Corporal," said Kropp, his thumbs in line with the seams of his trousers.

Himmelstoss saw that we meant it and went off without saying a word. But before he disappeared he growled: "You'll drink this!"—but that was the end of his authority. He tried it on once more in the ploughed field with his "Prepare to advance, advance" and "Lie down." We obeyed each order, since an order's an order and has to be obeyed. But we did it so slowly that Himmelstoss became desperate. Carefully we went down on our knees, then on our hands, and so on; in the

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meantime, quite infuriated, he had given another command. But before we had even begun to sweat he was hoarse. After that he left us in peace. He did indeed always refer to us as swine, but there was, nevertheless, a certain respect in his tone.

There were many other staff corporals, the majority of whom were more decent. But above all each of them wanted to keep his good job there as long as possible, and this he could do only by being strict with the recruits.

So we were put through every conceivable refinement of parade-ground soldiering till we often howled with rage. Many of us became ill through it; Wolf actually died of inflammation of the lung. But we would have felt ridiculous had we hauled down our colours. We became hard, suspicious, pitiless, vicious, tough—and that was good; for these attributes were just what we lacked. Had we gone into the trenches without this period of training most of us would certainly have gone mad. Only thus were we prepared for what awaited us. We did not break down, but adapted ourselves; our twenty years, which made many another thing so grievous, helped us in this. But by far the most important result was that it awakened in us a strong, practical sense of *esprit de corps*, which in the field developed

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into the finest thing that arose out of the war—comradeship.

I sit by Kemmerich's bed. He is sinking steadily. Around us is great commotion. A hospital train has arrived and the wounded fit to be moved are being selected. The doctor passes by Kemmerich's bed without once looking at him.

"Next time, Franz," I say.

He raises himself on the pillow with his elbows. "They have amputated my leg."

He knows it too then. I nod and answer: "You must be thankful you've come off with that."

He is silent.

I resume: "It might have been both legs, Franz. Wegeler has lost his right arm. That's much worse. Besides, you will be going home." He looks at me. "Do you think so?"

"Of course."

"Do you think so?" he repeats.

"Sure, Franz. Once you've got over the operation."

He beckons me to bend down. I stoop over him and he whispers: "I don't think so."

"Don't talk rubbish; Franz, in a couple of days you'll see for yourself. What is it anyway—an amputated leg? Here they patch up far worse things than that."



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He lifts one hand. "Look here though, these fingers."

"That's the result of the operation. Just eat decently and you'll soon be well again. Do they look after you properly?"

He points to a dish that is still half full. I get excited. "Franz, you must eat. Eating is the main thing. That looks good too."

He turns away. After a pause he says slowly: "I wanted to become a head-forester once."

"So you may still," I assure him. "There are splendid artificial limbs now, you'd hardly know there was anything missing. They are fixed on to the muscles. You can move the fingers and work and even write with an artificial hand. And besides, they will always be making new improvements."

For a while he lies still. Then he says: "You can take my lace-up boots with you for Müller."

I nod and wonder what to say to encourage him. His lips have fallen away, his mouth has become larger, his teeth stick out and look as though they were made of chalk. The flesh melts, the forehead bulges more prominently, the cheekbones protrude. The skeleton is working itself through. The eyes are already sunken in. In a couple of hours it will be over.

He is not the first that I have seen thus; but we grew up together and that always makes it a

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bit different. I have copied his essays. At school he used to wear a brown coat with a belt and shiny sleeves. He was the only one of us, too, who could do the giant's turn on the horizontal bar. His hair flew in his face like silk when he did it. Kantorek was proud of him. But he couldn't stand cigarettes. His skin was very white; he had something of the girl about him.

I glance at my boots. They are big and clumsy, the breeches are tucked into them, and standing up one looks well-built and powerful in these great drainpipes. But when we go bathing and strip, suddenly we have slender legs again and slight shoulders. We are no longer soldiers but little more than boys; no one would believe that we could carry packs. It is a strange moment when we stand naked; then we become civilians, and almost feel ourselves to be so. When bathing Franz Kemmerich looked as slight and frail as a child. There he lies now—but why? The whole world ought to pass by this bed and say: "That is Franz Kemmerich, nineteen and a half years old, he doesn't want to die. Let him not die!"

My thoughts become confused. This atmosphere of carbolic and gangrene clogs the lungs, it is a thick gruel, it suffocates.

It grows dark. Kemmerich's face changes colour, it lifts from the pillow and is so pale that it gleams. The mouth moves slightly. I draw near to

him. He whispers: "If you find my watch, send it home——"

I do not reply. It is no use any more. No one can console him. I am wretched with helplessness. This forehead with its hollow temples, this mouth that now seems all teeth, this sharp nose! And the fat, weeping woman at home to whom I must write. If only the letter were sent off already!

Hospital-orderlies go to and fro with bottles and pails. One of them comes up, casts a glance at Kemmerich and goes away again. You can see he is waiting, apparently he wants the bed.

I bend over Franz and talk to him as though that could save him: "Perhaps you will go to the convalescent home at Klosterberg, among the villas, Franz. Then you can look out from the window across the fields to the two trees on the horizon. It is the loveliest time of the year now, when the corn ripens; at evening the fields in the sunlight look like mother-of-pearl. And the lane of poplars by the Klosterbach, where we used to catch stickle-backs! You can build an aquarium again and keep fish in it, and you can go without asking anyone, you can even play the piano if you want to."

I lean down over his face which lies in the shadow. He still breathes, lightly. His face is wet,

he is crying. What a fine mess I have made of it with my foolish talk!

"But Franz"—I put my arm round his shoulder and put my face against his. "Will you sleep now?"

He does not answer. The tears run down his cheeks. I would like to wipe them away but my handkerchief is too dirty.

An hour passes. I sit tensely and watch his every movement in case he may perhaps say something. What if he were to open his mouth and cry out! But he only weeps, his head turned aside. He does not speak of his mother or his brothers and sisters. He says nothing; all that lies behind him; he is entirely alone now with his little life of nineteen years, and cries because it leaves him. This is the most disturbing and hardest parting that I ever have seen, although it was pretty bad too with Tiedjen, who called for his mother—a big bear of a fellow who, with wild eyes full of terror, held off the doctor from his bed with a dagger until he collapsed.

Suddenly Kemmerich groans and begins to gurgle.

I jump up, stumble outside and demand: "Where is the doctor? Where is the doctor?"

As I catch sight of the white apron I seize hold of it: "Come quick, Franz Kemmerich is dying."

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He frees himself and asks an orderly standing by: "Which will that be?"

He says: "Bed 26, amputated thigh."

He sniffs: "How should I know anything about it, I've amputated five legs to-day"; he shoves me away, says to the hospital-orderly "You see to it," and hurries off to the operating room.

I tremble with rage as I go along with the orderly. The man looks at me and says: "One operation after another since five o'clock this morning. You know, to-day alone there have been sixteen deaths—yours is the seventeenth. There will probably be twenty altogether——"

I become faint, all at once I cannot do any more. I won't revile any more, it is senseless, I could drop down and never rise up again.

We are by Kemmerich's bed. He is dead. The face is still wet from the tears. The eyes are half open and yellow like old horn buttons. The orderly pokes me in the ribs, "Are you taking his things with you?" I nod.

He goes on: "We must take him away at once, we want the bed. Outside they are lying on the floor."

I collect Kemmerich's things, and untie his identification disc. The orderly asks about the paybook. I say that it is probably in the orderly-room, and go. Behind me they are already hauling Franz on to a waterproof sheet.

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Outside the door I am aware of the darkness and the wind as a deliverance. I breathe as deep as I can, and feel the breeze in my face, warm and soft as never before. Thoughts of girls, of flowery meadows, of white clouds suddenly come into my head. My feet begin to move forward in my boots, I go quicker, I run. Soldiers pass by me, I hear their voices without understanding. The earth is streaming with forces which pour into me through the soles of my feet. The night crackles electrically, the front thunders like a concert of drums. My limbs move supplely, I feel my joints strong, I breathe the air deeply. The night lives, I live. I feel a hunger, greater than comes from the belly alone.

Müller stands in front of the hut waiting for me. I give him the boots. We go in and he tries them on. They fit well.

He roots among his supplies and offers me a fine piece of saveloy. With it goes hot tea and rum.

# THREE



Reinforcements have arrived. The vacancies have been filled and the sacks of straw in the huts are already booked. Some of them are old hands, but there are twenty-five men of a later draft from the base. They are about two years younger than us. Kropp nudges me: "Seen the infants?"

I nod. We stick out our chests, shave in the open, shove our hands in our pockets, inspect the recruits and feel ourselves stone-age veterans.

Katzinsky joins us. We stroll past the horse-boxes and go over to the reinforcements, who are already being issued with gas masks and coffee.

"Long time since you've had anything decent to eat, eh?" Kat asks one of the youngsters.

He grimaces. "For breakfast, turnip-bread—lunch, turnip-stew—supper, turnip-cutlets and turnip-salad." Kat gives a knowing whistle.

"Bread made of turnips? You've been in luck, it's nothing new for it to be made of sawdust. But what do you say to haricot beans? Have some?"

The youngster turns red: "You can't kid me."

Katzinsky merely says: "Fetch your mess-tin."

We follow curiously. He takes us to a tub beside his straw sack. Sure enough it is half full of beef and beans. Katzinsky plants himself in front of it like a general and says:

"Sharp eyes and light fingers! That's what the Prussians say."

We are surprised. "Great guts, Kat, how did you come by that?" I ask him.

"Ginger was glad I took it. I gave him three pieces of parachute-silk for it. Cold beans taste fine, too."

Patronizingly he gives the youngster a portion and says:

"Next time you come with your mess-tin have a cigar or a chew of tobacco in your other hand. Get me?" Then he turns to us. "You get off scot free, of course."

\* \* \*

We couldn't do without Katzinsky; he has a sixth sense. There are such people everywhere but one does not appreciate it at first. Every company has one or two. Katzinsky is the smartest I know. By trade he is a cobbler, I believe, but that hasn't anything to do with it; he understands all trades. It's a good thing to be friends with him, as Kropp and I are, and Haie Westhus too, more or less. But Haie is rather the executive arm, operating under Kat's orders when things come to blows. For that he has his qualifications.

For example, we land at night in some entirely unknown spot, a sorry hole, that has been eaten out to the very walls. We are quartered in a small dark factory adapted to the purpose. There are beds in it, or rather bunks—a couple of wooden beams over which wire netting is stretched.

Wire netting is hard. And there's nothing to put on it. Our waterproof sheets are too thin. We use our blankets to cover ourselves.

Kat looks at the place and then says to Haie Westhus: "Come with me." They go off to explore. Half an hour later they are back again with arms full of straw. Kat has found a horse-box with straw in it. Now we might sleep if we weren't so terribly hungry.

Kropp asks an artilleryman who has been some time in this neighbourhood: "Is there a canned anywhereabouts?"

"Is there a what?" he laughs. "There's nothing to be had here. You won't find so much as a crust of bread here."

"Aren't there any inhabitants here at all then?"

He spits. "Yes, a few. But they hang round the cook-house and beg."

"That's a bad business!—Then we'll have to pull in our belts and wait till the rations come up in the morning."

But I see Kat has put on his cap.

"Where to, Kat?" I ask.

"Just to explore the place a bit." He strolls off. The artilleryman grins scornfully. "Go ahead and explore. But don't strain yourself in carrying what you find."

Disappointed we lie down and consider whether we couldn't have a go at the iron rations. But it's too risky; so we try to get a wink of sleep.

Kropp divides a cigarette and hands me half. Tjaden gives an account of his national dish—broad-beans and bacon. He despises it when not flavoured with bog-myrtle, and, "for God's sake, let it all be cooked together, not the potatoes, the beans, and the bacon separately." Someone

grows that he will pound Tjaden into bog-myrtle if he doesn't shut up. Then all becomes quiet in the big room—only the candles flickering from the necks of a couple of bottles and the artilleryman spitting every now and then.

We are just dozing off when the door opens and Kat appears. I think I must be dreaming; he has two loaves of bread under his arm and a blood-stained sandbag full of horse-flesh in his hand.

The artilleryman's pipe drops from his mouth. He feels the bread. "Real bread, by God, and still hot too?"

Kat gives no explanation. He has the bread, the rest doesn't matter. I'm sure that if he were planted down in the middle of the desert, in half an hour he would have gathered together a supper of roast meat, dates, and wine.

"Cut some wood," he says curtly to Haie.

Then he hauls out a frying pan from under his coat, and a handful of salt as well as a lump of fat from his pocket. He has thought of everything. Haie makes a fire on the floor. It lights up the empty room of the factory. We climb out of bed.

The artilleryman hesitates. He wonders whether to praise Kat and so perhaps gain a little for himself. But Katzinsky doesn't even see him, he might as well be thin air. He goes off cursing.

Kat knows the way to roast horse-flesh so that

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it's tender. It shouldn't be put straight into the pan, that makes it tough. It should be boiled first in a little water. With our knives we squat round in a circle and fill our bellies.

That is Kat. If for one hour in a year something eatable were to be had in some one place only, within that hour, as if moved by a vision, he would put on his cap, go out and walk directly there, as though following a compass, and find it.

He finds everything—if it is cold, a small stove and wood, hay and straw, a table and chairs—but above all food. It is uncanny; one would think he conjured it out of the air. His masterpiece was four boxes of lobsters. Admittedly we would rather have had a good beef steak.

We have settled ourselves on the sunny side of the hut. There is a smell of tar, of summer, and of sweaty feet. Kat sits beside me. He likes to talk. Today we have done an hour's saluting drill because Tjaden failed to salute a major smartly enough. Kat can't get it out of his head.

"You take it from me, we are losing the war because we can salute too well," he says.

Kropp stalks up, with his breeches rolled up and his feet bare. He lays out his washed socks to dry on the grass. Kat turns his eyes to heaven,

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lets off a mighty fart, and says meditatively: "Every little bean must be heard as well as seen."

The two begin to argue. At the same time they lay a bottle of beer on the result of an air-fight that's going on above us. Katzinsky won't budge from the opinion which as an old Front-hog, he rhymes:

*Give 'em all the same grub and all the same pay  
And the war would be over and done in a day.*

Kropp on the other hand is a thinker. He proposes that a declaration of war should be a kind of popular festival with entrance-tickets and bands, like a bull fight. Then in the arena the ministers and generals of the two countries, dressed in bathing-drawers and armed with clubs, can have it out among themselves. Whoever survives, his country wins. That would be much simpler and more just than this arrangement, where the wrong people do the fighting.

The subject is dropped. Then the conversation turns to drill.

A picture comes before me. Burning midday in the barrack-yard. The heat hangs over the square. The barracks are deserted. Every thing sleeps. All one hears is the drummers practising; they have installed themselves somewhere and

practise brokenly, dully, monotonously. What a concord! Midday heat, barrack square, and drummers beating!

The windows of the barracks are empty and dark. From some of them trousers are hanging to dry. The rooms are cool and one looks toward them longingly.

O dark, musty platoon huts, with the iron beds, the chequered bedding, the lockers and the stools! Even you can become the object of desire; out here you have a faint resemblance to home; your rooms, full of the smell of stale food, sleep, smoke, and clothes.

Katezinsky paints it all in lively colours. What would we not give to be able to return to it! Farther back than that our thoughts dare not go.

Those early morning hours of instruction—"What are the parts of the 98 rifle?"—the midday hours of physical training—"Pianist forward! By the right, quick march. Report to the cook-house for potato-peeling."

We indulge in reminiscences. Kropp laughs suddenly and says: "Change at Löhne!"

That was our corporal's favourite game. Löhne is a railway junction. In order that our fellows going on shouldn't get lost there, Himmelstoss used to practise the change in the barrack-room. We had to learn that at Löhne, to reach the

branch-line, we must pass through a subway. The beds represented the subway and each man stood at attention on the left side of his bed. Then came the command: "Change at Löhne!" and like lighting everyone scrambled under the bed to the opposite side. We practised this for hours on end.

Meanwhile the German aeroplane has been shot down. Like a comet it bursts into a streamer of smoke and falls headlong. Kropp has lost the bottle of beer. Disgruntled he counts out the money from his wallet.

"Surely Himmelstoss was a very different fellow as a postman," say I, after Albert's disappointment has subsided. "Then how does it come that he's such a bully as a drill-sergeant?"

The question revives Kropp, more particularly as he hears there's no more beer in the canteen. "It's not only Himmelstoss, there are lots of them. As sure as they get a stripe or a star they become different men, just as though they'd swallowed concrete."

"That's the uniform," I suggest.

"Roughly speaking it is," says Kat, and prepares for a long speech; "but the root of the matter lies somewhere. For instance, if you train a dog to eat potatoes and then afterwards put a piece of meat in front of him, he'll snap at it, it's his nature. And if you give a man a little bit of



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authority he behaves just the same way, he snaps at it too. The things are precisely the same. In himself man is essentially a beast, only he butters it over like a slice of bread with a little decorum. The army is based on that; one man must always have power over the other. The mischief is merely that each one has much too much power. A non-com. can torment a private, a lieutenant a non-com., a captain a lieutenant, until he goes mad. And because they know they can, they all soon acquire the habit more or less. Take a simple case: we are marching back from the parade-ground dog-tired. Then comes the order to sing. We sing spiritlessly, for it is all we can do to trudge along with our rifles. At once the company is turned about and has to do another hour's drill as punishment. On the march back the order to sing is given again, and once more we start. Now what's the use of all that? It's simply that the company commander's head has been turned by having so much power. And nobody blames him. On the contrary, he is praised for being strict. That, of course, is only a trifling instance, but it holds also in very different affairs. Now I ask you: Let a man be whatever you like in peacetime, what occupation is there in which he can behave like that without getting a crack on the nose? He can only do that in the army. It goes to the heads of them all, you see. And the

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more insignificant a man has been in civil life the worse it takes him."

"They say, of course, there must be discipline," ventures Kropp meditatively.

"True," growls Kat, "they always do. And it may be so; still it oughtn't to become an abuse. But you try to explain that to a black-smith or a labourer or a workman, you try to make that clear to a peasant—and that's what most of them are here. All he sees is that he has been put through the mill and sent to the front, but he knows well enough what he must do and what not. It's simply amazing, I tell you, that the ordinary tommy sticks it all up here in the front-line. Simply amazing!"

No one protests. Everyone knows that drill ceases only in the front-line and begins again a few miles behind, with all the absurdities of saluting and parade. It is an Iron law that the soldier must be employed under every circumstance.

Here Tjaden comes up with a flushed face. He is so excited that he stutters. Beaming with satisfaction he stammers out: "Himmelstoss is on his way. He's coming to the front!"

Tjaden has a special grudge against Himmelstoss, because of the way he educated him in the barracks. Tjaden wets his bed, he does it at night

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in his sleep. Himmelstoss maintained that it was sheer laziness and invented a method worthy of himself for curing Tjaden.

He hunted up another piss-a-bed, named Kindedvater, from a neighbouring unit, and quartered him with Tjaden. In the huts there were the usual bunks, one above the other in pairs, with mattresses or wire netting. Himmelstoss put these two so that one occupied the upper and the other the lower bunk. The man underneath of course had a vile time. The next night they were changed over and the lower one put on top so that he could retaliate. That was Himmelstoss's system of self-education.

The idea was low but not ill-conceived. Unfortunately it accomplished nothing because the first assumption was wrong: it was not laziness in either of them. Anyone who looked at their sallow skin could see that. The matter ended in one of them always sleeping on the floor, where he frequently caught cold.

Meanwhile Haie sits down beside us. He winks at me and rubs his paws thoughtfully. We once spent the finest day of our army-life together—the day before we left for the front. We had been allotted to one of the recently formed regiments, but were first to be sent back for equipment to the garrison, not to the reinforcement-depot, or

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course, but to another barracks. We were due to leave the next morning early. In the evening we prepared ourselves to square accounts with Himmelstoss.

We had sworn for weeks past to do this. Kropp had even gone so far as to propose entering the postal service in peacetime in order to be Himmelstoss's superior when he became a postman again. He revelled in the thought of how he would grind him. It was this that made it impossible for him to crush us altogether—we always reckoned that later, at the end of the war, we would have our revenge on him.

In the meantime we decided to give him a good hiding. What could he do to us anyhow if he didn't recognize us and we left early in the morning?

We knew which pub he used to visit every evening. Returning to the barracks he had to go along a dark, uninhabited road. There we waited for him behind a pile of stones. I had a bed-cover with me. We trembled with suspense, hoping he would be alone. At last we heard his footsteps, which we recognized easily, so often had we heard it in the mornings as the door flew open and he bawled: "Get up!"

"Alone?" whispered Kropp.

"Alone."

I slipped round the pile of stones with Tjaden.

Himmelstoss seemed a little elevated; he was singing. His belt-buckle gleamed. He came on unsuspectingly.

We seized the bed-cover, made a quick leap, threw it over his head from behind and pulled it round him so that he stood there in a white sack unable to raise his arms. The singing stopped. The next moment Haie Westhus was there, and spreading his arms he shoved us back in order to be first in. He put himself in position with evident satisfaction, raised his arm like a signal-mast and his hand like a coal-shovel and fetched such a blow on the white sack as would have felled an ox.

Himmelstoss was thrown down, he rolled five yards and started to yell. But we were prepared for that and had brought a cushion. Haie squatted down, laid the cushion on his knees, felt where Himmelstoss's head was and pressed it down on the pillow. Immediately his voice was muffled. Haie let him get a gasp of air every so often, when he would give a mighty yell that was immediately hushed.

Tjaden unbuttoned Himmelstoss's braces and pulled down his trousers, holding the whip meantime in his teeth. Then he stood up and set to work.

It was a wonderful picture: Himmelstoss on the ground; Haie bending over him with a fiendish grin and his mouth open with bloodlust, Himmelstoss's head on his knees; then the convulsed striped drawers, the knock knees, executing at every blow most original movements in the lowered breeches, and towering over them like a woodcutter the indefatigable Tjaden. In the end we had to drag him away to get our turn.

Finally Haie stood Himmelstoss on his feet again and gave one last personal remonstrance. As he stretched out his right arm preparatory to giving him a box on the ear he looked as if he were going to reach down a star.

Himmelstoss toppled over. Haie stood him up again, made ready and fetched him a second, well-aimed beauty with the left hand. Himmelstoss yelled and made off on all fours. His striped postman's backside gleamed in the moonlight.

We disappeared at full speed.

Haie looked round once again and said wrathfully, satisfied and rather mysteriously:

"Revenge is black-pudding."

Himmelstoss ought to have been pleased; his saying that we should each educate one another had borne fruit for himself. We had become successful students of his method.

He never discovered whom he had to thank for

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the business. At any rate he scored a bed-cover out of it; for when we returned a few hours later to look for it, it was no longer to be found.

That evening's work made us more or less content to leave next morning. And an old buffer was pleased to describe us as "young heroes."

# FOUR



We have to go up on wiring fatigue. The motor lorries roll up after dark. We climb in. It is a warm evening and the twilight seems like a canopy under whose shelter we feel drawn together. Even the stingy Tjaden gives me a cigarette and then a light.

We stand jammed in together, shoulder to shoulder, there is no room to sit. But we do not expect that. Müller is in a good mood for once; he is wearing his new boots.

The engines drone, the lorries bump and rattle. The roads are worn and full of holes. We dare not show a light so we lurch along and are often almost pitched out. That does not worry us, how-

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ever. It can happen if it likes; a broken arm is better than a hole in the guts, and many a man would be thankful enough for such a chance of finding his home way again.

Beside us stream the munition-columns in long files. They are making the pace, they overtake us continually. We joke with them and they answer back.

A wall becomes visible, it belongs to a house which lies on the side of the road. I suddenly prick up my ears. Am I deceived? Again I hear distinctly the cackle of geese. A glance at Katzinsky—a glance from him to me; we understand one another.

"Kat, I hear some aspirants for the frying-pan over there."

He nods. "It will be attended to when we come back. I have their number."

Of course Kat has their number. He knows all about every leg of goose within a radius of fifteen miles.

The lorries arrive at the artillery lines. The gun-emplacements are camouflaged with bushes against aerial observation, and look like a kind of military Feast of the Tabernacles. These branches might seem gay and cheerful were not cannon embowered there.

The air becomes acrid with the smoke of the guns and the fog. The fumes of powder taste bit-

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ter on the tongue. The roar of the guns makes our lorry stagger, the reverberation rolls raging away to the rear, everything quakes. Our faces change imperceptibly. We are not, indeed, in the front-line, but only in the reserves, yet in every face can be read: This is the front, now we are within its embrace.

It is not fear. Men who have been up as often as we have become thick-skinned. Only the young recruits are agitated. Kat explains to them: "That was a twelve-inch. You can tell by the report; now you'll hear the burst."

But the muffled thud of the burst does not reach us. It is swallowed up in the general murmur of the front. Kat listens: "There'll be a bombardment to-night."

We all listen. The front is restless. "The Tommies are firing already," says Kropp.

The shelling can be heard distinctly. It is the English batteries to the right of our section. They are beginning an hour too soon. According to us they start punctually at ten o'clock.

"What's got them?" says Müller, "their clocks must be fast."

"There'll be a bombardment, I tell you. I can feel it in my bones." Kat shrugs his shoulders.

Three guns open fire close beside us. The burst of flame shoots across the fog, the guns roar and

boom. We shiver and are glad to think that we shall be back in the huts early in the morning.

Our faces are neither paler nor more flushed than usual; they are not more tense nor more flabby—and yet they are changed. We feel that in our blood a contact has shot home. That is no figure of speech; it is fact. It is the front, the consciousness of the front, that makes this contact. The moment that the first shells whistle over and the air is rent with the explosions there is suddenly in our veins, in our hands, in our eyes a tense waiting, a watching, a heightening alertness, a strange sharpening of the senses. The body with one bound is in full readiness.

It often seems to me as though it were the vibrating, shuddering air that with a noiseless leap springs upon us; or as though the front itself emitted an electric current which awakened unknown nerve-centres.

Every time it is the same. We start out for the front plain soldiers, either cheerful or gloomy: then come the first gun-emplacements and every word of our speech has a new ring.

When Kat stands in front of the hut and says: "There'll be a bombardment," that is merely his own opinion; but if he says it here, then the sentence has the sharpness of a bayonet in the moonlight, it cuts clean through the thought, it thrusts nearer and speaks to this unknown thing

that is awakened in us, a dark meaning—"There'll be a bombardment." Perhaps it is our inner and most secret life that shivers and falls on guard.

To me the front is a mysterious whirlpool. Though I am in still water far away from its centre, I feel the whirl of the vortex sucking me slowly, irresistibly, inescapably into itself.

From the earth, from the air, sustaining forces pour into us—mostly from the earth. To no man does the earth mean so much as to the soldier. When he presses himself down upon her long and powerfully, when he buries his face and his limbs deep in her from the fear of death by shell-fire, then she is his only friend, his brother, his mother; he stifles his terror and his cries in her silence and her security; she shelters him and releases him for ten seconds to live, to run, ten seconds of life; receives him again and often for ever.

Earth!—Earth!—Earth!

Earth with thy folds, and hollows, and holes, into which a man may fling himself and crouch down. In the spasm of terror, under the hailing of annihilation, in the bellowing death of the explosions, O Earth, thou grantest us the great resisting surge of new-won life. Our being, almost utterly carried away by the fury of the storm,

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streams back through our hands from thee, and we, thy redeemed ones, bury ourselves in thee, and through the long minutes in a mute agony of hope bite into thee with our lips!

At the sound of the first droning of the shells we rush back, in one part of our being, a thousand years. By the animal instinct that is awakened in us we are led and protected. It is not conscious; it is far quicker, much more sure, less fallible, than consciousness. One cannot explain it. A man is walking along without thought or heed;—suddenly he throws himself down on the ground and a storm of fragments flies harmlessly over him;—yet he cannot remember either to have heard the shell coming or to have thought of flinging himself down. But had he not abandoned himself to the impulse he would now be a heap of mangled flesh. It is this other, this second sight in us, that has thrown us to the ground and saved us, without our knowing how. If it were not so, there would not be one man alive from Flanders to the Vosges.

We march up, moody or good-tempered soldiers—we reach the zone where the front begins and become on the instant human animals.

An indigent looking wood receives us. We pass by the soup-kitchens. Under cover of the wood we

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climb out. The lorries turn back. They are to collect us again in the morning before dawn.

Mist and the smoke of guns lie breast-high over the fields. The moon is shining. Along the road troops file. Their helmets gleam softly in the moonlight. The heads and the rifles stand out above the white mist, nodding heads, rocking barrels.

Farther on the mist ends. Here the heads become figures; coats, trousers, and boots appear out of the mist as from a milky pool. They become a column. The column marches on, straight ahead, the figures resolve themselves into a block, individuals are no longer recognizable, the dark wedge presses onward, fantastically topped by the heads and the weapons floating on the milky pool. A column—not men at all.

Guns and munition wagons are moving along a cross-road. The backs of the horses shine in the moonlight, their movements are beautiful, they toss their heads, and their eyes gleam. The guns and the wagons float past the dim background of the moonlit landscape, the riders in their steel helmets resemble knights of a forgotten time; it is strangely beautiful and arresting.

We push on to the pioneer dump. Some of us load our shoulders with pointed and twisted iron stakes; others thrust smooth iron rods through



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rolls of wire and go off with them. The burdens are awkward and heavy.

The ground becomes more broken. From ahead come warnings: "Look out, deep shell-hole on the left"—"Mind, trenches"—

Our eyes peer out, our feet and our sticks feel in front of us before they take the weight of the body. Suddenly the line halts; I bump my face against the roll of wire carried by the man in front and curse.

There are some shell-smashed lorries in the road. Another order: "Cigarettes and pipes out." We are near the line.

In the meantime it has become pitch dark. We skirt a small wood and then have the front-line immediately before us.

An uncertain red glow spreads along the skyline from one end to the other. It is in perpetual movement, punctuated with the bursts of flame from the nozzles of the batteries. Balls of light rise up high above it, silver and red spheres which explode and rain down in showers of red, white, and green stars. French rockets go up, which unfold a silk parachute to the air and drift slowly down. They light up everything as bright as day, their light shines on us and we see our shadows sharply outlined on the ground. They hover for the space of a minute before they burn

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out. Immediately fresh ones shoot up in the sky, and again green, red, and blue stars.

"Bombardment," says Kat.

The thunder of the guns swells to a single heavy roar and then breaks up again into separate explosions. The dry bursts of the machine-guns rattle. Above us the air teems with invisible swift movement, with howls, pipings, and hisses. They are smaller shells;—and amongst them, booming through the night like an organ, go the great coal-boxes and the heavies. They have a hoarse, distant bellow like a rutting stag and make their way high above the howl and whistle of the smaller shells. It reminds me of flocks of wild geese when I hear them. Last autumn the wild geese flew day after day across the path of the shells.

The searchlights begin to sweep the dark sky. They slide along it like gigantic tapering rulers. One of them pauses, and quivers a little. Immediately a second is beside him, a black insect is caught between them and tries to escape—the airman. He hesitates, is blinded and falls.

At regular intervals we ram in the iron stakes. Two men hold a roll and the others spool off the barbed wire. It is that awful stuff with close-set,

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long spikes. I am not used to unrolling it and tear my hand.

After a few hours it is done. But there is still some time before the lorries come. Most of us lie down and sleep. I try also, but it has turned too chilly. We know we are not far from the sea because we are constantly waked by the cold.

Once I fall fast asleep. Then wakening suddenly with a start I do not know where I am. I see the stars, I see the rockets, and for a moment have the impression that I have fallen asleep at a garden fête. I don't know whether it is morning or evening, I lie in the pale cradle of the twilight, and listen for soft words which will come, soft and near—am I crying? I put my hand to my eyes, it is so fantastic, am I a child? Smooth skin—it lasts only a second, then I recognize the silhouette of Katzinsky. The old veteran, he sits quietly and smokes his pipe—a covered pipe of course. When he sees I am awake, he says: "That gave you a fright. It was only a nose-cap, it landed in the bushes over there."

I sit up, I feel myself strangely alone. It's good Kat is there. He gazes thoughtfully at the front and says:

"Mighty fine fire-works if they weren't so dangerous."

One lands behind us. Some recruits jump up terrified. A couple of minutes later another

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comes over, nearer this time. Kat knocks out his pipe. "We're in for it."

Then it begins in earnest. We crawl away as well as we can in our haste. The next lands fair amongst us. Two fellows cry out. Green rockets shoot up on the sky-line. Barrage. The mud flies high, fragments whizz past. The crack of the guns is heard long after the roar of the explosions.

Beside us lies a fair-headed recruit in utter terror. He has buried his face in his hands, his helmet has fallen off. I fish hold of it and try to put it back on his head. He looks up, pushes the helmet off and like a child creeps under my arm, his head close to my breast. The little shoulders heave. Shoulders just like Kemmerich's. I let him be. So that the helmet should be of some use I stick it on his behind;—not for a jest, but out of consideration, since that is his highest part. And though there is plenty of meat there, a shot in it can be damned painful. Besides, a man has to lie for months on his belly in the hospital, and afterwards he would be almost sure to have a limp.

It's got someone pretty badly. Cries are heard between the explosions.

At last it grows quiet. The fire has lifted over us and is now dropping on the reserves. We risk a look. Red rockets shoot up to the sky. Apparently there's an attack coming.

Where we are it is still quiet. I sit up and shake the recruit by the shoulder. "All over, kid! It's all right this time."

He looks round him dazedly. "You'll get used to it soon," I tell him.

He sees his helmet and puts it on. Gradually he comes to. Then suddenly he turns fiery red and looks confused. Cautiously he reaches his hand to his behind and looks at me dismally.

I understand at once: Gun-shy. That wasn't the reason I had stuck his helmet over it. "That's no disgrace," I reassure him: "Many's the man before you has had his pants full after the first bombardment. Go behind that bush there and throw your underpants away. Get along——"

He goes off. Things become quieter, but the cries do not cease. "What's up, Albert?" I ask.

"A couple of columns over there got it in the neck."

The cries continued. It is not men, they could not cry so terribly.

"Wounded horses," says Kat.

It's unendurable. It is the moaning of the world, it is the martyred creation, wild with anguish, filled with terror, and groaning.

We are pale. Detering stands up. "God! For God's sake! Shoot them."

He is a farmer and very fond of horses. It gets under his skin. Then as if deliberately the fire dies down again. The screaming of the beasts becomes louder. One can no longer distinguish whence in this now quiet silvery landscape it comes; ghostly, invisible, it is everywhere, between heaven and earth it rolls on immeasurably. Detering raves and yells out: "Shoot them! Shoot them, can't you? Damn you again!"

"They must look after the men first," says Kat quietly.

We stand up and try to see where it is. If we could only see the animals we should be able to endure it better. Müller has a pair of glasses. We see a dark group, bearers with stretchers, and larger black clumps moving about. Those are the wounded horses. But not all of them. Some gallop away in the distance, fall down, and then run on farther. The belly of one is ripped open, the guts trail out. He becomes tangled in them and falls, then he stands up again.

Detering raises up his gun and aims. Kat hits it in the air. "Are you mad——?"

Detering trembles and throws his rifle on the ground.

We sit down and hold our ears. But this appalling noise, these groans and screams penetrate, they penetrate everywhere.

We can bear almost anything. But now the

sweat breaks out on us. We must get up and run no matter where, but where these cries can no longer be heard. And it is not men, only horses.

From the dark group stretchers move off again. Then single shots crack out. The black heap convulses and then sinks down. At last! But still it is not the end. The men cannot overtake the wounded beasts which fly in their pain, their wide open mouths full of anguish. One of the men goes down on one knee, a shot—one horse drops—another. The last one props itself on its forelegs and drags itself round in a circle like a merry-go-round; squatting, it drags round in circles on its stiffened forelegs, apparently its back is broken. The soldier runs up and shoots it. Slowly, humbly, it sinks to the ground.

We take our hands from our ears. The cries are silenced. Only a long-drawn, dying sigh still hangs on the air.

Then only again the rockets, the singing of the shells and the stars there—most strange.

Detering walks up and down cursing: "Like to know what harm they've done." He returns to it once again. His voice is agitated, it sounds almost dignified as he says: "I tell you it is the vilest baseness to use horses in the war."

\* \* \*

We go back. It is time we returned to the lorries. The sky has become brighter. Three o'clock in the morning. The breeze is fresh and cool, the pale hour makes our faces look grey.

We trudge onward in single file through the trenches and shell-holes and come again to the zone of mist. Katzinsky is restive, that's a bad sign.

"What's up, Kat?" says Kropp.

"I wish I were back home." Home—he means the huts.

"We'll soon be out of it, Kat."

He is nervous. "I don't know, I don't know——"

We come to the communication-trench and then to the open fields. The little wood reappears; we know every foot of ground here. There's the cemetery with the mounds and the black crosses.

That moment it breaks out behind us, swells, roars, and thunders. We duck down—a cloud of flame shoots up a hundred yards ahead of us.

The next minute under a second explosion part of the wood rises slowly in the air, three or four trees sail up and then crash to pieces. The shells begin to hiss like safety-valves—heavy fire——

"Take cover!" yells somebody—"Cover!"

The fields are flat, the wood is too distant and dangerous—the only cover is the graveyard and the mounds. We stumble across in the dark and as though he had been spat there every man lies glued behind a mound.

Not a moment too soon. The dark goes mad. It heaves and raves. Darkneses blacker than the night rush on us with giant strides, over us and away. The flames of the explosions light up the graveyard.

There is no escape anywhere. By the light of the shells I try to get a view of the fields. They are a surging sea, daggers of flame from the explosions leap up like fountains. It is impossible for anyone to break through it.

The wood vanishes, it is pounded, crushed, torn to pieces. We must stay here in the graveyard.

The earth bursts before us. It rains clods. I feel a smack. My sleeve is torn away by a splinter. I shut my fist. No pain. Still that does not reassure me: wounds don't hurt till afterwards. I feel the arm all over. It is grazed but sound. Now a crack on the skull, I begin to lose consciousness. Like lightning the thought comes to me: Don't faint! I sink down in the black broth and immediately come up to the top again. A splinter slashes into my helmet, but has already travelled so far that it does not go through. I wipe the mud out of my

eyes. A hole is torn up in front of me. Shells hardly ever land in the same hole twice, I'll get into it. With one lunge, I shoot as flat as a fish over the ground; there it whistles again, quickly I crouch together, claw for cover, feel something on the left, shove in beside it, it gives way, I groan, the earth leaps, the blast thunders in my ears, I creep under the yielding thing, cover myself with it, draw it over me, it is wood, cloth, cover, cover, miserable cover against the whizzing splinters.

I open my eyes—my fingers grasp a sleeve, an arm. A wounded man? I yell to him—no answer—a dead man. My hand gropes farther, splinters of wood—now I remember again that we are lying in the graveyard.

But the shelling is stronger than everything. It wipes out the sensibilities, I merely crawl still farther under the coffin, it shall protect me, though Death himself lies in it.

Before me gapes the shell-hole. I grasp it with my eyes as with fists. With one leap I must be in it. There, I get a smack in the face, a hand clamps onto my shoulder—has the dead man waked up?—The hand shakes me, I turn my head, in the second of light I stare into the face of Katczinsky, he has his mouth wide open and is yelling. I hear nothing, he rattles me, comes

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nearer, in a momentary lull his voice reaches me: "Gas—Gaas—Gaaas—Pass it on."

I grab for my gas-mask. Some distance from me there lies someone. I think of nothing but this: That fellow there must know: Gaaas—Gaaas—

I call, I lean toward him, I swipe at him with the satchel, he doesn't see—once again, again—he merely ducks—it's a recruit—I look at Kat desperately, he has his mask on—I pull out mine, too, my helmet falls to one side, it slips over my face, I reach the man, his satchel is on the side nearest me, I seize the mask, pull it over his head, he understands, I let go and with a jump drop into the shell-hole.

The dull thud of the gas-shells mingles with the crashes of the light explosives. A bell sounds between the explosions, gongs, and metal clappers warning everyone—Gas—Gas—Gaaas.

Someone plumps down behind me, another. I wipe the goggles of my mask clear of the moist breath. It is Kat, Kropp, and someone else. All four of us lie there in heavy, watchful suspense and breathe as lightly as possible.

These first minutes with the mask decide between life and death: is it air-tight? I remember the awful sights in the hospital: the gas patients who in day-long suffocation cough up their burnt lungs in clots.

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Cautiously, the mouth applied to the valve, I breathe. The gas still creeps over the ground and sinks into all hollows. Like a big, soft jelly-fish it floats into our shell-hole and lolls there obscenely. I nudge Kat, it is better to crawl out and lie on top than to stay where the gas collects most. But we don't get as far as that; a second bombardment begins. It is no longer as though shells roared; it is the earth itself raging.

With a crash something black bears down on us. It lands close beside us; a coffin thrown up.

I see Kat move and I crawl across. The coffin has hit the fourth man in our hole on his outstretched arm. He tries to tear off his gas-mask with the other hand. Kropp seizes him just in time, twists the hand sharply behind his back and holds it fast.

Kat and I proceed to free the wounded arm. The coffin lid is loose and bursts open, we are easily able to pull it off, we toss the corpse out, it slides down to the bottom of the shell-hole, then we try to loosen the under-part.

Fortunately the man swoons and Kropp is able to help us. We no longer have to be careful, but work away till the coffin gives with a sigh before the spade that we have dug in under it.

It has grown lighter. Kat takes a piece of the lid, places it under the shattered arm, and we

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wrap all our bandages round it. For the moment we can do no more.

Inside the gas-mask my head booms and roars—it is nigh bursting. My lungs are tight, they breathe always the same hot, used-up air, the veins on my temples are swollen. I feel I am suffocating.

A grey light filters through to us. I climb out over the edge of the shell-hole. In the dirty twilight lies a leg torn clean off; the boot is quite whole, I take that all in at a glance. Now something stands up a few yards distant. I polish the windows, in my excitement they are immediately dimmed again. I peer through them, the man there no longer wears his mask.

I wait some seconds—he has not collapsed—he looks around and makes a few paces—rattling in my throat I tear my mask off too and fall down, the air streams into me like cold water, my eyes are bursting the wave sweeps over me and extinguishes me.

The shelling has ceased, I turn towards the crater beckoning to the others. They take off their masks. We lift up the wounded man, one taking his splinted arm. And so we stumble off hastily.

The graveyard is a mass of wreckage. Coffins

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and corpses lie strewn about. They have been killed once again; but each of them that was flung up saved one of us.

The hedge is destroyed, the rails of the light railway are torn up and rise stiffly in the air in great arches. Someone lies in front of us. We stop; Kropp goes on alone with the wounded man.

The man on the ground is a recruit. His hip is covered with blood; he is so exhausted that I feel for my water-bottle where I have rum and tea. Kat restrains my hand and stoops over him.

"Where's it got you comrade?"

His eyes move. He is too weak to answer.

We slit open his trousers carefully. He groans. "Gently, gently, it is much better——"

If he has been hit in the stomach he oughtn't to drink anything. There's no vomiting, that's a good sign. We lay the hip bare. It is one mass of mince-meat and bone splinters. The joint has been hit. This lad won't walk any more.

I wet his temples with a moistened finger and give him a swig. His eyes move again. We see now that the right arm is bleeding as well.

Kat spreads out two wads of dressing as wide as possible so that they will cover the wound. I look for something to bind loosely round it. We have nothing more, so I slip up the wounded man's trouser leg still farther in order to use a piece of his underpants as a bandage. But he is

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wearing none. I now look at him closely. He is the fair-headed boy of a little while ago.

In the meantime Kat has taken a bandage from a dead man's pocket and we carefully bind the wound. I say to the youngster who looks at us fixedly: "We're going for a stretcher now——"

Then he opens his mouth and whispers: "Stay here——"

"We'll be back again soon," says Kat. "We are only going to get a stretcher for you."

We don't know if he understands. He whimpers like a child and plucks at us: "Don't go away——"

Kat looks around and whispers: "Shouldn't we just take a revolver and put an end to it?"

The youngster will hardly survive the carrying, and at the most he will only last a few days. What he has gone through so far is nothing to what he's in for till he dies. Now he is numb and feels nothing. In an hour he will become one screaming bundle of intolerable pain. Every day that he can live will be a howling torture. And to whom does it matter whether he has them or not——

I nod. "Yes, Kat, we ought to put him out of his misery."

He stands still a moment. He has made up his mind. We look round—but we are no longer

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alone. A little group is gathering, from the shell-holes and trenches appear heads.

We get a stretcher.

Kat shakes his head. "Such a kid——" He repeats it. "Young innocents——"

Our losses are less than was to be expected—five killed and eight wounded. It was in fact quite a short bombardment. Two of our dead lie in the upturned graves. We merely throw the earth in on them.

We go back. We trot off silently in single file one behind the other. The wounded are taken to the dressing-station. The morning is cloudy. The bearers make a fuss about numbers and tickets, the wounded whimper. It begins to rain.

An hour later we reach our lorries and climb in. There is more room now than there was.

The rain becomes heavier. We take out waterproof sheets and spread them over our heads. The rain rattles down, and flows off at the sides in streams. The lorries bump through the holes, and we rock to and fro in a half-sleep.

Two men in the front of the lorry have long forked poles. They watch for telephone wires which hang crosswise over the road so low that they might easily pull our heads off. The two fellows take them at the right moment on their



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poles and lift them over behind us. We hear their call "Mind—wire—," dip the knee in a half-sleep and straighten up again.

Monotonously the lorryes sway, monotonously come the calls, monotonously falls the rain. It falls on our heads and on the heads of the dead up in the line, on the body of the little recruit with the wound that is so much too big for his hip; it falls on Kemmerich's grave; it falls in our hearts.

An explosion sounds somewhere. We wince, our eyes become tense, our hands are ready to vault over the side of the lorry into the ditch by the road.

Nothing happens—only the monotonous cry: "Mind—wire,"—our knees bend—we are again half asleep.

# FIVE

Killing each separate louse is a tedious business when a man has hundreds. The little beasts are hard and the everlasting cracking with one's fingernails very soon becomes wearisome. So Tjaden has rigged up the lid of a boot-polish tin with a piece of wire over the lighted stump of a candle. The lice are simply thrown into this little pan. Crack! and they're done for.

We sit around with our shirts on our knees, our bodies naked to the warm air and our hands at work. Haie has a particularly fine brand of louse: they have a red cross on their heads. He suggests that he brought them back from the hospital at Thourhout, where they attended per-

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sonally on a surgeon-general. He says he means to use the fat that slowly accumulates in the tin-lid for polishing his boots, and roars with laughter for half an hour at his own joke.

But he gets little response to-day; we are too preoccupied with another affair.

The rumour has materialized. Himmelstoss has come. He appeared yesterday; we've already heard the well-known voice. He seems to have overdone it with a couple of young recruits on the ploughed field at home and unknown to him the son of the local magistrate was watching. That cooked his goose.

He will get some surprises here. Tjaden has been meditating for hours what to say to him. Haie gazes thoughtfully at his great paws and winks at me. The thrashing was the high water mark of his life. He tells me he often dreams of it. Kropp and Müller are amusing themselves. From somewhere or other, probably the pioneer-cookhouse, Kropp has bagged for himself a mess-tin full of beans. Müller squints hungrily into it but checks himself and says: "Albert, what would you do if it were suddenly peace-time again?"

"There won't be any peace-time," says Albert bluntly.

"Well, but if—" persists Müller, "what would you do?"

"Clear out of this!" growls Kropp.

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"Of course. And then what?"

"Get drunk," says Albert.

"Don't talk rot, I mean seriously—"

"So do I," says Kropp, "what else should a man do?"

Kat becomes interested. He levies tribute on Kropp's tin of beans, swallows some, then considers for a while and says: "You might get drunk first, of course, but then you'd take the next train for home and mother. Peace-time, man, Albert——"

He fumbles in his oil-cloth pocket-book for a photograph and suddenly shows it all round. "My old woman!" Then he puts it back and swears: "Damned lousy war——"

"It's all very well for you to talk," I tell him. "You've a wife and children."

"True," he nods, "and I have to see to it that they've something to eat."

We laugh. "They won't lack for that, Kat, you'd scrounge it from somewhere."

Müller is insatiable and gives himself no peace. He wakes Haie Westhus out of his dream. "Haie, what would you do if it was peace-time?"

"Give you a kick in the backside for the way you talk," I say. "How does it come about exactly?"

"How does the cow-shit come on the roof?" re-

torts Müller laconically, and turns to Haie Westhus again.

It is too much for Haie. He shakes his freckled head:

"You mean when the war's over?"

"Exactly. You've said it."

"Well, there'd be women of course, eh?"—Haie licks his lips.

"Sure."

"By Jove, yes," says Haie, his face melting, "then I'd grab some good buxom dame, some real kitchen wench with plenty to get hold of, you know, and jump straight into bed. Just you think, boys, a real feather-bed with a spring mattress; I wouldn't put trousers on again for a week."

Everyone is silent. The picture is too good. Our flesh creeps. At last Müller pulls himself together and says:

"And then what?"

A pause. Then Haie explains rather awkwardly: "If I were a non-com. I'd stay with the Prussians and serve out my time."

"Haie, you've got a screw loose, surely!" I say.

"Have you ever dug peat?" he retorts good-naturedly. "You try it."

Then he pulls a spoon out of the top of his boot and reaches over into Kropp's mess-tin.

"It can't be worse than digging trenches," I ventured.

Haie chews and grins: "It lasts longer though. And there's no getting out of it either."

"But, man, surely it's better at home."

"Some ways," says he, and with open mouth sinks into a day-dream.

You can see what he is thinking. There is the mean little hut on the moors, the hard work on the heath from morning till night in the heat, the miserable pay, the dirty labourer's clothes.

"In the army in peace-time you've nothing to trouble about," he goes on, "your food's found every day, or else you kick up a row; you've a bed, every week clean underwear like a perfect gent, you do your non-com.'s duty, you have a good suit of clothes; in the evening you're a free man and go off to the pub."

Haie is extraordinarily set on his idea. He's in love with it.

"And when your twelve years are up you get your pension and become the village bobby, and you can walk about the whole day."

He's already sweating on it. "And just you think how you'd be treated. Here a dram, there a pint. Everybody wants to be well in with a bobby."

"You'll never be a non-com. though, Haie," interrupts Kat.

Haie looks at him sadly and is silent. His thoughts still linger over the clear evenings in

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autumn, the Sundays in the heather, the village bells, the afternoons and evenings with the servant girls, the fried bacon and barley, the care-free hours in the ale-house——

He can't part with all these dreams so abruptly; he merely growls: "What silly questions you do ask."

He pulls his shirt over his head and buttons up his tunic.

"What would you do, Tjaden!" asks Kropp.

Tjaden thinks of one thing only. "See to it that Himmelstoss didn't get past me."

Apparently he would like most to have him in a cage and sail into him with a club every morning. To Kropp he says warmly: "If I were in your place I'd see to it that I became a lieutenant. Then you could grind him till the water in his backside boils."

"And you, Detering!" asks Müller like an inquisitor. He's a born schoolmaster with all his questions.

Detering is sparing with his words. But on this subject he speaks. He looks at the sky and says only the one sentence: "I would go straight on with the harvesting."

Then he gets up and walks off.

He is worried. His wife has to look after the farm. They've already taken away two more of his horses. Every day he reads the papers that

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come, to see whether it is raining in his little corner of Oldenburg. They haven't brought in the hay yet.

At this moment Himmelstoss appears. He comes straight up to our group. Tjaden's face turns red. He stretches his length on the grass and shuts his eyes in excitement.

Himmelstoss is a little hesitant, his gait becomes slower. Then he marches up to us. No one makes any motion to stand up. Kropp looks up at him with interest.

He continues to stand in front of us and wait. As no one says anything he launches a "Well!"

A couple of seconds go by. Apparently Himmelstoss doesn't quite know what to do. He would like most to set us all on the run again. But he seems to have learned already that the front-line isn't a parade ground. He tries it on though, and by addressing himself to one instead of to all of us hopes to get some response. Kropp is nearest, so he favours him.

"Well, you here too?"

But Albert's no friend of his. "A bit longer than you, I fancy," he retorts.

The red moustache twitches: "You don't recognize me any more, what?"

Tjaden now opens his eyes. "I do though."

Himmelstoss turns to him: "Tjaden, isn't it?"

Tjaden lifts his head. "And do you know what you are?"

Himmelstoss is disconcerted. "Since when have we become so familiar? I don't remember that we ever slept in the gutter together?"

He has no idea what to make of the situation. He didn't expect this open hostility. But he is on his guard: he has already had some rot dinned into him about getting a shot in the back.

The question about the gutter makes Tjaden so mad that he becomes almost witty: "No you slept there by yourself."

Himmelstoss begins to boil. But Tjaden gets in ahead of him. He must bring off his insult: "Wouldn't you like to know what you are? A dirty hound, that's what you are. I've been wanting to tell you that for a long time."

The satisfaction of months shines in his dull pig's eyes as he spits out: "Dirty hound!"

Himmelstoss lets fly too, now. "What's that, you muck-rake, you dirty peat-stealer? Stand up there, bring your heels together when your superior officer speaks to you."

Tjaden waves him off. "You take a run and jump at yourself, Himmelstoss."

Himmelstoss is a raging book of army regulations. The Kaiser couldn't be more insulted. "Tjaden, I command you, as your superior officer: Stand up!"

"Anything else you would like?" asks Tjaden.

"Will you obey my order or not?"

Tjaden replies, without knowing it, in the well-known classical phrase.

At the same time he ventilates his backside.

"I'll have you court-martialled," storms Himmelstoss.

We watch him disappear in the direction of the Orderly Room. Haie and Tjaden burst into a regular peat-digger's bellow. Haie laughs so much that he dislocates his jaw, and suddenly stands there helpless with his mouth wide open. Albert has to put it back again by giving it a blow with his fist.

Kat is troubled: "If he reports you, it'll be pretty serious."

"Do you think he will?" asks Tjaden.

"Sure to," I say.

"The least you'll get will be five days close arrest," says Kat.

That doesn't worry Tjaden. "Five days clink are five days rest."

"And if they send you to the Fortress?" urges the thoroughgoing Müller.

"Well, for the time being the war will be over so far as I am concerned."

Tjaden is a cheerful soul. There aren't any worries for him. He goes off with Haie and Leer so that they won't find him in the first flush of excitement.

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Müller hasn't finished yet. He tackles Kropp again.

"Albert, if you were really at home now, what would you do?"

Kropp is contented now and more accommodating:

"How many of us were there in the class exactly?"

We count up: out of twenty, seven are dead, four wounded, one in a mad-house. That makes twelve.

"Three of them are lieutenants," says Müller. "Do you think they would still let Kantorek sit on them?"

We guess not: we wouldn't let ourselves be sat on for that matter.

"What do you mean by the three-fold theme in 'William Tell'?" says Kropp reminiscently, and roars with laughter.

"What was the purpose of the Poetic League of Göttingen?" asked Müller suddenly and earnestly.

"How many children has Charles the Bald?" I interrupt gently.

"You'll never make anything of your life, Bäumer," croaks Müller.

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"When was the battle of Zana?" Kropp wants to know.

"You lack the studious mind, Kropp, sit down, three minus——" I say.

"What offices did Lycurgus consider the most important for the state?" asks Müller, pretending to take off his pince-nez.

"Does it go: 'We Germans fear God and none else in the whole world,' or 'We, the Germans, fear God and——'" I submit.

"How many inhabitants has Melbourne?" asks Müller.

"How do you expect to succeed in life if you don't know that?" I ask Albert hotly.

Which he caps with: "What is meant by Cohesion?"

We remember mighty little of all that rubbish. Anyway, it has never been the slightest use to us. At school nobody ever taught us how to light a cigarette in a storm of rain, nor how a fire could be made with wet wood—nor that it is best to stick a bayonet in the belly because there it doesn't get jammed, as it does in the ribs.

Müller says thoughtfully: "What's the use? We'll have to go back and sit on the forms again."

I consider that out of the question. "We might take a special exam."

"That needs preparation. And if you do get

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through, what then? A student's life isn't any better. If you have no money, you have to work like the devil."

"It's a bit better. But it's rot all the same, everything they teach you."

Kropp supports me: "How can a man take all that stuff seriously when he's once been out here?"

"Still you must have an occupation of some sort," insists Müller, as though he were Kantorek himself.

Albert cleans his nails with a knife. We are surprised at this delicacy. But it is merely pensiveness. He puts the knife away and continues: "That's just it. Kat and Detering and Haie will go back to their jobs because they had them already. Himmelstoss too. But we never had any. How will we ever get used to one after this, here?"—he makes a gesture toward the front.

"What we'll want is a private income, and then we'll be able to live by ourselves in a wood," I say, but at once feel ashamed of this absurd idea.

"But what will really happen when we go back?" wonders Müller, and even he is troubled.

Kropp gives a shrug. "I don't know. Let's get back first, then we'll find out."

We are all utterly at a loss. "What could we do?" I ask.

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"I don't want to do anything," replies Kropp wearily. "You'll be dead one day, so what does it matter? I don't think we'll ever go back."

"When I think about it, Albert," I say after a while rolling over on my back, "when I hear the word 'peace-time,' it goes to my head: and if it really came, I think I would do some unimaginable thing—something, you know, that it's worth having lain here in the muck for. But I can't even imagine anything. All I do know is that this business about professions and studies and salaries and so on—it makes me sick, it is and always was disgusting. I don't see anything at all, Albert."

All at once everything seems to me confused and hopeless.

Kropp feels it too. "It will go pretty hard with us all. But nobody at home seems to worry much about it. Two years of shells and bombs—a man won't peel that off as easy as a sock."

We agree that it's the same for everyone; not only for us here, but everywhere, for everyone who is of our age; to some more, and to others less. It is the common fate of our generation.

Albert expresses it: "The war has ruined us for everything."

He is right. We are not youth any longer. We don't want to take the world by storm. We are fleeing. We fly from ourselves. From our life. We

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were eighteen and had begun to love life and the world; and we had to shoot it to pieces. The first bomb, the first explosion, burst in our hearts. We are cut off from activity, from striving, from progress. We believe in such things no longer, we believe in the war.

The Orderly Room shows signs of life. Himmelstoss seems to have stirred them up. At the head of the column trots the fat sergeant-major. It is queer that almost all of the regular sergeant-majors are fat.

Himmelstoss follows him, thirsting for vengeance. His boots gleam in the sun.

We get up.

"Where's Tjaden?" the sergeant puffs.

No one knows, of course. Himmelstoss glowers at us wrathfully. "You know very well. You won't say, that's the fact of the matter. Out with it!"

Fatty looks round enquiringly; but Tjaden is not to be seen. He tries another way.

"Tjaden will report at the Orderly Room in ten minutes."

Then he steams off with Himmelstoss in his wake.

"I have a feeling that next time we go up wiring I'll be letting a bundle of wire fall on Himmelstoss's leg," hints Kropp.

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"We'll have quite a lot of jokes with him," laughs Müller.—

That is our sole ambition: to knock the conceit out of a postman.

I go into the hut and put Tjaden wise. He disappears.

Then we change our posy and lie down again to play cards. We know how to do that: to play cards, to swear, and to fight. Not much for twenty years;—and yet too much for twenty years.

Half an hour later Himmelstoss is back again. Nobody pays any attention to him. He asks for Tjaden. We shrug our shoulders.

"Then you'd better find him," he persists. "Haven't you been to look for him?"

Kropp lies back on the grass and says: "Have you ever been out here before?"

"That's none of your business," retorts Himmelstoss. "I expect an answer."

"Very good," says Kropp, getting up. "See up there where those little white clouds are. Those are anti-aircraft. We were over there yesterday. Five dead and eight wounded. And that's a mere nothing. Next time, when you go up with us, before they die the fellows will come up to you, click their heels, and ask stiffly: 'Please may I go? Please may I hop it? We've been waiting here a long time for someone like you.'"



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He sits down again and Himmelstoss disappears like a comet.

"Three days C.B.," conjectures Kat.

"Next time I'll let fly," I say to Albert.

But that is the end. The case comes up for trial in the evening. In the Orderly Room sits our Lieutenant, Bertink, and calls us in one after another.

I have to appear as a witness and explain the reason of Tjaden's insubordination.

The story of the bed-wetting makes an impression. Himmelstoss is recalled and I repeat my statement.

"Is that right?" Bertink asks Himmelstoss.

He tries to evade the question, but in the end has to confess, for Kropp tells the same story.

"Why didn't someone report the matter, then?" asks Bertink.

We are silent: he must know himself how much use it is in reporting such things. It isn't usual to make complaints in the army. He understands it all right though, and lectures Himmelstoss, making it plain to him that the front isn't a parade-ground. Then comes Tjaden's turn, he gets a long sermon and three days' open arrest. Bertink gives Kropp a wink and one day's open arrest. "It can't be helped," he says to him regretfully. He is a decent fellow.

Open arrest is quite pleasant. The clink was

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once a fowl-house; there we can visit the prisoners, we know how to manage it. Close arrest would have meant the cellar.

They used to tie us to a tree, but that is forbidden now. In many ways we are treated quite like men.

An hour later after Tjaden and Kropp are settled in behind their wire-netting we make our way into them. Tjaden greets us crowing. Then we play skat far into the night. Tjaden wins of course, the lucky wretch.

When we break it up Kat says to me: "What do you say to some roast goose?"

"Not bad," I agree.

We climb up on a munition-wagon. The ride costs us two cigarettes. Kat has marked the spot exactly. The shed belongs to a regimental headquarters. I agree to get the goose and receive my instructions. The out-house is behind the wall and the door shuts with just a peg.

Kat hoists me up. I rest my foot in his hands and climb over the wall. Kat keeps watch below.

I wait a few moments to accustom my eyes to the darkness. Then I recognize the shed. Softly I steal across, lift the peg, pull it out and open the door.

I distinguish two white patches. Two geese,

that's bad: if I grab one the other will cackle. Well, both of them—if I'm quick, it can be done.

I make a jump. I catch hold of one and the next instant the second. Like a madman I bash their heads against the wall to stun them. But I haven't quite enough weight. The beasts cackle and strike out with their feet and wings. I fight desperately, but Lord! what a kick a goose has! They struggle and I stagger about. In the dark these white patches are terrifying. My arms have grown wings and I'm almost afraid of going up into the sky, as though I held a couple of captive balloons in my fists.

Then the row begins; one of them gets his breath and goes off like an alarmclock. Before I can do anything, something comes in from outside; I feel a blow, lie outstretched on the floor, and hear awful growls. A dog. I steal a glance to the side, he makes a snap at my throat. I lie still and tuck my chin into my collar.

It's a bull dog. After an eternity he withdraws his head and sits down beside me. But if I make the least movement he growls. I consider. The only thing to do is to get hold of my small revolver, and that too before anyone arrives. Inch by inch I move my hand toward it.

I have the feeling that it lasts an hour. The slightest movement and then an awful growl; I

lie still, then try again. When at last I have the revolver my hand starts to tremble. I press it against the ground and say over to myself: Jerk the revolver up, fire before he has a chance to grab, and then jump up.

Slowly I take a deep breath and become calmer. Then I hold my breath, whip up the revolver, it cracks, the dog leaps howling to one side, I make for the door of the shed and fall head over heels over one of the scuttering geese.

At full speed I seize it again, and with a swing toss it over the wall and clamber up. No sooner am I on top than the dog is up again as lively as ever and springs at me. Quickly I let myself drop. Ten paces away stands Kat with the goose under his arm. As soon as he sees me we run.

At last we can take a breather. The goose is dead, Kat saw to that in a moment. We intend to roast it at once so that nobody will be any wiser. I fetch a dixie and wood from the hut and we crawl into a small deserted lean-to which we use for such purposes. The single window space is heavily curtained. There is a sort of hearth, an iron plate set on some bricks. We kindle a fire.

Kat plucks and cleans the goose. We put the feathers carefully to one side. We intend to make two cushions out of them with the inscription: "Sleep soft under shell-fire." The sound of the

gun-fire from the front penetrates into our refuge. The glow of the fire lights up our faces, shadows dance on the wall. Sometimes a heavy crash and the lean-to shivers. Aeroplane bombs. Once we hear a stifled cry. A hut must have been hit.

Aeroplane drone; the tack-tack of machine-guns breaks out. But no light that could be observed shows from us.

We sit opposite one another, Kat and I, two soldiers in shabby coats, cooking a goose in the middle of the night. We don't talk much, but I believe we have a more complete communion with one another than even lovers have.

We are two men, two minute sparks of life; outside is the night and the circle of death. We sit on the edge of it crouching in danger, the grease drips from our hands, in our hearts we are close to one another, and the hour is like the room: flecked over with the lights and shadows of our feelings cast by a quiet fire. What does he know of me or I of him? Formerly we should not have had a single thought in common—now we sit with a goose between us and feel in unison, are so intimate that we do not even speak.

It takes a long time to roast a goose, even when it is young and fat. So we take turns. One

bastes it while the other lies down and sleeps. A grand smell gradually fills the hut.

The noises without increase in volume, pass into my dream and yet linger in my memory. In a half sleep I watch Kat dip and raise the ladle. I love him, his shoulders, his angular, stooping figure—and at the same time I see behind him woods and stars, and a clear voice utters words that bring me peace, to me, a soldier in big boots, belt, and knapsack, taking the road that lies before him under the high heaven, quickly forgetting and seldom sorrowful, for ever pressing on under the wide night sky.

A little soldier and a clear voice, and if anyone were to caress him he would hardly understand, this soldier with the big boots and the shut heart, who marches because he is wearing big boots, and has forgotten all else but marching. Beyond the sky-line is a country with flowers, lying so still that he would like to weep. There are sights there that he has not forgotten, because he never possessed them—perplexing, yet lost to him. Are not his twenty summers there?

Is my face wet, and where am I? Kat stands before me, his gigantic, stooping shadow falls upon me, like home. He speaks gently, he smiles and goes back to the fire.

Then he says: "It's done."

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"Yes, Kat."

I stir myself. In the middle of the room shines the brown goose. We take out our collapsible forks and our pocket-knives and each cuts off a leg. With it we have army bread dipped in gravy. We eat slowly and with gusto.

"How does it taste, Kat?"

"Good! And yours?"

"Good, Kat."

We are brothers and press on one another the choicest pieces. Afterwards I smoke a cigarette and Kat a cigar. There is still a lot left.

"How would it be, Kat if we took a bit to Kropp and Tjaden?"

"Sure," says he.

We carve off a portion and wrap it up carefully in newspaper. The rest we thought of taking over to the hut. Kat laughs, and simply says: "Tjaden."

I agree, we will have to take it all.

So we go off to the fowl-house to waken them. But first we pack away the feathers.

Kropp and Tjaden take us for magicians. Then they get busy with their teeth. Tjaden holds a wing in his mouth with both hands like a mouth-organ, and gnaws. He drinks the gravy from the pot and smacks his lips:

"May I never forget you!"

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We go to our hut. Again there is the lofty sky with the stars and the oncoming dawn, and I pass beneath it, a soldier with big boots and a full belly, a little soldier in the early morning—but by my side, stooping and angular, goes Kat, my comrade.

The outlines of the huts are upon us in the dawn like a dark, deep sleep.

# SIX

There are rumours of an offensive. We go up to the front two days earlier than usual. On the way we pass a shelled school-house. Stacked up against its longer side is a high double wall of yellow, unpolished, brand-new coffins. They still smell of resin, and pine, and the forest. There are at least a hundred.

"That's a good preparation for the offensive," says Müller astonished.

"They're for us," growls Detering.

"Don't talk rot," says Kat to him angrily.

"You be thankful if you get so much as a coffin," grins Tjaden, "they'll slip you a waterproof sheet for your old Aunt Sally of a carcass."

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The others jest too, unpleasant jests, but what else can a man do?—The coffins are really for us. The organization surpasses itself in that kind of thing.

Ahead of us everything is shimmering. The first night we try to get our bearings. When it is fairly quiet we can hear the transports behind the enemy lines rolling ceaselessly until dawn. Kat says that they do not go back but are bringing up troops—troops, munitions, and guns.

The English artillery has been strengthened, that we can detect at once. There are at least four more batteries of nine-inch guns to the right of the farm, and behind the poplars they have put in trenchmortars. Besides these they have brought up a number of those little French beasts with instantaneous fuses.

We are now in low spirits. After we have been in the dug-outs two hours our own shells begin to fall in the trench. This is the third time in four weeks. If it were simply a mistake in aim no one would say anything, but the truth is that the barrels are worn out. The shots are often so uncertain that they land within our own lines. To-night two of our men were wounded by them.

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The front is a cage in which we must await fearfully whatever may happen. We lie under the network of arching shells and live in a suspense of uncertainty. Over us, Chance hovers. If a shot comes, we can duck, that is all; we neither know nor can determine where it will fall.

It is this Chance that makes us indifferent. A few months ago I was sitting in a dug-out playing skat; after a while I stood up and went to visit some friends in another dug-out. On my return nothing more was to be seen of the first one, it had been blown to pieces by a direct hit. I went back to the second and arrived just in time to lend a hand digging it out. In the interval it had been buried.

It is just as much a matter of chance that I am still alive as that I might have been hit. In a bomb-proof dug-out I may be smashed to atoms and in the open may survive ten hours' bombardment unscathed. No soldier outlives a thousand chances. But every soldier believes in Chance and trusts his luck.

We must look out for our bread. The rats have become much more numerous lately because the

trenches are no longer in good condition. Detering says it is a sure sign of a coming bombardment.

The rats here are particularly repulsive, they are so fat—the kind we all call corpse-rats. They have shocking, evil, naked faces, and it is nauseating to see their long, nude tails.

They seem to be mighty hungry. Almost every man has had his bread gnawed. Kropp wrapped his in his waterproof sheet and put it under his head, but he cannot sleep because they run over his face to get at it. Detering meant to outwit them: he fastened a thin wire to the roof and suspended his bread from it. During the night when he switched on his pocket-torch he saw the wire swing to and fro. On the bread was riding a fat rat.

At last we put a stop to it. We cannot afford to throw the bread away, because then we should have nothing left to eat in the morning, so we carefully cut off the bits of bread that the animals have gnawed.

The slices we cut off are heaped together in the middle of the floor. Each man takes out his spade and lies down prepared to strike. Detering, Kropp, and Kat hold their pocket-torches ready.

After a few minutes we hear the first shuffling and tugging. It grows, now it is the sound of many little feet. Then the torches switch on and every man strikes at the heap, which scatters

with a rush. The result is good. We toss the bits of rat over the parapet and again lie in wait.

Several times we repeat the process. At last the beasts get wise to it, or perhaps they have scented the blood. They return no more. Nevertheless, before morning the remainder of the bread on the floor has been carried off.

In the adjoining sector they attacked two large cats and a dog, bit them to death and devoured them.

Next day there was an issue of Edamer cheese. Each man gets almost a quarter of a cheese. In one way that is all to the good, for Edamer is tasty—but in another way it is vile, because the fat red balls have long been a sign of a bad time coming. Our forebodings increase as rum is served out. We drink it of course; but are not greatly comforted.

During the day we loaf about and make war on the rats. Ammunition and hand-grenades become more plentiful. We overhaul the bayonets—that is to say, the ones that have a saw on the blunt edge. If the fellows over there catch a man with one of those he's killed at sight. In the next sector some of our men were found whose noses were cut off and their eyes poked out with their own sawbayonets. Their mouths and noses were stuffed with sawdust so that they suffocated.

Some of the recruits have bayonets of this sort;

we take them away and give them the ordinary kind.

But the bayonet has practically lost its importance. It is usually the fashion now to charge with bombs and spades only. The sharpened spade is a more handy and many-sided weapon; not only can it be used for jabbing a man under the chin, but it is much better for striking with because of its greater weight; and if one hits between the neck and shoulder it easily cleaves as far down as the chest. The bayonet frequently jams on the thrust and then a man has to kick hard on the other fellow's belly to pull it out again; and in the interval he may easily get one himself. And what's more the blade often gets broken off.

At night they send over gas. We expect the attack to follow and lie with our masks on, ready to tear them off as soon as the first shadow appears.

Dawn approaches without anything happening—only the everlasting, nerve-wracking roll behind the enemy lines, trains, lorries, lorries; but what are they concentrating? Our artillery fires on it continually, but still it does not cease.

We have tired faces and avoid each other's eyes. "It will be like the Somme," says Kat gloomily. "There we were shelled steadily for seven days and nights." Kat has lost all his fun since we have been here, which is bad, for Kat is

an old front-hog, and can smell what is coming. Only Tjaden seems pleased with the good rations and the rum; he thinks we might even go back to rest without anything happening at all.

It almost looks like it. Day after day passes. At night I squat in the listening-post. Above me the rockets and parachute-lights shoot up and float down again. I am cautious and tense, my heart thumps. My eyes turn again and again to the luminous dial of my watch; the hands will not budge. Sleep hangs on my eyelids, I work my toes in my boots in order to keep awake. Nothing happens till I am relieved;—only the everlasting rolling over there. Gradually we grow calmer and play skat and poker continually. Perhaps we will be lucky.

All day the sky is hung with observation balloons. There is a rumour that the enemy are going to put tanks over and use low-flying planes for the attack. But that interests us less than what we hear of the new flame-throwers.

We wake up in the middle of the night. The earth booms. Heavy fire is falling on us. We crouch into corners. We distinguish shells of every calibre.

Each man lays hold of his things and looks again every minute to reassure himself that they are still there. The dug-out heaves, the night roars and flashes. We look at each other in the



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momentary flashes of light, and with pale faces and pressed lips shake our heads.

Every man is aware of the heavy shells tearing down the parapet, rooting up the embankment and demolishing the upper layers of concrete. When a shell lands in the trench we note how the hollow, furious blast is like a blow from the paw of a raging beast of prey. Already by morning a few of the recruits are green and vomiting. They are too inexperienced.

Slowly the grey light trickles into the post and pales the flashes of the shells. Morning is come. The explosion of mines mingles with the gunfire. That is the most dementing convulsion of all. The whole region where they go up becomes one grave.

The reliefs go out, the observers stagger in, covered with dirt, and trembling. One lies down in silence in the corner and eats, the other, an older man of the new draft, sobs; twice he has been flung over the parapet by the blast of the explosions without getting any more than shell-shock.

The recruits are eyeing him. We must watch them, these things are catching, already some lips begin to quiver. It is good that it is growing daylight; perhaps the attack will come before noon.

The bombardment does not diminish. It is falling in the rear too. As far as one can see spout

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fountains of mud and iron. A wide belt is being raked.

The attack does not come, but the bombardment continues. We are gradually benumbed. Hardly a man speaks. We cannot make ourselves understood.

Our trench is almost gone. At many places it is only eighteen inches high, it is broken by holes, and craters, and mountains of earth. A shell lands square in front of our post. At once it is dark. We are buried and must dig ourselves out. After an hour the entrance is clear again, and we are calmer because we have had something to do.

Our Company Commander scrambles in and reports that two dug-outs are gone. The recruits calm themselves when they see him. He says that an attempt will be made to bring up food this evening.

That sounds reassuring. No one had thought of it except Tjaden. Now the outside world seems to draw a little nearer: if food can be brought up, think the recruits, then it can't really be so bad.

We do not disabuse them; we know that food is as important as ammunition and only for that reason must be brought up.

But it miscarries. A second party goes out, and it also turns back. Finally Kat tries, and even he reappears without accomplishing anything. No

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one gets through, not even a fly is small enough to get through such a barrage.

We pull in our belts tighter and chew every mouthful three times as long. Still the food does not last out; we are damnably hungry. I take out a scrap of bread, eat the white and put the crust back in my knapsack; from time to time I nibble at it.

The night is unbearable. We cannot sleep, but stare ahead of us and doze. Tjaden regrets that we wasted the gnawed pieces of bread on the rats. We would gladly have them again to eat now. We are short of water, too, but not seriously yet.

Towards morning, while it is still dark, there is some excitement. Through the entrance rushes in a swarm of fleeing rats that try to storm the walls. Torches light up the confusion. Everyone yells and curses and slaughters. The madness and despair of many hours unloads itself in this outburst. Faces are distorted, arms strike out, and the beasts scream; we just stop in time to avoid attacking one another.

The onslaught has exhausted us. We lie down to wait again. It is a marvel that our post has had no casualties so far. It is one of the less deep dug-outs.

A corporal creeps in; he has a loaf of bread with him. Three people have had the luck to get

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through during the night and bring some provisions. They say the bombardment extends undiminished as far as the artillery lines. It is a mystery where the enemy gets all his shells.

We wait and wait. By midday what I expected happens. One of the recruits has a fit. I have been watching him for a long time, grinding his teeth and opening and shutting his fists. These hunted, protruding eyes, we know them too well. During the last few hours he has had merely the appearance of calm. He had collapsed like a rotten tree.

Now he stands up, stealthily creeps across the floor, hesitates a moment and then glides towards the door. I intercept him and say: "Where are you going?"

"I'll be back in a minute," says he, and tries to push past me.

"Wait a bit, the shelling will stop soon."

He listens for a moment and his eyes become clear. Then again he has the glowering eyes of a mad dog, he is silent, he shoves me aside.

"One minute, lad," I say. Kat notices. Just as the recruit shakes me off Kat jumps in and we hold him.

Then he begins to rave: "Leave me alone, let me go out, I will go out!"

He won't listen to anything and hits out, his mouth is wet and pours out words, half choked, meaningless words. It is a case of claustrophobia,

he feels as though he is suffocating here and wants to get out at any price. If we let him go he would run about everywhere regardless of cover. He is not the first.

Though he raves and his eyes roll, it can't be helped, we have to give him a hiding to bring him to his senses. We do it quickly and mercifully, and at last he sits down quietly. The others have turned pale; let's hope it deters them. This bombardment is too much for the poor devils, they have been sent straight from a recruiting-depot into a barrage that is enough to turn an old soldier's hair grey.

After this affair the sticky, close atmosphere works more than ever on our nerves. We sit as if in our graves waiting only to be closed in.

Suddenly it howls and flashes terrifically, the dug-out cracks in all its joints under a direct hit, fortunately only a light one that the concrete blocks are able to withstand. It rings metallically, the walls reel, rifles, helmets, earth, mud, and dust fly everywhere. Sulphur fumes pour in.

If we were in one of those light dug-outs that they have been building lately instead of this deeper one, none of us would be alive.

But the effect is bad enough even so. The recruit starts to rave again and two others follow suit. One jumps up and rushes out, we have trouble with the other two. I start after one who

escapes and wonder whether to shoot him in the leg—then it shrieks again, I fling myself down and when I stand up the wall of the trench is plastered with smoking splinters, lumps of flesh, and bits of uniform. I scramble back.

The first recruit seems actually to have gone insane. He butts his head against the wall like a goat. We must try to-night to take him to the rear. Meanwhile we bind him, but in such a way that in case of attack he can be released at once.

Kat suggests a game of skat: it is easier when a man has something to do. But it is no use, we listen for every explosion that comes close, miscount the tricks, and fail to follow suit. We have to give it up. We sit as though in a boiler that is being belaboured from without on all sides.

Night again. We are deadened by the strain—a deadly tension that scrapes along one's spine like a gapped knife. Our legs refuse to move, our hands tremble, our bodies are a thin skin stretched painfully over repressed madness, over an almost irresistible, bursting roar. We have neither flesh nor muscles any longer, we dare not look at one another for fear of some miscalculable thing. So we shut our teeth—it will end—it will end—perhaps we will come through.

Suddenly the nearer explosions cease. The shelling continues but it has lifted and falls behind us, our trench is free. We seize the hand-

grenades, pitch them out in front of the dug-out and jump after them. The bombardment has stopped and a heavy barrage now falls behind us. The attack has come.

No one would believe that in this howling waste there could still be men; but steel helmets now appear on all sides out of the trench, and fifty yards from us a machine-gun is already in position and barking.

The wire entanglements are torn to pieces. Yet they offer some obstacle. We see the storm-troops coming. Our artillery opens fire. Machine-guns rattle, rifles crack. The charge works its way across. Haie and Kropp begin with the hand-grenades. They throw as fast as they can, others pass them, the handles with the strings already pulled. Haie throws seventy-five yards, Kropp sixty, it has been measured, the distance is important. The enemy as they run cannot do much before they are within forty yards.

We recognize the smooth distorted faces, the helmets; they are French. They have already suffered heavily when they reach the remnants of the barbed wire entanglements. A whole line has gone down before our machine-guns; then we have a lot of stoppages and they come nearer.

I see one of them, his face upturned, fall into a wire cradle. His body collapses, his hands remain suspended as though he were praying. Then his

body drops clean away and only his hands with the stumps of his arms, shot off, now hang in the wire.

The moment we are about to retreat three faces rise up from the ground in front of us. Under one of the helmets a dark pointed beard and two eyes that are fastened on me. I raise my hand, but I cannot throw into those strange eyes; for one mad moment the whole slaughter whirls like a circus around me, and these two eyes alone are motionless; then the head rises up, a hand, a movement, and my hand-grenade flies through the air and into him.

We make for the rear, pull wire cradles into the trench and leave bombs behind us with the strings pulled, which ensures us a fiery retreat. The machine-guns are already firing from the next position.

We have become wild beasts. We do not fight, we defend ourselves against annihilation. It is not against men that we fling our bombs, what do we know of men in this moment when Death is hunting us down—now, for the first time in three days we can see his face, now for the first time in three days we can oppose him; we feel a mad anger. No longer do we lie helpless, waiting on the scaffold, we can destroy and kill, to save ourselves, to save ourselves and to be revenged.

We crouch behind every corner, behind every barrier of barbed wire, and hurl heaps of explo-

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sives at the feet of the advancing enemy before we run. The blast of the hand-grenades impinges powerfully on our arms and legs; crouching like cats we run on, overwhelmed by this wave that bears us along, that fills us with ferocity, turns us into thugs, into murderers, into God only knows what devils; this wave that multiplies our strength with fear and madness and greed of life, seeking and fighting for nothing but our deliverance. If your own father came over with them you would not hesitate to fling a bomb at him.

The forward trenches have been abandoned. Are they still trenches? They are blown to pieces, annihilated—there are only broken bits of trenches, holes linked by cracks, nests of craters, that is all. But the enemy's casualties increase. They did not count on so much resistance.

It is nearly noon. The sun blazes hotly, the sweat stings in our eyes, we wipe it off on our sleeves and often blood with it. At last we reach a trench that is in a somewhat better condition. It is manned and ready for the counter-attack, it receives us. Our guns open in full blast and cut off the enemy attack.

The lines behind us stop. They can advance no farther. The attack is crushed by our artillery. We

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watch. The fire lifts a hundred yards and we break forward. Beside me a lance-corporal has his head torn off. He runs a few steps more while the blood spouts from his neck like a fountain.

It does not come quite to hand-to-hand fighting; they are driven back. We arrive once again at our shattered trench and pass on beyond it.

Oh, this turning back again! We reach the shelter of the reserves and yearn to creep in and disappear;—but instead we must turn round and plunge again into the horror. If we were not automata at that moment we would continue lying there, exhausted, and without will. But we are swept forward again, powerless, madly savage and raging; we will kill, for they are still our mortal enemies, their rifles and bombs are aimed against us, and if we don't destroy them, they will destroy us.

The brown earth, the torn, blasted earth, with a greasy shine under the sun's rays; the earth is the background of this restless, gloomy world of automatons, our gasping is the scratching of a quill, our lips are dry, our heads are debauched with stupor—thus we stagger forward, and into our pierced and shattered souls bores the torturing image of the brown earth with the greasy sun and the convulsed and dead soldiers,

who lie there—it can't be helped—who cry and clutch at our legs as we spring away over them.

We have lost all feeling for one another. We can hardly control ourselves when our glance lights on the form of some other man. We are insensible, dead men, who through some trick, some dreadful magic, are still able to run and to kill.

A young Frenchman lags behind, he is overtaken, he puts up his hands, in one he still holds his revolver—does he mean to shoot or to give himself!—a blow from a spade cleaves through his face. A second sees it and tries to run farther; a bayonet jabs into his back. He leaps in the air, his arms thrown wide, his mouth wide open, yelling; he staggers, in his back the bayonet quivers. A third throws away his rifle, cowers down with his hands before his eyes. He is left behind with a few other prisoners to carry off the wounded.

Suddenly in the pursuit we reach the enemy line.

We are so close on the heels of our retreating enemies that we reach it almost at the same time as they. In this way we suffer few casualties. A machine-gun barks, but is silenced with a bomb. Nevertheless, the couple of seconds has sufficed to give us five stomach wounds. With the butt of his rifle Kat smashes to pulp the face of one of the unwounded machine-gunners. We bayonet the others before they have time to get out their

bombs. Then thirstily we drink the water they have for cooling the gun.

Everywhere wire-cutters are snapping, planks are thrown across the entanglements, we jump through the narrow entrances into the trenches. Haie strikes his spade into the neck of a gigantic Frenchman and throws the first hand-grenade; we duck behind a breastwork for a few seconds, then the straight bit of trench ahead of us is empty. The next throw whizzes obliquely over the corner and clears a passage; as we run past we toss handfuls down into the dug-outs, the earth shudders, it crashes, smokes and groans, we stumble over slippery lumps of flesh, over yielding bodies; I fall into an open belly on which lies a clean, new officer's cap.

The fight ceases. We lose touch with the enemy. We cannot stay here long but must retire under cover of our artillery to our own position. No sooner do we know this than we dive into the nearest dug-outs, and with the utmost haste seize on whatever provisions we can see, especially the tins of corned beef and butter, before we clear out.

We get back pretty well. There is no further attack by the enemy. We lie for an hour panting and resting before anyone speaks. We are so completely played out that in spite of our great

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hunger we do not think of the provisions. Then gradually we become something like men again.

The corned beef over there is famous along the whole front. Occasionally it has been the chief reason for a flying raid on our part, for our nourishment is generally very bad; we have a constant hunger.

We bagged five tins altogether. The fellows over there are well looked after; they fare magnificently, as against us, poor starving wretches, with our turnip jam; they can get all the meat they want. Haie has scored a thin loaf of white French bread, and stuck it behind his belt like a spade. It is a bit bloody at one corner, but that can be cut off.

It is a good thing we have something decent to eat at last; we still have a use for all our strength. Enough to eat is just as valuable as a good dug-out; it can save our lives; that is the reason we are so greedy for it.

Tjaden has captured two water-bottles full of cognac. We pass them round.

The evening benediction begins. Night comes, out of the craters rise the mists. It looks as though the holes were full of ghostly secrets. The white vapour creeps painfully round before it

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ventures to steal away over the edge. Then long streaks stretch from crater to crater.

It is chilly. I am on sentry and stare into the darkness. My strength is exhausted as always after an attack, and so it is hard for me to be alone with my thoughts. They are not properly thoughts; they are memories which in my weakness haunt me and strangely move me.

The parachute-lights soar upwards—and I see a picture, a summer evening, I am in the cathedral cloister and look at the tall rose trees that bloom in the middle of the little cloister garden where the monks lie buried. Around the walls are the stone carvings of the Stations of the Cross. No one is there. A great quietness rules in this blossoming quadrangle, the sun lies warm on the heavy grey stones, I place my hand upon them and feel the warmth. At the right-hand corner the green cathedral spire ascends into the pale blue sky of the evening. Between the glowing columns of the cloister is the cool darkness that only churches have, and I stand there and wonder whether, when I am twenty, I shall have experienced the bewildering emotions of love.

The image is alarmingly near; it touches me before it dissolves in the light of the next star-shell.

I lay hold of my rifle to see that it is in trim.

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The barrel is wet, I take it in my hands and rub off the moisture with my fingers.

Between the meadows behind our town there stands a line of old poplars by a stream. They were visible from a great distance, and although they grew on one bank only, we called them the poplar avenue. Even as children we had a great love for them, they drew us vaguely thither, we played truant the whole day by them and listened to their rustling. We sat beneath them on the bank of the stream and let our feet hang in the bright, swift waters. The pure fragrance of the water and the melody of the wind in the poplars held our fancies. We loved them dearly, and the image of those days still makes my heart pause in its beating.

It is strange that all the memories that come have these two qualities. They are always completely calm, that is predominant in them; and even if they are not really calm, they become so. They are soundless apparitions that speak to me, with looks and gestures silently, without any word—and it is the alarm of their silence that forces me to lay hold of my sleeve and my rifle lest I should abandon myself to the liberation and allurements in which my body would dilate and gently pass away into the still forces that lie behind these things.

They are quiet in this way, because quietness is

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so unattainable for us now. At the front there is no quietness and the curse of the front reaches so far that we never pass beyond it. Even in the remote depots and rest-areas the droning and the muffled noise of shelling is always in our ears. We are never so far off that it is no more to be heard. But these last few days it has been unbearable.

Their stillness is the reason why these memories of former times do not awaken desire so much as sorrow—a vast, inapprehensible melancholy. Once we had such desires—but they return not. They are past, they belong to another world that is gone from us. In the barracks they called forth a rebellious, wild craving for their return; for then they were still bound to us, we belonged to them and they to us, even though we were already absent from them. They appeared in the soliders' songs which we sang as we marched between the glow of the dawn and the black silhouettes of the forests to drill on the moor, they were a powerful remembrance that was in us and came from us.

But here in the trenches they are completely lost to us. They arise no more; we are dead and they stand remote on the horizon, they are a mysterious reflection, an apparition, that haunts us, that we fear and love without hope. They are strong and our desire is strong—but they are unattainable, and we know it.



no longer untroubled—we are indifferent. We might exist there; but should we really live there?

We are forlorn like children, and experienced like old men, we are crude and sorrowful and superficial—I believe we are lost.

My hands grow cold and my flesh creeps; and yet the night is warm. Only the mist is cold, this mysterious mist that trails over the dead and sucks from them their last, creeping life. By morning they will be pale and green and their blood congealed and black.

Still the parachute-rockets shoot up and cast their pitiless light over the stony landscape, which is full of craters and frozen lights like a moon. The blood beneath my skin brings fear and restlessness into my thoughts. They become feeble and tremble, they want warmth and life. They cannot persist without solace, without illusion, they are disordered before the naked picture of despair.

I hear the rattle of the mess-tins and immediately feel a strong desire for warm food; it would do me good and comfort me. Painfully I force myself to wait until I am relieved.

Then I go into the dug-out and find a mug of barley. It is cooked in fat and tastes good, I eat it

And even if these scenes of our youth were given back to us we would hardly know what to do. The tender, secret influence that passed from them into us could not rise again. We might be amongst them and move in them; we might remember and love them and be stirred by the sight of them. But it would be like gazing at the photograph of a dead comrade; those are his features, it is his face, and the days we spent together take on a mournful life in the memory; but the man himself it is not.

We could never regain the old intimacy with those scenes. It was not any recognition of their beauty and their significance that attracted us, but the communion, the feeling of a comradeship with the things and events of our existence, which cut us off and made the world of our parents a thing incomprehensible to us—for then we surrendered ourselves to events and were lost in them, and the least little thing was enough to carry us down the stream of eternity. Perhaps it was only the privilege of our youth, but as yet we recognized no limits and saw nowhere an end. We had that thrill of expectation in the blood which united us with the course of our days.

To-day we would pass through the scenes of our youth like travellers. We are burnt up by hard facts; like tradesmen we understand distinctions, and like butchers, necessities. We are

slowly. I remain quiet, though the others are in a better mood, for the shelling has died down.

The days go by and the incredible hours follow one another as a matter of course. Attacks alternate with counter-attacks and slowly the dead pile up in the field of craters between the trenches. We are able to bring in most of the wounded that do not lie too far off. But many have long to wait and we listen to them dying.

For one of them we search two days in vain. He must be lying on his belly and unable to turn over. Otherwise it is hard to understand why we cannot find him; for it is only when a man has his mouth close to the ground that it is impossible to gauge the direction of his cry.

He must have been badly hit—one of those nasty wounds neither so severe that they exhaust the body at once and a man dreams on in a half-swoon, nor so light that a man endures the pain in the hope of becoming well again. Kat thinks he has either a broken pelvis or a shot through the spine. His chest cannot have been injured otherwise he would not have such strength to cry out. And if it were any other kind of wound it would be possible to see him moving.

He grows gradually hoarser. The voice is so strangely pitched that it seems to be everywhere.

The first night some of our fellows go out three times to look for him. But when they think they have located him and crawl across, the next time they hear the voice it seems to come from somewhere else altogether.

We search in vain until dawn. We scrutinize the field all day with glasses, but discover nothing. On the second day the calls are fainter; that will be because his lips and mouth have become dry.

Our Company Commander has promised next turn of leave with three days extra to anyone who finds him. This is a powerful inducement, but we would do all that is possible without that for his cry is terrible. Kat and Kropp even go out in the afternoon, and Albert gets the lobe of his ear shot off in consequence. It is to no purpose, they come back without him.

It is easy to understand what he cries. At first he called only for help—the second night he must have had some delirium, he talked with his wife and his children, we often detected the name Elise. To-day he merely weeps. By evening the voice dwindles to a croaking. But it persists still through the whole night. We hear it so distinctly because the wind blows toward our line. In the morning when we suppose he must already have long gone to his rest, there comes across to us one last gurgling rattle.

The days are hot and the dead lie unburied.

We cannot fetch them all in, if we did we should not know what to do with them. The shells will bury them. Many have their bellies swollen up like balloons. They hiss, belch, and make movements. The gases in them make noises.

The sky is blue and without clouds. In the evening it grows sultry and the heat rises from the earth. When the wind blows toward us it brings the smell of blood, which is very heavy and sweet. This deathly exhalation from the shell-holes seems to be a mixture of chloroform and putrefaction, and fills us with nausea and retching.

The nights become quiet and the hunt for copper driving-bands and the silken parachutes of the French star-shells begins. Why the driving-bands are so desirable no one knows exactly. The collectors merely assert that they are valuable. Some have collected so many that they will stoop under the weight of them when we go back.

But Haie at least gives a reason. He intends to give them to his girl to supplement her garters. At this the Friesians explode with mirth. They slap their knees: "By Jove though, he's a wit, Haie is, he's got brains." Tjaden especially can hardly contain himself; he takes the largest of the rings in his hand and every now and then puts his legs through it to show how much slack there is.

"Haie, man, she must have legs like, legs——" his thoughts mount somewhat higher "and a behind too she must have, like a——like an elephant!"

He cannot get over it. "I wish I could play hothead with her once, my hat——"

Haie beams, proud that his girl should receive so much appreciation.

"She's a nice bit," he says with self-satisfaction.

The parachutes are turned to more practical uses. According to the size of the bust three or perhaps four will make a blouse. Kropp and I use them as handkerchiefs. The others send them home. If the women could see at what risk these bits of rag are often obtained, they would be horrified.

Kat surprises Tjaden endeavouring with perfect equanimity to knock the driving-band off a dud. If anyone else had tried it the thing would have exploded, but Tjaden always has his luck with him.

One morning two butterflies play in front of our trench. They are brimstone-butterflies, with red spots on their yellow wings. What can they be looking for here? There is not a plant nor a flower for miles. They settle on the teeth of a skull. The birds too are just as carefree, they

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have long since accustomed themselves to the war. Every morning larks ascend from No Man's Land. A year ago we watched them nesting; the young ones grew up too.

We have a spell from the rats in the trench. They are in No Man's Land—we know what for. They grow fat; when we see one we have a crack at it. At night we hear again the rolling behind the enemy lines. All day we have only the normal shelling, so that we are able to repair the trenches. There is always plenty of amusement, the airmen see to that. There are countless fights for us to watch every day.

Battle planes don't trouble us, but the observation planes we hate like the plague; they put the artillery to us. A few minutes after they appear, shrapnel and high-explosives begin to drop on us. We lose eleven men in one day that way, and five of them stretcher-bearers. Two are smashed so that Tjaden remarks you could scrape them off the wall of the trench with a spoon and bury them in a mess-tin. Another has the lower part of his body and his legs torn off. Dead, his chest leans against the side of the trench, his face is lemon-yellow, in his beard still burns a cigarette. It glows until it dies out on his lips.

We put the dead in a large shell-hole. So far there are three layers, one on top of the other.

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Suddenly the shelling begins to pound again. Soon we are sitting up once more with the rigid tenseness of blank anticipation.

Attack, counter-attack, charge, repulse—these are words, but what things they signify! We have lost a good many men, mostly recruits. Reinforcements have again been sent up to our sector. They are one of the new regiments, composed almost entirely of young fellows just called up. They have had hardly any training, and are sent into the field with only a theoretical knowledge. They do know what a hand-grenade is, it is true, but they have very little idea of cover, and what is most important of all, have no eye for it. A fold in the ground has to be quite eighteen inches high before they can see it.

Although we need reinforcement, the recruits give us almost more trouble than they are worth. They are helpless in this grim fighting area, they fall like flies. Modern trench-warfare demands knowledge and experience; a man must have a feeling for the contours of the ground, an ear for the sound and character of the shells, must be able to decide beforehand where they will drop, how they will burst, and how to shelter from them.

The young recruits of course know none of these

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things. They get killed simply because they hardly can tell shrapnel from high-explosive, they are mown down because they are listening anxiously to the roar of the big coal-boxes falling in the rear, and miss the light, piping whistle of the low spreading daisy-cutters. They flock together like sheep instead of scattering, and even the wounded are shot down like hares by the airmen.

Their pale turnip faces, their pitiful clenched hands, the fine courage of these poor devils, the desperate charges and attacks made by the poor brave wretches, who are so terrified that they dare not cry out loudly, but with battered chests, with torn bellies, arms and legs only whimper softly for their mothers and cease as soon as one looks at them.

Their sharp, downy, dead faces have the awful expressionlessness of dead children.

It brings a lump into the throat to see how they go over, and run and fall. A man would like to spank them, they are so stupid, and to take them by the arm and lead them away from here where they have no business to be. They wear grey coats and trousers and boots, but for most of them the uniform is far too big, it hangs on their limbs, their shoulders are too narrow, their bodies too slight; no uniform was ever made to these childish measurements.

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Between five and ten recruits fall to every old hand.

A surprise gas-attack carries off a lot of them. They have not yet learned what to do. We found one dug-out full of them, with blue heads and black lips. Some of them in a shell-hole took off their masks too soon; they did not know that the gas lies longest in the hollows; when they saw others on top without masks they pulled theirs off too and swallowed enough to scorch their lungs. Their condition is hopeless, they choke to death with haemorrhages and suffocation.

In one part of the trench I suddenly run into Himmelstoss. We dive into the same dug-out. Breathless we are all lying one beside the other waiting for the charge.

When we run out again, although I am very excited, I suddenly think: "Where's Himmelstoss?" Quickly I jump back into the dug-out and find him with a small scratch lying in a corner pretending to be wounded. His face looks sullen. He is in a panic; he is new to it too. But it makes me mad that the young recruits should be out there and he here.

"Get out!" I spit.

He does not stir, his lips quiver, his moustache twitches.

"Out!" I repeat.

He draws up his legs, crouches back against the wall, and shows his teeth like a cur.

I seize him by the arm and try to pull him up. He barks.

This is too much for me. I grab him by the neck and shake him like a sack, his head jerks from side to side.

"You lump, will you get out—you hound, you skunk, sneak out of it, would you?" His eye becomes glassy, I knock his head against the wall—"You cow"—I kick him in the ribs—"You swine"—I push him toward the door and shove him out head first.

Another wave of our attack has just come up. A lieutenant is with them. He sees us and yells: "Forward, forward, join in, follow." And the word of command does what all my banging could not. Himmelstoss hears the order, looks round him as if awakened, and follows on.

I come after and watch him go over. Once more he is the smart Himmelstoss of the parade-ground, he has even outstripped the lieutenant and is far ahead.

Bombardment, barrage, curtain-fire, mines, gas, tanks, machine-guns, hand-grenades—words, words, but they hold the horror of the world.

Our faces are encrusted, our thoughts are dev-

astated, we are weary to death; when the attack comes we shall have to strike many of the men with our fists to waken them and make them come with us—our eyes are burnt, our hands are torn, our knees bleed, our elbows are raw.

How long has it been? Weeks—months—years? Only days. We see time pass in the colourless faces of the dying, we cram food into us, we run, we throw, we shoot, we kill, we lie about, we are feeble and spent, and nothing supports us but the knowledge that there are still feebler, still more spent, still more helpless ones there who, with staring eyes, look upon us as gods that escape death many times.

In the few hours of rest we teach them. "There, see that waggle-top? That's a mortar coming. Keep down, it will go clean over. But if it comes this way, then run for it. You can run from a mortar."

We sharpen their ears to the malicious, hardly audible buzz of the smaller shells that are not easily distinguishable. They must pick them out from the general din by their insect-like hum—we explain to them that these are far more dangerous than the big ones that can be heard long beforehand.

We show them how to take cover from aircraft, how to simulate a dead man when one is overrun in an attack, how to time hand-grenades so that

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they explode half a second before hitting the ground; we teach them to fling themselves into holes as quick as lightning before the shells with instantaneous fuses; we show them how to clean up a trench with a handful of bombs; we explain the difference between the fuse-length of the enemy bombs and our own; we put them wise to the sound of gas shells;—show them all the tricks that can save them from death.

They listen, they are docile—but when it begins again, in their excitement they do everything wrong.

Haie Westhus drags off with a great wound in his back through which the lung pulses at every breath. I can only press his hand; "It's all up, Paul," he groans and he bites his arm because of the pain.

We see men living with their skulls blown open; we see soldiers run with their two feet cut off, they stagger on their splintered stumps into the next shell-hole; a lance-corporal crawls a mile and a half on his hands dragging his smashed knee after him; another goes to the dressing station and over his clasped hands bulge his intestines; we see men without mouths, without jaws, without faces; we find one man who has held the artery of his arm in his teeth for two hours in order not to bleed to death. The sun goes down, night comes, the shells whine, life is at an end.

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Still the little piece of convulsed earth in which we lie is held. We have yielded no more than a few hundred yards of it as a prize to the enemy. But on every yard there lies a dead man.

We have just been relieved. The wheels roll beneath us, we stand dully, and when the call "Mind—wire" comes, we bend our knees. It was summer when we came up, the trees were still green, now it is autumn and the night is grey and wet. The lorries stop, we climb out—a confused heap, a remnant of many names. On either side stand people, dark, calling out the numbers of the brigades, the battalions. And at each call a little group separates itself off, a small handful of dirty, pallid soldiers, a dreadfully small handful, and a dreadfully small remnant.

Now someone is calling the number of our company, it is, yes, the Company Commander, he has come through, then; his arm is in a sling. We go over to him and I recognize Kat and Albert, we stand together, lean against each other, and look at one another.

And we hear the number of our company called again and again. He will call a long time, they do not hear him in the hospitals and shell-holes.

Once again: "Second Company, this way!" And

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then more softly: "Nobody else, Second Company?"

He is silent, and then huskily he says: "Is that all?" he gives the order: "Number!"

The morning is grey, it was still summer when we came up, and we were one hundred and fifty strong. Now we freeze, it is autumn, the leaves rustle, the voices flutter out wearily: "One—two—three—four—" and cease at thirty-two. And there is a long silence before the voice asks: "Anyone else?"—and waits and then says softly: "In squads—" and then breaks off and is only able to finish: "Second Company—" with difficulty: "Second Company—march easy!"

A line, a short line trudges off into the morning.

Thirty-two men.

# SEVEN



They have taken us farther back than usual to a field depot so that we can be re-organized. Our company needs more than a hundred reinforcements.

In the meantime, when we are off duty, we loaf around. After a couple of days Himmelstoss comes up to us. He has had the bounce knocked out of him since he has been in the trenches and wants to get on good terms with us. I am willing, because I saw how he brought Haie Westhus in when he was hit in the back. Besides he's decent enough to treat us in the canteen when we are out of funds. Only Tjaden is still reserved and suspicious.



But he is won over, too, when Himmelstoss tells us that he is taking the place of the sergeant-cook who has gone on leave. As a proof he produces on the spot two pounds of sugar for us and a half-pound of butter specially for Tjaden. He even sees to it that we are detailed the next two or three days to the cook-house for potato and turnip peeling. The grub he gives us there is real officers' fare.

Thus momentarily we have the two things a soldier needs for contentment: good food and rest. That's not much when one comes to think of it. A few years ago we would have despised ourselves terribly. But now we are almost happy. It is all a matter of habit—even the front-line.

Habit is the explanation of why we seem to forget things so quickly. Yesterday we were under fire, to-day we act the fool and go foraging through the countryside, to-morrow we go up to the trenches again. We forget nothing really. But so long as we have to stay here in the field, the front-line days, when they are past, sink down in us like a stone; they are too grievous for us to be able to reflect on them at once. If we did that, we should have been destroyed long ago. I soon found out this much:—terror can be endured so long as a man simply ducks;—but it kills, if a man thinks about it.

Just as we turn into animals when we go up to

the line, because that is the only thing which brings us through safely, so we turn into wags and loafers when we are resting. We can do nothing else, it is a sheer necessity. We want to live at any price; so we cannot burden ourselves with feelings which, though they might be ornamental enough in peacetime, would be out of place here. Kemmerich is dead, Haie Westhus is dying, they will have a job with Hans Kramer's body at the Judgment Day, piecing it together after a direct hit; Martens has no legs anymore, Meyer is dead, Max is dead, Beyer is dead, Hämmerling is dead, there are a hundred and twenty wounded men lying somewhere or other; it is a damnable business, but what has it to do with us now—we live. If it were possible for us to save them, then it would be seen how much we cared—we would have a shot at it though we went under ourselves; for we can be damned quixotic when we like; fear we do not know much about—terror of death, yes; but that is a different matter, that is physical.

But our comrades are dead, we cannot help them, they have their rest—and who knows what is waiting for us? We will make ourselves comfortable and sleep, and eat as much as we can stuff into our bellies, and drink and smoke so that hours are not wasted. Life is short.

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The terror of the front sinks deep down when we turn our back upon it; we make grim, coarse jests about it, when a man dies, then we say he has nipped off his turd, and so we speak of everything; that keeps us from going mad; as long as we take it that way we maintain our own resistance.

But we do not forget. It's all rot that they put in the war-news about the good humour of the troops, how they are arranging dances almost before they are out of the front-line. We don't act like that because we are in a good humour: we are in a good humour because otherwise we should go to pieces. Even so we cannot hold out much longer; our humour becomes more bitter every month.

And this I know: all these things that now, while we are still in the war, sink down in us like a stone, after the war shall waken again, and then shall begin the disentanglement of life and death.

The days, the weeks, the years out here shall come back again, and our dead comrades shall then stand up again and march with us, our heads shall be clear, we shall have a purpose, and so we shall march, our dead comrades beside us, the years at the Front behind us:—against whom, against whom?

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Some time ago there was an army theatre in these parts. Coloured posters of the performances are still sticking on a hoarding. With wide eyes Kropp and I stand in front of it. We can hardly credit that such things still exist. A girl in a light summer dress, with a red patent-leather belt about her hips! She is standing with one hand on a railing and with the other she holds a straw hat. She wears white stockings and white shoes, fine buckle shoes with high heels. Behind her smiles the blue sea with white-horses, at the side is a bright bay. She is a lovely girl with a delicate nose, red lips, and slender legs, wonderfully clean and well cared for, she certainly baths twice a day and never has any dirt under her nails. At most perhaps a bit of sand from the beach.

Beside her stands a man in white trousers, a blue jacket, and sailor's cap; but he interests us much less.

The girl on the poster is a wonder to us. We have quite forgotten that there are such things, and even now we hardly believe our eyes. We have seen nothing like it for years, nothing like it for happiness, beauty and joy. That is peacetime, that is as it should be; we feel excited.

"Just look at those thin shoes though, she

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couldn't march many miles in those," I say, and then begin to feel silly, for it is absurd to stand in front of the picture like this and think of nothing but marching.

"How old would she be?" Kropp asks.

"About twenty-two at the most," I hazard.

"Then she would be older than us! She is not more than seventeen, let me tell you!"

It gives us goose flesh.

"That would be good, Albert, what do you think?"

He nods. "I have some white trousers at home too."

"White trousers," say I, "but a girl like that——"

We look askance at one another. There's not much to boast of here—two ragged, stained, and dirty uniforms. It is hopeless to compete.

So we proceed to tear the young man with the white trousers off the hoarding, taking care not to damage the girl. That is something toward it.

"We could go and get deloused, anyway," Kropp then suggests.

I am not very enthusiastic because it doesn't do one's clothes any good and a man is lousy again inside two hours. But when we have considered the picture once more, I declare myself willing. I go even farther.

"We might see if we could get a clean shirt as well——"

"Socks might be better," says Albert, not without reason.

"Yes, socks too perhaps. Let's go and explore a bit."

Then Leer and Tjaden stroll up; they look at the poster and immediately the conversation becomes smutty. Leer was the first of our class to have intercourse, and he gave stirring details of it. After his fashion he enjoys himself over the picture, and Tjaden supports him nobly.

It does not distress us exactly. Who isn't smutty is no soldier; it merely does not suit us at the moment, so we edge away and march off to the delousing station with the same feeling as if it were a swell gentlemen's outfitters.

The houses in which we are billeted lie near the canal. On the other side of the canal there are ponds flanked with poplars;—on the other side of the canal there are women too.

The houses on our side have been abandoned. On the other side though one occasionally sees inhabitants.

In the evening we go swimming. Three women come strolling along the bank. They walk slowly

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and don't look away, although we have no bathing suits.

Leer calls out to them. They laugh and stop to watch us. We fling remarks at them in broken French, anything that comes into our heads, hastily and all jumbled together, anything to detain them. They are not specially wonderful pieces, but then where are such to be had about here?

There is one slim little brunette, her teeth gleam when she laughs. She has quick movements, her dress swings loosely about her legs. Although the water is cold we are very jovial and do our best to interest them so that they will stay. We try to make jokes and they answer with things we cannot understand; we laugh and beckon. Tjaden is more crafty. He runs into the house, gets a loaf of army bread and holds it up.

That produces a great effect. They nod and beckon us to come over. But we don't dare to do that. It is forbidden to cross to the opposite bank. There are sentries on all the bridges. It's impossible without a pass. So we indicate that they should come over to us; but they shake their heads and point to the bridge. They are not allowed to pass either. They turn back and walk slowly down the canal, keeping along the tow-path all the way. We accompany them swimming.

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After a few hundred yards they turn off and point to a house that stands a little distance away among the trees and shrubbery.

Leer asks if they live there.

They laugh—sure, that's their house.

We call out to them that we would like to come, sometime when the guards cannot see us. At night. To-night.

They raise their hands, put them together, rest their faces on them and shut their eyes. They understand. The slim brunette does a two-step. The blonde girl twitters: "Bread—good——"

Eagerly we assure them that we will bring some with us. And other tasty bits too, we roll our eyes and try to explain with our hands. Leer nearly drowns trying to demonstrate a sausage. If it were necessary we would promise them a whole quartermaster's store. They go off and frequently turn and look back. We climb out on the bank on our side of the canal and watch to see whether they go into the house, for they might easily have been lying. Then we swim back.

No one can cross the bridge without leave, so we will simply have to swim over to-night. We are full of excitement. We cannot last out without a drink, so we go to the canteen where there is beer and a kind of punch.

We drink punch and tell one another lying

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tales of our experiences. Each man gladly believes the other man's story, only waiting impatiently till he can cap it with a taller one. Our hands are fidgety, we smoke countless cigarettes, until Kropp says: "We might as well take them a few cigarettes too." So we put some inside our caps to keep them.

The sky turns apple-green. There are four of us, but only three can go; we must shake off Tjaden, so ply him with rum and punch until he rocks. As it turns dark we go to our billets, Tjaden in the centre. We are glowing and full of a lust for adventure.

The little brunette is mine, we have settled all that.

Tjaden drops on his sack of straw and snores. Once he wakes up and grins so craftily that we are alarmed and begin to think he is cheating, and that we have given him the punch to no purpose. Then he drops back again and sleeps on.

We each get hold of a whole army loaf and wrap it up in newspaper. The cigarettes we put in too, as well as three good rations of liver-sausage that were issued to us this evening. That makes a decent present.

We stow the things carefully in our boots; we have to take them to protect our feet against treading on wire and broken glass on the other

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bank. As we must swim for it we can take no other clothes. But it is not far and quite dark.

We make off with our boots in our hands. Swiftly we slip into the water, lie on our backs and swim, holding the boots with their contents up over our heads.

We climb out carefully on the opposite bank, take out the packages and put on our boots. We put the things under our arms. And so, all wet and naked, clothed only in our boots, we break into a trot. We find the house at once. It lies among the trees. Leer trips over a root and skins his elbows.

"No matter," he says gaily.

The windows are shuttered. We slip round the house and try to peer through the cracks. Then we grow impatient. Suddenly Kropp hesitates:

"What if there's a Major with them?"

"Then we just clear off," grins Leer, "he can try to read our regimental numbers here," and smacks his behind.

The door of the courtyard stands open. Our boots made a great clatter. The house door opens, a chink of light shines through and a woman cries out in a scared voice.

"Ssh, ssh! camerade—bon ami—" we say, and show our packages protestingly.

The other two are now on the scene, the door

opens and the light floods over us. They recognize us and all three burst into laughter at our appearance. They rock and sway in the doorway, they laugh so much. How supple their movements are.

"Un moment—" They disappear and throw us bits of clothing which we gladly wrap round ourselves. Then we are allowed in. A small lamp burns in their room, which is warm and smells a little of perfume. We unwrap our parcels and hand them over to the women. Their eyes shine, it is obvious that they are hungry.

Then we all become rather embarrassed. Leer makes the gestures of eating, and then they come to life again and bring out plates and knives and fall to on the food, and they hold up every slice of livered sausage and admire it before they eat it, and we sit proudly by.

They overwhelm us with their chatter,—we understand very little of it, but we listen and the words sound friendly. No doubt we all look very young. The little brunette strokes my hair and says what all French women say: "La guerre—grand malheur—pauvres garçons—"

I hold her arm tightly and press my lips into the palm of her hand. Her fingers close round my face. Close above me are her bewildering eyes, the soft brown of her skin and her red lips. Her mouth speaks words I do not understand. Nor do

I fully understand her eyes; they seem to say more than we anticipated when we came here.

There are other rooms adjoining. In passing I see Leer, he has made a great hit with the blonde. He's an old hand at the game. But I—I am lost in remoteness, in weakness, and in a passion to which I yield myself trustingly. My desires are strangely compounded of yearning and misery. I feel giddy, there is nothing here that a man can hold on to. We have left our boots at the door, they have given us slippers instead, and now nothing remains to recall for me the assurance and self-confidence of the soldier; no rifle, no belt, no tunic, no cap. I let myself drop into the unknown, come what may—yet, in spite of all, I feel somewhat afraid.

The little brunette contracts her brows when she is thinking; but when she talks they are still. And often sound does not quite become a word but suffocates or floats away over me half finished; an arch, a pathway, a comet. What have I known of it—what do I know of it?—The words of this foreign tongue, that I hardly understand, they caress me to a quietness, in which the room grows dim, and dissolves in the half light, only the face above me lives and is clear.

How various is a face; but an hour ago it was strange and it is now touched with a tenderness that comes, not from it, but from out of the night,

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the world and the blood, all these things seem to shine in it together. The objects in the room are touched by it and transformed, they become isolated, and I feel almost awed at the sight of my clear skin when the light of the lamp falls upon it and the cool, brown hand passes over it.

How different this is from the conditions in the soldiers' brothels, to which we are allowed to go, and where we have to wait in long queues. I wish I never thought of them; but desire turns my mind to them involuntarily and I am afraid for it might be impossible ever to be free of them again.

But then I feel the lips of the little brunette and press myself against them, my eyes close, I want it all to fall from me, war and terror and grossness, in order to awaken young and happy; I think of the picture of the girl on the poster and, for a moment, believe that my life depends on winning her. And if I press ever deeper into the arms that embrace me, perhaps a miracle may happen. . . .

So, after a time we find ourselves reassembled again. Leer is in high spirits. We pull on our boots and take our leave warmly. The night air cools our hot bodies. The rustling poplars loom large in the darkness. The moon floats in the

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heavens and in the waters of the canal. We do not run, we walk beside one another with long strides.

"That was worth a ration-loaf," says Leer.

I cannot trust myself to speak, I am not in the least happy.

Then we hear footsteps and dodge behind a shrub.

The steps come nearer, close by us. We see a naked soldier, in boots, just like ourselves; he has a package under his arm, and gallops onward. It is Tjaden in full course. He has disappeared already.

We laugh. In the morning he will curse us.

Unobserved, we arrive again at our sacks of straw.

I am called to the Orderly Room. The Company Commander gives me a leave-pass and a travel-pass and wishes me a good journey. I look to see how much leave I have got. Seventeen days—fourteen days leave and three days for travelling. It is not enough and I ask whether I cannot have five days for travelling. Bertinck points to my pass. There I see that I am not to return to the front immediately. After my leave I have to report for a course of training to a camp on the moors.

The others envy me. Kat gives me good advice, and tells me I ought to try to get a base-job. "If you're smart, you'll hang on to it."

I would rather not have gone for another eight days; we are to stay here that much longer and it is good here.

Naturally I have to stand the others drinks at the canteen. We are all a little bit drunk. I become gloomy: I will be away for six weeks—that is lucky, of course, but what may happen before I get back? Shall I meet all these fellows again? Already Haie and Kemmerich have gone—who will the next be?

As we drink, I look at each of them in turn. Albert sits beside me and smokes, he is cheerful, we have always been together;—opposite squats Kat, with his drooping shoulders, his broad thumb, and calm voice—Müller with the projecting teeth and the booming laugh; Tjaden with his mousey eyes;—Leer who has grown a full beard and looks at least forty.

Over us hangs a dense cloud of smoke. Where would a soldier be without tobacco? The canteen is his refuge, and beer is far more than a drink, it is a token that a man can move his limbs and stretch in safety. We do it ceremonially, we stretch our legs out in front of us and spit deliberately, that is the only way. How it all rises up

before a man when he is going away the next morning!

At night we go again to the other side of the canal. I am almost afraid to tell the little brunette that I am going away, and when I return we will be far from here; we will never see one another again. But she merely nods and takes no special notice. At first I am at a loss to understand, then it suddenly dawns on me. Yes, Leer is right: if I were going up to the front, then she would have called me again "pauvre garçon"; but merely going on leave—she does not want to hear about that, that is not nearly so interesting. May she go to the devil with her chattering talk. A man dreams of a miracle and wakes up to loaves of bread.

Next morning, after I have been de-loused, I go the rail head. Albert and Kat come with me. At the halt we learn that it will be a couple of hours yet before the train leaves. The other two have to go back to duty. We take leave of one another.

"Good luck, Kat: good luck, Albert."

They go off and wave once or twice. Their figures dwindle. I know their every step and movement; I would recognize them at any distance. Then they disappear. I sit down on my pack and wait.



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Suddenly I become filled with a consuming impatience to be gone.

I lie down on many a station platform; I stand before many a soup-kitchen; I squat on many a bench;—then at last the landscape becomes disturbing, mysterious, and familiar. It glides past the western windows with its villages, their thatched roofs like caps, pulled over the white-washed, half-timbered houses, its corn-fields, gleaming like mother-of-pearl in the slanting light, its orchards, its barns and old lime trees.

The names of the stations begin to take on meaning and my heart trembles. The train stamps and stamps onward. I stand at the window and hold on to the frame. These names mark the boundaries of my youth.

Smooth meadows, fields, farm-yards; a solitary team moves against the sky-line along the road that runs parallel to the horizon—a barrier, before which peasants stand waiting, girls waving, children playing on the embankment, roads, leading into the country, smooth roads without artillery.

It is evening, and if the train did not rattle I should cry out. The plain unfolds itself.

In the distance, the soft, blue silhouette of the mountain ranges begins to appear. I recognize

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the characteristic outline of the Dolbenberg, a jagged comb, springing up precipitously from the limits of the forests. Behind it should lie the town.

But now the sun streams through the world, dissolving everything in its golden-red light, the train swings round one curve and then another;—far away, in a long line one behind the other, stand the poplars, unsubstantial, swaying and dark, fashioned out of shadow, light, and desire.

The field swings round as the train encircles it, and the intervals between the trees diminish; the trees become a block and for a moment I see one only—then they reappear from behind the foremost tree and stand out a long line against the sky until they are hidden by the first houses.

A street-crossing. I stand by the window, I cannot drag myself away. The others put their baggage ready for getting out. I repeat to myself the name of the street that we cross over—Bremerstrasse—Bremerstrasse—

Below there are cyclists, lorries, men; it is a grey street and a grey subway;—it affects me as though it were my mother.

Then the train stops, and there is the station with noise and cries and signboards. I pick up my pack and fasten the straps, I take my rifle in my hand and stumble down the steps.

On the platform I look round; I know no one

among all the people hurrying to and fro. A red-cross sister offers me something to drink. I turn away, she smiles at me too foolishly, so obsessed with her own importance: "Just look, I am giving a soldier coffee!"—She calls me "Comrade," but I will have none of it.

Outside in front of the station the stream roars alongside the street, it rushes foaming from the sluices of the mill bridge. There stands the old, square watch-tower, in front of it the great mot-tled lime tree and behind it the evening.

Here we have often sat—how long ago it is—we have passed over this bridge and breathed the cool, acid smell of the stagnant water; we have leaned over the still water on this side of the lock, where the green creepers and weeds hang from the piles of the bridge;—and on hot days we rejoiced in the spouting foam on the other side of the lock and told tales about our school-teachers.

I pass over the bridge, I look right and left; the water is as full of weeds as ever, and it still shoots over in gleaming arches; in the tower building laundresses still stand with bare arms as they used to over the clean linen, and the heat from the ironing pours out through the open windows. Dogs trot along the narrow street, before the doors of the houses people stand and follow me with their gaze as I pass by, dirty and heavy laden.

In this confectioner's we used to eat ices, and there we learned to smoke cigarettes. Walking down the street I know every shop, the grocer's, the chemist's, the baker's. Then at last I stand before the brown door with its worn latch and my hand grows heavy. I open the door and a strange coolness comes out to meet me, my eyes are dim.

The stairs creak under my boots. Upstairs a door rattles, someone is looking over the railing. It is the kitchen door that was opened, they are cooking potato-cakes, the house reeks of it, and to-day of course is Saturday; that will be my sister leaning over. For a moment I am shy and lower my head, then I take off my helmet and look up. Yes, it is my eldest sister.

"Paul," she cries, "Paul——"

I nod, my pack bumps against the banisters; my rifle is so heavy.

She pulls a door open and calls: "Mother, mother, Paul is here."

I can go no further—mother, mother, Paul is here.

I lean against the wall and grip my helmet and rifle. I hold them as tight as I can, but I cannot take another step, the staircase fades before my eyes, I support myself with the butt of my rifle against my feet and clench my teeth fiercely, but I cannot speak a word, my sister's call has made me powerless, I can do nothing, I struggle

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to make myself laugh, to speak, but no word comes, and so I stand on the steps, miserable, helpless, paralysed, and against my will the tears run down my cheeks.

My sister comes back and says: "Why, what is the matter?"

Then I pull myself together and stagger on to the landing. I lean my rifle in a corner, I set my pack against the wall, place my helmet on it and fling down my equipment and baggage. Then I say fiercely: "Bring me a handkerchief."

She gives me one from the cupboard and I dry my face. Above me on the wall hangs the glass case with the coloured butterflies that once I collected.

Now I hear my mother's voice. It comes from the bedroom.

"Is she in bed?" I ask my sister.

"She is ill——" she replies.

I go into her, give her my hand and say as calmly as I can: "Here I am, Mother."

She lies still in the dim light. Then she asks anxiously:

"Are you wounded?" and I feel her searching glance.

"No, I have got leave."

My mother is very pale. I am afraid to make a light.

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"Here I lie now," says she, "and cry instead of being glad."

"Are you sick, Mother?" I ask.

"I am going to get up a little to-day," she says and turns to my sister, who is continually running to the kitchen to watch that the food does not burn: "And put out that jar of preserved whortleberries—you like that, don't you?" she asks me.

"Yes, Mother, I haven't had any for a long time."

"We might almost have known you were coming," laughs my sister, "there is just your favourite dish, potato-cakes, and even whortleberries to go with them too."

"And it is Saturday," I add.

"Sit here beside me," says my mother.

She looks at me. Her hands are white and sickly and frail compared with mine. We say very little and I am thankful that she asks nothing. What ought I to say? Everything I could have wished for has happened. I have come out of it safely and sit here beside her. And in the kitchen stands my sister preparing supper and singing.

"Dear boy," says my mother softly.

We were never very demonstrative in our family; poor folk who toil and are full of cares are not so. It is not their way to protest what they already know. When my mother says to me "dear

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boy," it means much more than when another uses it. I know well enough that the jar of whorleberries is the only one they have had for months, and that she has kept it for me; and the somewhat stale cakes that she gives me too. She must have got them cheap some time and put them all by for me.

I sit by her bed, and through the window the chestnut trees in the beer garden opposite glow in brown and gold. I breathe deeply and say over to myself:—"You are at home, you are at home." But a sense of strangeness will not leave me, I cannot feel at home amongst these things. There is my mother, there is my sister, there my case of butterflies, and there the mahogany piano—but I am not myself there. There is a distance, a veil between us.

I go and fetch my pack to the bedside and turn out the things I have brought—a whole Edamer cheese, that Kat provided me with, two loaves of army bread, three-quarters of a pound of butter, two tins of livered sausage, a pound of dripping and a little bag of rice.

"I suppose you can make some use of that——"  
They nod.

"It is pretty bad for food here?" I enquire.

"Yes, there's not much. Do you get enough out there?"

I smile and point to the things I have brought.

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"Not always quite as much as that, of course, but we fare reasonably well."

Erna takes away the food. Suddenly my mother seizes hold of my hand and asks falteringly: "Was it very bad out there, Paul?"

Mother, what should I answer to that! You would not understand, you could never realize it. And you shall never realize it. Was it bad, you ask.—You, Mother,—I shake my head and say: "No, Mother, not so very. There are always a lot of us together so it isn't so bad."

"Yes, but Heinrich Bredemeyer was here just lately and said it was terrible out there now, with the gas and all the rest of it."

It is my mother who says that. She says: "With the gas and all the rest of it." She does not know what she is saying, she is merely anxious for me. Should I tell her how we once found three enemy trenches with their garrison all stiff as though stricken with apoplexy? against the parapet, in the dug-outs, just where they were, the men stood and lay about, with blue faces, dead.

"No Mother, that's only talk," I answer, "there's not very much in what Bredemeyer says. You see for instance, I'm well and fit——"

Before my mother's tremulous anxiety I recover my composure. Now I can walk about and talk and answer questions without fear of having suddenly to lean against the wall because the

world turns soft as rubber and my veins become brimstone.

My mother wants to get up. So I go for a while to my sister in the kitchen. "What is the matter with her?" I ask.

She shrugs her shoulders: "She has been in bed some months now, but we did not want to write and tell you. Several doctors have been to see her. One of them said it is probably cancer again."

I go to the district commandant to report myself. Slowly I wander through the streets. Occasionally someone speaks to me. I do not delay long for I have little inclination to talk.

On the way back from the barracks a loud voice calls out to me. Still lost in thought I turn round and find myself confronted by a Major. "Can't you salute?" he blusters.

"Sorry, Major," I say in embarrassment, "I didn't notice you."

"Don't you know how to speak properly?" he roars.

I would like to hit him in the face, but control myself, for my leave depends on it. I click my heels and say: "I did not see you, Herr Major."

"Then keep your eyes open," he snorts. "What is your name?" I give it.

His fat red face is furious. "What regiment?"

I give him full particulars. Even yet he has not had enough. "Where are you quartered?"

But I have had more than enough and say: "Between Langemark and Bixshoote."

"Eh?" he asks, a bit stupefied.

I explain to him that I arrived on leave only an hour or two since, thinking that he would then trot along. But not at all. He gets even more furious: "You think you can bring your front-line manners here, what? Well, we don't stand for that sort of thing. Thank God, we have discipline here!"

"Twenty paces backwards, double march!" he commands.

I am mad with rage. But I cannot say anything to him; he could put me under arrest if he liked. So I double back, and then march up to him. Six paces from him I spring to a stiff salute and maintain it until I am six paces beyond him.

He calls me back again and affably gives me to understand that for once he is pleased to put mercy before justice. I pretend to be duly grateful. "Now, dismissal!" he says. I turn about smartly and march off.

That ruins the evening for me. I go back home and throw my uniform into a corner; I had intended to change it in any case. Then I take out

my knee. The sky is blue, between the leaves of the chestnuts rises the green spire of St. Margaret's Church.

This is good, I like it. But I cannot get on with the people. My mother is the only one who asks no questions. Not so my father. He wants me to tell him about the front; he is curious in a way that I find stupid and distressing; I no longer have any real contact with him. There is nothing he likes more than just hearing about it. I realize he does not know that a man cannot talk of such things; I would do it willingly, but it is too dangerous for me to put these things into words. I am afraid they might then become gigantic and I be no longer able to master them. What would become of us if everything that happens out there were quite clear to us?

So I confine myself to telling him a few amusing things. But he wants to know whether I have ever had a hand-to-hand fight. I say "No," and get up and go out.

But that does not mend matters. After I have been startled a couple of times in the street by the screaming of the trams, which resembles the shriek of a shell coming straight for one, somebody taps me on the shoulder. It is my German-master, and he fastens on me with the usual question: "Well, how are things out there? Terrible, terrible, eh? Yes, it is dreadful, but we must

my civilian clothes from the wardrobe and put them on.

I feel awkward. The suit is rather tight and short, I have grown in the army. Collar and tie give me some trouble. In the end my sister ties the bow for me. But how light the suit is, it feels as though I had nothing on but a shirt and underpants.

I look at myself in the glass. It is a strange sight. A sunburnt, overgrown candidate for confirmation gazes at me in astonishment.

My mother is pleased to see me wearing civilian clothes; it makes me less strange to her. But my father would rather I kept my uniform on so that he could take me to visit his acquaintances.

But I refuse.

It is pleasant to sit quietly somewhere, in the beer garden for example, under the chestnuts by the skittle-alley. The leaves fall down on the table and on the ground, only a few, the first. A glass of beer stands in front of me, I've learned to drink in the army. The glass is half empty, but there are a few good swigs ahead of me, and besides I can always order a second and a third if I wish to. There are no bugles and no bombardments, the children of the house play in the skittle-alley, and the dog rests his head against

carry on. And after all, you do at least get decent food out there, so I hear. You look well, Paul, and fit. Naturally it's worse here. Naturally. The best for our soldiers every time, that goes without saying."

He drags me along to a table with a lot of others. They welcome me, a head-master shakes hands with me and says: "So you come from the front? What is the spirit like out there? Excellent, eh? Excellent?"

I explain that no one would be sorry to be back home.

He laughs uproariously. "I can well believe it! But first you have to give the Froggies a good hiding. Do you smoke? Here, try one. Waiter, bring a beer as well for our young warrior."

Unfortunately I have accepted the cigar, so I have to remain. And they are all so dripping with good will that it is impossible to object. All the same I feel annoyed and smoke like a chimney as hard as I can. In order to make at least some show of appreciation I toss off the beer in one gulp. Immediately a second is ordered; people know how much they are indebted to the soldiers. They argue about what we ought to annex. The head-master with the steel watch-chain wants to have at least the whole of Belgium, the coal-areas of France, and a slice of Russia. He produces reasons why we must have them and is

quite inflexible until at last the others give in to him. Then he begins to expound just whereabouts in France the break-through must come, and turns to me: "Now, shove ahead a bit out there with your everlasting trench warfare—Smash through the johnnies and then there will be peace."

I reply that in our opinion a break-through may not be possible. The enemy may have too many reserves. Besides, the war may be rather different from what people think.

He dismisses the idea loftily and informs me I know nothing about it. "The details, yes," says he, "but this relates to the whole. And of that you are not able to judge. You see only your little sector and so cannot have any general survey. You do your duty, you risk your lives, that deserves the highest honour—every man of you ought to have the Iron Cross—but first of all the enemy line must be broken through in Flanders and then rolled up from the top."

He blows his nose and wipes his beard. "Completely rolled up they must be, from the top to the bottom. And then to Paris."

I would like to know just how he pictures it to himself, and pour the third glass of beer into me. Immediately he orders another.

But I break away. He stuffs a few more cigars into my pocket and sends me off with a friendly

slap. "All of the best! I hope we will soon hear something worth while from you."

I imagined leave would be different from this. Indeed, it was different a year ago. It is I of course that have changed in the interval. There lies a gulf between that time and to-day. At that time I still knew nothing about the war, we had only been in quiet sectors. But now I see that I have been crushed without knowing it. I find I do not belong here any more, it is a foreign world. Some of these people ask questions, some ask no questions, but one can see that the latter are proud of themselves for their silence; they often say with a wise air that these things cannot be talked about. They plume themselves on it.

I prefer to be alone, so that no one troubles me. For they all come back to the same thing, how badly it goes and how well it goes; one thinks it is this way, another that; and yet they are always absorbed in the things that go to make up their existence. Formerly I lived in just the same way myself, but now I feel no contact here.

They talk too much for me. They have worries, aims, desires, that I cannot comprehend. I often sit with one of them in the little beer garden and try to explain to him that this is really the only thing: just to sit quietly, like this. They under-

stand of course, they agree, they may even feel it so too, but only with words, only with words, yes that is it—they feel it, but always with only half of themselves, the rest of their being is taken up with other things, they are so divided in themselves that none feels it with his whole essence; I cannot even say myself exactly what I mean.

When I see them here, in their rooms, in their offices, about their occupations, I feel an irresistible attraction in it, I would like to be here too and forget the war; but also it repels me, it is so narrow, how can that fill a man's life, he ought to smash it to bits; how can they do it, while out at the front the splinters are whining over the shell-holes and star-shells go up, the wounded are carried back on waterproof sheets and comrades crouch in the trenches.—They are different men here, men I cannot properly understand, whom I envy and despise. I must think of Kat and Albert and Müller and Tjaden, what will they be doing? No doubt they are sitting in the canteen, or perhaps swimming—soon they will have to go up to the front-line again.

In my room behind the table stands a brown leather sofa. I sit down on it.

On the walls are pinned countless pictures that I once used to cut out of the newspapers. In



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between are drawings and postcards that have pleased me. In the corner is a small iron stove. Against the wall opposite stand the book-shelves with my books.

I used to live in this room before I was a soldier. The books I bought gradually with the money I earned by coaching. Many of them are secondhand, all the classics for example, one volume in blue cloth boards cost one mark twenty pfennig. I bought them complete because it was thorough-going, I did not trust the editors of selections to choose all the best. So I purchased only "collected works." I read most of them with laudable zeal, but few of them really appealed to me. I preferred the other books, the moderns, which were of course much dearer. A few I came by not quite honestly, I borrowed and did not return them because I did not want to part with them.

One shelf is filled with school books. They are not so well cared for, they are badly thumbed, and pages have been torn out for certain purposes. Then below are periodicals, papers, and letters all jammed in together with drawings and rough sketches.

I want to think myself back into that time. It is still in the room, I feel it at once, the walls have preserved it. My hands rest on the arms of the sofa; now I make myself at home and draw up

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my legs so that I sit comfortably in the corner, in the arms of the sofa. The little window is open, through it I see the familiar picture of the street with the rising spire of the church at the end. There are a couple of flowers on the table. Penholders, a shell as a paper-weight, the ink-well—here nothing is changed.

It will be like this too. If I am lucky, when the war is over and I come back here for good. I will sit here just like this and look at my room and wait.

I feel excited; but I do not want to be, for that is not right. I want that quiet rapture again. I want to feel the same powerful, nameless urge that I used to feel when I turned to my books. The breath of desire that then arose from the colored backs of the books, shall fill me again, melt the heavy, dead lump of lead that lies somewhere in me and waken again the impatience of the future, the quick joy in the world of thought, it shall bring back again the lost eagerness of my youth. I sit and wait.

It occurs to me that I must go and see Kemmerich's mother;—I might visit Mittelstaedt too, he should be at the barracks. I look out of the window;—beyond the picture of the sunlit street appears a range of hills, distant and light; it changes to a clear day in autumn, and I sit by the

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fire with Kat and Albert and eat potatoes baked in their skins.

But I do not want to think of that, I sweep it away. The room shall speak, it must catch me up and hold me, I want to feel that I belong here, I want to hear and know when I go back to the front that the war will sink down, be drowned utterly in the great home-coming tide, know that it will then be past forever, and not gnaw us continually, that it will have none but an outward power over us.

The backs of the books stand in rows. I know them all still, I remember arranging them in order. I implore them with my eyes: Speak to me—take me up—take me, Life of my Youth—you who are care-free, beautiful—receive me again—

I wait, I wait.

Images float through my mind, but they do not grip me, they are mere shadows and memories.

Nothing—nothing—

My disquietude grows.

A terrible feeling of foreignness suddenly rises up in me. I cannot find my way back, I am shut out though I entreat earnestly and put forth all my strength.

Nothing stirs; listless and wretched, like a condemned man, I sit there and the past withdraws itself. And at the same time I fear to im-

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portune it too much, because I do not know what might happen then. I am a soldier, I must cling to that.

Wearily I stand up and look out of the window. Then I take one of the books, intending to read, and turn over the leaves. But I put it away and take out another. There are passages in it that have been marked. I look, turn over the pages, take up fresh books. Already they are piled up beside me. Speedily more join the heap, papers, magazines, letters.

I stand there dumb. As before a judge.

Dejected.

Words, Words, Words—they do not reach me.

Slowly I place the books back in the shelves.

Nevermore.

Quietly, I go out of the room.

Still I do not give up hope. I do not indeed go to my room any more, but comfort myself with the thought that a few days are not enough to judge by. Afterwards—later on—there is plenty of time for that.

So I go over to see Mittelstaedt in the barracks, and we sit in his room; there is an atmosphere about it that I do not like but with which I am quite familiar.

Mittelstaedt has some news ready for me that

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electrifies me on the spot. He tells me Kantorek has been called up as a territorial.

"Just think of it," says he, and takes out a couple of good cigars, "I come back here from the hospital and bump right into him. He stretches out his paw to me and bleats: 'Hullo Mittelstaedt, how are you?'—I look at him and say: 'Territorial Kantorek, business is business and schnapps is schnapps, you ought to know that well enough. Stand to attention when you speak to a superior officer.' You should have seen his face! A cross between a dud and a pickled cucumber. He tried once again to chum up. So I snubbed him a bit harder. Then he brought up his biggest guns and asked confidentially: 'Would you like me to use my influence so that you can take an emergency-exam?' He was trying to remind me of those things, you know. Then I got mad, and I reminded him of something instead. 'Territorial Kantorek, two years ago you preached us into enlisting; and among us there was one, Joseph Behm, who didn't want to enlist. He was killed three months before he would have been called up in the ordinary way. If it had not been for you he would have lived just that much longer. And now: Dismiss. You will hear from me later.' It was easy to get put in charge of his company. First thing I did was to take him to the stores

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and fit him out with suitable equipment. You will see in a minute."

We go to the parade ground. The company has fallen in, Mittelstaedt stands them at ease and inspects.

Then I see Kantorek and am scarcely able to stifle my laughter. He is wearing a faded blue tunic. On the back and in the sleeves there are big dark patches. The tunic must have belonged to a giant. The black, worn breeches are just as much too short; they reach barely halfway down his calf. The boots, tough old clod-hoppers, with turned-up toes and laces at the side are much too big for him. But as a compensation the cap is too small, a terribly dirty, mean little pill-box. The whole rig-out is just pitiful.

Mittelstaedt stops in front of him: "Territorial Kantorek, do you call those buttons polished? You seem as though you can never learn. Inadequate, Kantorek, quite inadequate——"

It makes me bubble with glee. In school Kantorek used to chasten Mittelstaedt with exactly the same expression—"Inadequate, Mittelstaedt, quite inadequate."

Mittelstaedt continues to upbraid him: "Look at Boettcher now, there's a model for you to learn from."

I can hardly believe my eyes. Boettcher is there too, Boettcher, our school porter. And he is

a model! Kantorek shoots a glance at me as if he would like to eat me. But I grin at him innocently, as though I do not recognize him any more.

Nothing could look more ludicrous than his forage-cap and his uniform. And this is the object before whom we used to stand in anguish as he sat up there enthroned at his desk, spearing at us with his pencil for our mistakes in those irregular French verbs with which afterwards we made so little headway in France. That is barely two years ago—and now here stands Territorial Kantorek, the spell quite broken, with bent knees, arms like pothooks, unpolished buttons and that ludicrous rig-out—an impossible soldier. I cannot reconcile this with the menacing figure at the schoolmaster's desk. I wonder what I, the old soldier, would do if this skiful of woe ever dared to say to me again: "Bäumer, give the imperfect of 'aller'."

Then Mittelstaedt makes them practise skirmishing, and as a favour appoints Kantorek squad leader.

Now, in skirmishing the squad leader has always to keep twenty paces in front of his squad; if the order comes "On the march, about turn," the line of skirmishers simply turns about, but the squad leader, who now finds himself suddenly twenty paces in the rear of the line, has to

rush up at the double and take his position again twenty paces in front of the squad. That makes altogether forty paces double march. But no sooner has he arrived than the order "On the march, about turn," comes again and he once more has to race at top speed another forty paces to the other side. In this way the squad has merely made the turn-about and a couple of paces, while the squad-leader dashes backwards and forwards like a fart on a curtain-pole. That is one of Himmelstoss' well-worn recipes.

Kantorek can hardly expect anything else from Mittelstaedt, for he once messed up the latter's chance of promotion, and Mittelstaedt would be a big fool not to make the best of such a good opportunity as this before he goes back to the front again. A man might well die easier after the army has given him just one such stroke of luck.

In the meantime Kantorek is dashing up and down like a wild boar. After a while Mittelstaedt stops the skirmish and begins the very important exercise of creeping.

On hands and knees, carrying his gun in regulation fashion, Kantorek shoves his absurd figure over the sand immediately in front of us. He is breathing hard, and his panting is music.

Mittelstaedt encourages Kantorek the territorial with quotations from Kantorek the school-

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master. "Territorial Kantorek, we have the good fortune to live in a great age, we must brace ourselves and triumph over hardship."

Kantorek sweats and spits out a dirty piece of wood that has lodged in his teeth.

Mittelstaedt stoops down and says reproachfully: "And in the trifles never lose sight of the great adventure, Territorial Kantorek!"

It amazes me that Kantorek does not explode with a bang, especially when, during physical exercises, Mittelstaedt copies him to perfection, seizing him by the seat of his trousers as he is pulling himself up on the horizontal bar so that he can just raise his chin above the beam, and then starts to give him good advice. That is exactly what Kantorek used to do to him at school.

The extra fatigues are next detailed off. "Kantorek and Boettcher, bread fatigue! Take the handcart with you."

A few minutes later the two set off together pushing the barrow. Kantorek in a fury walks with his head down. But the porter is delighted to have scored light duty.

The bakehouse is away at the other end of the town, and the two must go there and back through the whole length of it.

"They've done that a couple of times already," grins Mittelstaedt. "People have begun to watch for them coming."

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"Excellent," I say, "but hasn't he reported you yet?"

"He did try. Our C.O. laughed like the deuce when he heard the story. He hasn't any time for schoolmasters. Besides, I'm sweet with his daughter."

"He'll mess up the examination for you."

"I don't care," says Mittelstaedt calmly. "Besides, his complaint came to nothing because I could show that he had had hardly anything but light duty."

"Couldn't you polish him up a bit?" I ask.

"He's too stupid, I couldn't be bothered," answers Mittelstaedt contemptuously.

What is leave?—A pause that only makes everything after it so much worse. Already the sense of parting begins to intrude itself. My mother watches me silently; I know she counts the days; every morning she is sad. It is one day less. She has put away my pack, she does not want to be reminded by it.

The hours pass quickly if a man broods. I pull myself together, and go with my sister to the slaughter-house to get a pound or two of bones. That is a great favour and people line up early in the morning and stand waiting. Many of them faint.

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We have no luck. After waiting by turns for three hours the queue disperses. The bones have not lasted out.

It is a good thing that I get my rations. I bring them to my mother and in that way we all get something decent to eat.

The days grow ever more strained and my mother's eyes more sorrowful. Four days left now. I must go and see Kemmerich's mother.

I cannot write that down. This quaking, sobbing woman who shakes me and cries out on me: "Why are you living then, when he is dead?"—who drowns me in tears and calls out: "What are you there for at all, child, when you——"——who drops into a chair and wails: "Did you see him? Did you see him then? How did he die?"

I tell her he was shot through the heart and died instantaneously. She looks at me, she doubts me: "You lie. I know better. I have felt how terribly he died. I have heard his voice at night, I have felt his anguish——tell the truth, I want to know it, I must know it."

"No," I say, "I was beside him. He died at once."

She pleads with me gently: "Tell me. You must tell me. I know you want to comfort me, but don't you see, you torment me far more than if you told

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me the truth? I cannot bear the uncertainty. Tell me how it was and even though it will be terrible, it will be far better than what I have to think if you don't."

I will never tell her, she can make mince meat out of me first. I pity her, but she strikes me as rather stupid all the same. Why doesn't she stop worrying? Kemmerich will stay dead whether she knows about it or not. When a man has seen so many dead he cannot understand any longer why there should be so much anguish over a single individual. So I say rather impatiently: "He died immediately. He felt absolutely nothing at all. His face was quite calm."

She is silent. Then says slowly: "Will you swear it?"  
"Yes."

"By everything that is sacred to you?"

Good God, what is there that is sacred to me?—such things change pretty quickly with us.

"Yes, he died at once."

"Are you willing never to come back yourself, if it isn't true?"

"May I never come back if he wasn't killed instantaneously."

I would swear to anything. But she seems to believe me. She moans and weeps steadily. I have to tell how it happened, so I invent a story and I almost believe it myself.

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As I leave she kisses me and gives me a picture of him. In his recruit's uniform he leans on a round rustic table with legs made of birch branches. Behind him a wood is painted on a curtain, and on the table stands a mug of beer.

It is the last evening at home. Everyone is silent. I go to bed early, I seize the pillow, press it against myself and bury my head in it. Who knows if I will ever lie in a feather bed again?

Late in the night my mother comes into my room. She thinks I am asleep, and I pretend to be so. To talk, to stay awake with one another, it is too hard.

She sits long into the night although she is in pain and often writhes. At last I can bear it no longer, and pretend I have just wakened up.

"Go and sleep, Mother, you will catch cold here."

"I can sleep enough later," she says.

I sit up. "I don't go straight back to the front, Mother. I have to do four weeks at the training camp. I may come over from there on Sunday, perhaps."

She is silent. Then she asks gently: "Are you very much afraid?"

"No Mother."

"I would like to tell you to be on your guard

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against the women out in France. They are no good."

Ah! Mother, Mother! You still think I am a child—why can I not put my head in your lap and weep? Why have I always to be strong and self-controlled? I would like to weep and be comforted too, indeed I am little more than a child; in the wardrobe still hang short, boy's trousers—it is such a little time ago, why is it over?

"Where we are there aren't any women, Mother," I say as calmly as I can.

"And be very careful at the front, Paul."

Ah, Mother, Mother! Why do I not take you in my arms and die with you. What poor wretches we are!

"Yes Mother, I will."

"I will pray for you every day, Paul."

Ah! Mother, Mother! Let us rise up and go out, back through the years, where the burden of all this misery lies on us no more, back to you and me alone, Mother!

"Perhaps you can get a job that is not so dangerous."

"Yes, Mother, perhaps I can get into the cookhouse, that can easily be done."

"You do it then, and if the others say anything——"

"That won't worry me, Mother——"

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She sighs. Her face is a white gleam in the darkness.

"Now you must go to sleep, Mother."

She does not reply. I get up and wrap my cover round her shoulders.

She supports herself on my arm, she is in pain. And so I take her to her room. I stay with her a little while.

"And you must get well again, Mother, before I come back."

"Yes, yes, my child."

"You ought not to send your things to me, Mother. We have plenty to eat out there. You can make much better use of them here."

How destitute she lies there in her bed, she that loves me more than all the world. As I am about to leave, she says hastily: "I have two pairs of underpants for you. They are all wool. They will keep you warm. You must not forget to put them in your pack."

Ah! Mother! I know what these underpants have cost you in waiting, and walking, and begging! Ah! Mother, Mother! how can it be that I must part from you? Who else is there that has any claim on me but you? Here I sit and there you are lying; we have so much to say, and we shall never say it.

"Good-night, Mother."

"Good-night, my child."

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The room is dark. I hear my mother's breathing, and the ticking of the clock. Outside the window the wind blows and the chestnut trees rustle.

On the landing I stumble over my pack, which lies there already made up because I have to leave early in the morning.

I bite into my pillow. I grasp the iron rods of my bed with my fists. I ought never to have come here. Out there I was indifferent and often hopeless—I will never be able to be so again. I was a soldier, and now I am nothing but an agony for myself, for my mother, for everything that is so comf ortless and without end.

I ought never to have come on leave.