ERICH MARIA REMARQUE

ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT

Чтение в оригинале (Каро)

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All Quiet on the Western Front / На Западном фронте без перемен. Книга для чтения на английском языке

«КАРО»

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Эрих Мария Ремарк – один из самых известных немецких писателей XX века. Роман «На Западном фронте без перемен» рассказывает о поколении, которое погубила война, о тех, кто стал ее жертвой, даже если спасся от пуль. Это отчет о реальных событиях Первой мировой войны, рассказ о солдатском товариществе. Книга предназначена для широкого круга читателей, владеющих английским языком, для студентов языковых вузов, а также может быть рекомендована всем, кто самостоятельно изучает английский язык.

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Содержание

Erich Maria Remarque / Эрих Мария Ремарк All Quiet on the Western Front / На Западном фронте без перемен. Книга для чтения на английском языке

This book is intended neither as an accusation nor as a confession, but simply as an attempt to give an account of[1] a generation that was destroyed by the war – even those of it who survived the shelling.

I

We are in camp five miles behind the line. Yesterday our relief arrived; now our bellies are full of bully beef[2] and beans, we've had enough to eat and we're well satisfied. We were even able to fill up a mess-tin for later, every one of us, and there are double rations of sausage and bread as well – that will keep us going. We haven't had a stroke of luck[3] like this for ages; the cook-sergeant, the one with the ginger hair, is actually offering to dish out food, beckoning with his serving ladle to anyone who comes near him and giving him a massive helping. He's getting a bit worried because he can't see how he's going to empty his cooking pot. Tjaden and Muller have dug out a couple of washing bowls from somewhere and got him to fill them up to the brim[4] as a reserve supply. Tjaden does things like that out of sheer greed[5]; with Muller it's a precaution. Nobody knows where Tjaden puts it all. He's as thin as a rake and he always has been.

The most important thing, though, is that there are double rations of tobacco as well. Ten cigars, twenty cigarettes and two plugs of chewing tobacco for everyone, and that's a decent amount. I've swapped my chewing tobacco with Katczinsky for his cigarettes, and that gives me forty. You can last a day on that.

And on top of it all, we're not really entitled to this lot. The army is never that good to us. We've only got it because of a mistake.

Fourteen days ago we were sent up the line as relief troops[6]. It was pretty quiet in our sector, and because of that the quartermaster drew the normal quantity of food for the day we were due back, and he catered for the full company of a hundred and fifty men. But then, on the very last day, we were taken by surprise by long-range shelling from the heavy artillery[7]. The English guns kept on pounding our position, so we lost a lot of men, and only eighty of us came back.

It was night-time when we came in, and the first thing we did was get our heads down so that we could get a good night's sleep. Katczinsky is right when he says that the war wouldn't be nearly as bad if we could only get more sleep. But there is no chance of that at the front, and two weeks for every spell in the line is a long time.

It was already midday when the first of us crawled out of the huts. Within half an hour every man had his mess-tin in his hand and we were fining up by the cookhouse, where there was a smell of proper food cooked in good fat. Needless to say, the hungriest were at the front of the queue: little Albert Kropp, who is the cleverest of us, and was the first one to make it to acting lance-corporal. Then Muller – one of the five boys called that at our school – who still lugs his textbooks about with him and dreams about taking his school leaving diploma later under the special regulations. He even swots up physics formulae when there is a barrage going on. Then Leer, who has a beard, and is obsessed with the girls from the officers-only knocking-shops[8]; he swears that they are obliged by army regulations to wear silk slips, and that they have to take a bath before entertaining any guest with the rank of captain or above. And fourthly me, Paul Baumer. All four of us are nineteen years old, and all four of us went straight out of the same class at school into the war.

Close behind us are our friends. Tjaden, a skinny locksmith who is the same age as us and the biggest glutton in the company. He's thin when he sits down to eat and when he gets up again he's got

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[2] **bully beef** – мясные консервы

[3] **a stroke of luck** – счастливый случай

[4] **to fill them up to the brim** – наполнить их до краев

[5] **out of sheer greed** – исключительно из жадности

[6] **relief troops** – запасные войска

[7] **heavy artillery** – крупнокалиберная (тяжелая) артиллерия

[8] **officers-only knocking-shops** – бордели для офицеров

a pot-belly; Haie Westhus, the same age, a peat-digger, who can quite easily hold an army-issue loaf in one great paw and ask, 'Guess what I've got in my hand?'; Detering, a farmer, who thinks about nothing but his bit of land and his wife; and finally Stanislaus Katczinsky, leader of our group, tough, crafty, shrewd, forty years old, with an earthy face, blue eyes, sloping shoulders and an amazing nose[9] for trouble, good food and cushy jobs[10].

Our group was at the head of the grub queue[11]. We were getting impatient, because the cook-sergeant didn't know what was going on and was still standing there waiting.

In the end Katczinsky shouted to him, 'Come on, mate, open up your soup kitchen[12]! Anyone can see the beans are done!'

But he just shook his head dozily. 'You've all got to be here first.'

Tjaden grinned. 'We are all here.'

The cook-sergeant still didn't get it. 'That would suit you nicely, wouldn't it. Come on, where are the rest?'

'They won't be getting served by you today. It's either a field hospital or a mass grave for them.'

The cook was pretty shaken when he heard what had happened. He wasn't so sure of himself any more. 'But I cooked for a hundred and fifty men.'

Kropp elbowed him in the ribs. 'So for once we'll get enough to eat. Right, get on with it!'

Suddenly a light dawned in Tjaden's eyes. His pointed, mouselike face positively glowed, his eyes narrowed with cunning, his cheeks twitched and he moved in closer. 'Bloody hell[13], then you must have drawn bread rations for a hundred and fifty men as well, right?'

The cook-sergeant nodded, confused and not thinking.

Tjaden grabbed him by the tunic. 'Sausage, too?'

Another nod from Ginger.

Tjaden's jaw was trembling. 'And tobacco?'

'Yes, the whole lot.'

Tjaden looked round, beaming all over his face. 'Christ Almighty[14], now that's what I call a bit of luck! Then all that stuff has to be for us! Everyone gets – hang on – right, exactly double of everything!'

When he heard that the ginger-headed cook-sergeant realized what was up, and told us that it wasn't on.

By now we were getting a bit restive, and pushed forward. 'Why isn't it on, carrot-top[15]?' Katczinsky wanted to know. 'Eighty men can't have the rations for a hundred and fifty.' 'We'll soon show you,' growled Muller.

'I wouldn't mind about the meal, but I can only give out the other rations for eighty,' insisted Ginger.

Katczinsky was getting annoyed. 'Is it time they pensioned you off, or what? You didn't draw provisions for eighty men, you drew them for B Company[16], and that's that. So now you can issue them. We are B Company.'

We started to crowd him. He wasn't too popular – it was thanks to him that in the trenches we'd more than once got our food far too late, and cold into the bargain, just because he didn't dare bring his field kitchen close enough in when there was a little bit of shellfire; and that meant that our

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[9] **an amazing nose** – необыкновенный нюх

[10] **cushy jobs** – тепленькое местечко

[11] **grub queue** ***(разг.)*** – очередь за харчами

[12] **soup kitchen** – походная кухня

[13] **bloody hell** ***(разг.)*** – черт возьми!

[14] **Christ Almighty** – Господь всемогущий!

[15] **carrot-top** ***(разг.)*** – рыжий, рыжеволосый человек

[16] **B Company** – вторая рота (тактическое военное подразделение, насчитывающее от 100 до 150 человек)

men had to make a far longer trip to fetch the food than those from other companies. On that score Bulcke, from A Company[17], was much better. It's true that he was as fat as a hamster in winter, but he used to carry the cooking-pots right to the front line himself if he had to.

We were just about in the right mood and there would certainly have been trouble if our company commander hadn't turned up. He asked what the argument was about, and for the moment all he said was, 'Yes, we had heavy losses yesterday —'

Then he looked into the cooking-pot. 'Those beans look good.' Ginger nodded. 'Cooked in fat, with meat, too.'

Our lieutenant looked at us. He knew what we were thinking. He knew a lot of other things as well, because he had come to the company as an NCO[18] and grown up with us. He took the lid off the pot again and had a sniff. 'Bring me a plateful as well. And give out all the rations. We can do with them.'

Ginger made a face. Tjaden danced around him.

'It's no skin off your nose![19] He acts as if the supplies depot[20] was his own personal property. So get on with it now, you old skinflint, and make sure you don't get it wrong —'

'Go to hell,' spat Ginger. He was beaten – this was simply too much for him – everything was turned upside down. And as if he wanted to show that he just didn't care any more, he gave out half a pound of ersatz honey per head, off his own bat[21].

It really is a good day today. There is even mail, nearly everyone has a couple of letters and newspapers. So we wander out to the field behind the barracks. Kropp has the round lid of a big margarine tub under his arm.

On the right-hand edge of the field they have built a huge latrine block, a good solid building with a roof. But that is only for new recruits, who haven't yet learned to get the best they can out of everything. We want something a bit better. And scattered all around are small individual thunder-boxes with precisely the same function. They are square, clean, made of solid wood, closed in, and with a really comfortable seat. There are handles on the sides so that they can be carried about.

We pull three of them together in a circle and make ourselves comfortable. We shan't be getting up again for the next couple of hours.

I can still remember how embarrassed we were at the beginning, when we were recruits in the barracks and had to use the communal latrines. There are no doors, so that twenty men had to sit side by side as if they were on a train. That way they could all be seen at a glance – soldiers, of course, have to be under supervision at all times.

Since then we've learnt more than just how to cope with a bit of embarrassment. As time went by, our habits changed quite a bit.

Out here in the open air the whole business is a real pleasure. I can't understand why it was that we always used to skirt round these things so nervously – after all, it is just as natural as eating or drinking. And perhaps it wouldn't need to be mentioned at all if it didn't play such a significant part in our lives, and if it hadn't been new to us – the other men had long since got used to it.

A soldier is on much closer terms with his stomach and digestive system[22] than anyone else is. Three-quarters of his vocabulary comes from this area and, whether he wants to express extreme delight or extreme indignation, he will use one of these pungent phrases to underline it. It is impossible

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[17] **A Company** – первая рота

[18] **NCO = non-commissioned officer** – унтер-офицер (категория младшего командного и начальствующего состава в вооруженных силах)

[19] **It's no skin off your nose!** *(зд.)* – С тебя не убудет!

[20] **supplies depot** – склад снабжения

[21] **off his own bat** – добровольно

[22] **digestive system** – пищеварение

to make a point as clearly and as sufficiently in any other way. Our families and our teachers will be pretty surprised when we get home, but out here it's simply the language that everyone uses.

Being forced to do everything in public means that as far as we are concerned, the natural innocence of the business has returned. In fact it goes further than that. It has become so natural to us, that the convivial performance of this particular activity is as highly valued as, well, holding a cast-iron certainty of a hand[23] when we are playing cards. It is not for nothing that the phrase 'latrine rumour'[24] has come to mean all kinds of gossip; these places are the army equivalent of the street corner or a favourite bar.

Just at the moment we are happier than we would be in some luxuriously appointed lavatory, white tiles and all. The most a place like that could be is hygienic; out here, though, it is beautiful.

These are wonderfully mindless hours. The blue sky is above us. On the horizon we can see the yellow observation balloons[25] with the sun shining on them, and white puffs of smoke from the tracer bullets[26]. Sometimes you see a sudden sheaf of them going up, when they are chasing an airman.

The muted rumble of the front sounds like nothing more than very distant thunder. Even the bumble bees drown it out when they buzz past.

And all around us the fields are in flower. The grasses are waving, cabbage whites[27] are fluttering about, swaying on the warm breezes of late summer, while we read our letters and newspapers, and smoke; we take our caps off and put them on the ground beside us, the wind plays with our hair and it plays with our words and with our thoughts.

The three thunder-boxes are standing amid glowing red poppies.

We put the lid of the margarine tub on our knees and that gives us a solid base to play cards. Kropp has brought a pack. After every few hands we have a round of lowest score wins'. You could sit like this for ever and ever.

There is the sound of an accordion coming from the huts. Every so often we put the cards down and look at one another. Then someone says, 'I tell you, lads…' or: 'It could easily have gone wrong that time…' and then we are silent for a moment. There is a strong feeling of restraint in us all, we are all aware of it and it doesn't have to be spelt out. It could easily have happened that we wouldn't be sitting on our boxes here today, it was all so damned close. And because of that, everything is new and full of life – the red poppies, the good food, the cigarettes and the summer breeze.

Kropp asks, 'Have any of you seen Kemmerich again?'

'He's over at St Joseph,' I say.

Muller reckons that he got one right through the thigh[28], a decent blighty wound[29].

We decide to go and see him that afternoon.

Kropp pulls out a letter. 'Kantorek sends his regards.'

We laugh. Muller tosses his cigarette away and says, 'I wish he was out here.'

Kantorek was our form-master at school, a short, strict man who wore a grey frock-coat and had a shrewish face. He was roughly the same size and shape as Corporal Himmelstoss, the 'terror of Klosterberg Barracks'. Incidentally, it's funny how often the miseries of this world are caused by short people – they are so much more quick-tempered and difficult to get on with than tall ones. I have always tried to avoid landing up in companies with commanders who are short – usually they are complete bastards.

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[23] **holding a cast-iron certainty of a hand** *(зд.)* – быть железно уверенным в выигрыше

[24] **latrine rumour** *(разг.)* – сортирный треп

[25] **observation balloons** – наблюдательный аэростат

[26] **tracer bullets** – зенитные снаряды

[27] **cabbage white** – бабочка-капустница

[28] **one right through the thigh** – сквозное ранение правого бедра

[29] **blighty wound** – ранение, обеспечивающее отправку на родину

Kantorek kept on lecturing at us in the PT lessons until the entire class marched under his leadership down to the local recruiting office and enlisted. I can still see him, his eyes shining at us through his spectacles and his voice trembling with emotion as he asked, 'You'll all go, won't you lads?'

Schoolmasters always seem to keep their sentiments handy in their waistcoat pockets; after all, they have to trot them out in lesson after lesson. But that never occurred to us for a moment at the time.

In fact, one of our class was reluctant, and didn't really want to go with us. That was Josef Behm, a tubby, cheerful chap. But in the end he let himself be persuaded, because he would have made things impossible for himself by not going. Maybe others felt the same way as he did; but it wasn't easy to stay out of it because at that time even our parents used the word 'coward' at the drop of a hat. People simply didn't have the slightest idea of what was coming. As a matter of fact it was the poorest and simplest people who were the most sensible; they saw the war as a disaster right from the start, whereas those who were better off were overjoyed about it, although they of all people should have been in a far better position to see the implications.

Katczinsky says it is all to do with education – it softens the brain. And if Kat says something, then he has given it some thought.

Oddly enough, Behm was one of the first to be killed. He was shot in the eye during an attack, and we left him for dead. We couldn't take him with us because we had to get back in a great rush ourselves. That afternoon we suddenly heard him shout out and saw him crawling around in no man's land. He had only been knocked unconscious. Because he couldn't see and was mad with pain he didn't take cover, so he was shot down from the other side before anyone could get out to fetch him.

That can't be linked directly with Kantorek, of course – where would we be if that counted as actual guilt? Anyway, there were thousands of Kantoreks, all of them convinced that they were acting for the best, in the way that was the most comfortable for themselves.

But as far as we are concerned, that is the very root of their moral bankruptcy.

They were supposed to be the ones who would help us eighteen-year-olds to make the transition, who would guide us into adult life, into a world of work, of responsibilities, of civilized behaviour and progress – into the future. Quite often we ridiculed them and played tricks on them, but basically we believed in them. In our minds the idea of authority – which is what they represented – implied deeper insights and a more humane wisdom. But the first dead man that we saw shattered this conviction. We were forced to recognize that our generation was more honourable than theirs; they only had the advantage of us in phrase-making and in cleverness. Our first experience of heavy artillery fire showed us our mistake, and the view of life that their teaching had given us fell to pieces under that bombardment.

While they went on writing and making speeches, we saw field hospitals and men dying: while they preached the service of the state as the greatest thing, we already knew that the fear of death is even greater. This didn't make us into rebels or deserters, or turn us into cowards – and they were more than ready to use all of those words – because we loved our country just as much as they did, and so we went bravely into every attack. But now we were able to distinguish things clearly, all at once our eyes had been opened. And we saw that there was nothing left of their world. Suddenly we found ourselves horribly alone – and we had to come to terms with it alone as well.

Before we set off to see Kemmerich we pack his things up for him – he'll be glad of them on his way home.

The clearing station[30] is very busy. It smells of carbolic, pus and sweat, just like it always does. You get used to a lot of things when you are in the barracks, but this can still really turn your stomach. We keep on asking people until we find out where Kemmerich is; he is in a long ward, and welcomes

[30] **clearing station** – эвакуационный пункт

us weakly, with a look that is part pleasure and part helpless agitation. While he was unconscious, somebody stole his watch.

Muller shakes his head, 'I always said that you shouldn't take such a good watch with you, didn't I?'

Muller is a bit bossy and tactless. Otherwise he would have kept his mouth shut, because it is obvious to everyone that Kemmerich is never going to leave this room. It makes no difference whether he gets his watch back or not – the most it would mean is that we could send it back home for him.

'How's it going, then, Franz?' asks Kropp.

Kemmerich's head drops back. 'OK, I suppose. It's just that my damned foot hurts so much.'

We glance at his bed-cover. His leg is under a wire frame, which makes the coverlet bulge upwards. I kick Muller on the shin, because he would be quite capable of telling Kemmerich what the orderly told us before we came in; Kemmerich no longer has a foot. His leg has been amputated.

He looks terrible, yellow and pallid, and his face already has those weird lines that we are so familiar with because we have seen them a hundred times before. They aren't really lines at all, just signs. There is no longer any life pulsing under his skin – it has been forced out already to the very edges of his body, and death is working its way through him, moving outwards from the centre, it is already in his eyes. There in the bed is our pal Kemmerich, who was frying horse-meat with us not long ago, and squatting with us in a shell hole[31] – it's still him, but it isn't really him any more; his image has faded, become blurred, like a photographic plate that's had too many copies made from it. Even his voice sounds like ashes.

I remember the day when we were drafted out[32]. His mother, a pleasant, stout woman, saw him off at the station. She was crying all the time, and her face was puffy and swollen. This embarrassed Kemmerich, because she was the least composed of all of them, practically dissolving in fat and tears. What's more, she picked me out, and kept grabbing my arm and begging me to keep an eye on Franz when we got out here. As it happens, he did have a very young face, and his bones were so soft that after just a month of carrying a pack he got flat feet[33]. But how can you keep an eye on someone on a battlefield?

'You'll be going home now,' says Kropp. 'You would have had to wait at least another three or four months before you got leave.' Kemmerich nods. I can't look at his hands, they are like wax. The dirt of the trenches is underneath his fingernails, and it is bluey-grey, like poison. It occurs to me that those fingernails will go on getting longer and longer for a good while yet, like some ghastly underground growths, long after Kemmerich has stopped breathing. I can see them before my eyes, twisting like corkscrews and growing and growing, and with them the hair on his caved-in skull, like grass on good earth, just like grass – how can all that be? Muller leans forward. 'We've brought your things, Franz.' Kemmerich gestures with one hand. 'Put them under the bed.' Muller does as he says. Kemmerich starts on about the watch again. How can we possibly calm him down without making him suspicious?

Muller bobs up again with a pair of airman's flying boots, best quality English ones made of soft yellow leather, the sort that come up to the knee, with lacing all the way to the top – something really worth having. The sight of them makes Muller excited, and he holds the soles against his own clumsy boots and says, 'Are you going to take these with you, Franz?'

All three of us are thinking the same thing: even if he did get better he would only be able to wear one of them, so they wouldn't be any use to him. But as things are it would be a pity to leave them here – the orderlies are bound to pinch them the moment he is dead.

Muller repeats, 'Why don't you leave them here?'

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[31] **shell hole** – воронка от снаряда

[32] **we were drafted out** – мы отправились на фронт

[33] **flat feet** – плоскостопие

Kemmerich doesn't want to. They are his prize possession.

'We could do a swap,' suggests Muller, trying again, 'you can really do with boots like that out here.' But Kemmerich won't be persuaded.

I kick Muller, and reluctantly he puts the splendid boots back under the bed.

We chat for a bit longer, and then say goodbye. 'Chin up[34], Franz.'

I promise him that I will come back tomorrow. Muller says that he will as well. He is still thinking about the flying boots and he wants to keep an eye on things.

Kemmerich groans. He is feverish[35]. We get hold of a medical orderly outside, and try and persuade him to give Kemmerich a shot of morphia.

He says no. 'If we wanted to give morphia to everyone we'd need buckets of the stuff —'

'Only give it to officers, then, do you?' snarls Kropp.

I step in quickly and the first thing I do is give the orderly a cigarette. He takes it. Then I ask him, 'Are you allowed to give shots at all?'

He is annoyed. 'If you think I can't, what are you asking me for – ?'

I press a few more cigarettes into his hand. 'Just as a favour —'

'Well, OK,' he says. Kropp goes in with him, because he doesn't trust him and wants to see him do it. We wait outside.

Muller starts on again about the flying boots. 'They would fit me perfectly. In these clodhoppers even my blisters get blisters. Do you think he'll last until we come off duty tomorrow? If he goes during the night we've seen the last of the boots —'

Albert comes back and says, 'Do you reckon —?'

'Had it,' says Muller, and that's that.

We walk back to camp. I'm thinking about the letter I shall have to write to Kemmerich's mother tomorrow. I'm shivering, I could do with a stiff drink. Muller is pulling up grass stems and he's chewing on one. Suddenly little Kropp tosses his cigarette away, stamps on it like a madman, stares round with an unfocused and disturbed look on his face and stammers, 'Shit! Shit! The whole damned thing is a load of shit!'

We walk on for a long time. Kropp calms down – we know what was wrong, it's just the strain of being at the front, we all get that way from time to time.

Muller asks him, 'What did Kantorek say in his letter?'

He laughs. 'He calls us "young men of iron".'

That makes the three of us laugh, though not because it is funny. Kropp curses. He is happy to be able to talk again —

And yes, that's it, that is what they think, those hundred thousand Kantoreks. Young men of iron. Young? None of us is more than twenty. But young? Young men? That was a long time ago. We are old now.

[34] **Chin up** – Не вешай нос!

[35] **He is feverish** – Его лихорадит

II

I find it strange to think that at home in a drawer there is the first part of a play I once started to write called 'Saul', and a stack of poems as well. I spent so many evenings on them – we all did things like that – but it has all become so unreal to me that I can't even imagine it any more.

When we came out here we were cut off, whether we liked it or not, from everything we had done up to that point. We often try to find a reason or an explanation for this, but we can never quite manage it. Things are particularly confused for us twenty-year-olds, for Kropp, Muller, Leer and me, the ones Kantorek called young men of iron. The older men still have firm ties to their earlier lives – they have property, wives, children, jobs and interests, and these bonds are all so strong that the war can't break them. But for us twenty-year-olds there are only our parents, and for some of us a girlfriend. That isn't much, because at our age parental influence is at its weakest, and girls haven't really taken over yet. Apart from that, we really didn't have much else; the occasional passion for something, a few hobbies, school; our lives didn't go much further than that as yet. And now nothing is left of it all.

Kantorek would say that we had been standing on the very threshold of life itself. It's pretty well true, too. We hadn't had a chance to put down any roots. The war swept us away. For the others, for the older men, the war is an interruption, and they can think beyond the end of it. But we were caught up by the war, and we can't see how things will turn out. All we know for the moment is that in some strange and melancholy way we have become hardened, although we don't often feel sad about it any more.

If Muller wants Kemmerich's flying boots, this doesn't make him any more unfeeling than somebody who would find such a wish too painful even to contemplate. It's just that he can keep things separate in his mind. If the boots were any use at all to Kemmerich, Muller would sooner walk barefoot over barbed-wire than give a single thought to getting them. But as it is, the boots are objects which now have nothing to do with Kemmerich's condition, whereas Muller can do with them. Kemmerich is going to die, whoever gets them. So why shouldn't Muller try and get hold of them – after all, he has more right to them than some orderly. Once Kemmerich is dead it will be too late. That's why Muller is keeping an eye on them now.

We have lost all our ability to see things in other ways, because they are artificial. For us, it is only the facts that count. And good boots are hard to come by.

We were not always like that. We went down to the local recruiting office, still a class of twenty young men, and then we marched off en masse[36], full of ourselves, to get a shave at the barber's – some of us for the first time – before we set foot on a parade-ground[37]. We had no real plans for the future and only very few of us had thoughts of careers or jobs that were firm enough to be meaningful in practical terms. On the other hand, our heads were full of nebulous ideas which cast an idealized, almost romantic glow over life and even the war for us.

We had ten weeks of basic training, and that changed us more radically than ten years at school. We learnt that a polished tunic button is more important than a set of philosophy books. We came to realize – first with astonishment, then bitterness, and finally with indifference – that intellect apparently wasn't the most important thing, it was the kit-brush[38]; not ideas, but the system; not freedom, but drill. We had joined up with enthusiasm and with good will; but they did everything

[36] **en masse** *(фр.)* – все вместе, все разом

[37] **set foot on a parade-ground** – ступить на армейский плац

[38] **kit-brush** – сапожная щетка

to knock that out of us. After three weeks it no longer struck us as odd that an ex-postman with a couple of stripes should have more power over us than our parents ever had, or our teachers, or the whole course of civilization from Plato[39] to Goethe[40]. With our young, wide-open eyes we saw that the classical notion of patriotism we had heard from our teachers meant, in practical terms at that moment, surrendering our individual personalities more completely than we would ever have believed possible even in the most obsequious errand boy[41]. Saluting, eyes front, marching, presenting arms, right and left about, snapping to attention[42], insults and a thousand varieties of bloody-mindedness – we had imagined that our task would be rather different from all this, but we discovered that we were being trained to be heroes the way they train circus horses, and we quickly got used to it. We even understood that some of these things were necessary, but that others, by the same token[43], were completely superfluous. Soldiers soon sort out which is which.

In threes and fours our class was scattered around the different squads as we were put in with fishermen from the Frisian Islands[44], farmers, labourers and artisans, and we soon got friendly with them. Kropp, Muller, Kemmerich and I were put into Number Nine Squad, the one commanded by Corporal Himmelstoss.

He was reckoned to be the stickiest bastard in the whole barracks[45], and he was proud of it. He was a short, stocky bloke with twelve years' service in the reserve, a gingery moustache with waxed ends, and in civilian life he was a postman. He took a particular dislike to Kropp, Tjaden, Westhus and me because he sensed our unspoken defiance.

One day I had to make his bed fourteen times. Every time he found some fault with it and pulled it apart. Over a period of twenty hours – with breaks, of course – I polished an ancient and rock-hard pair of boots until they were soft as butter and even Himmelstoss couldn't find anything to complain about. On his orders I scrubbed the floor of the corporals' mess with a toothbrush. Kropp and I once had a go at sweeping the parade-ground clear of snow with a dustpan and brush on his orders, and we would have carried on until we froze to death if a lieutenant hadn't turned up, sent us in, and given Himmelstoss a hell of a dressing-down. Unfortunately, this only turned Himmelstoss against us even more. Every Sunday for a month I was put on guard duty, and he made me room orderly[46] for the same amount of time. I had to practise 'On your feet! Advance! Get down!'[47] with full pack[48] and rifle in a sodden ploughed field[49] until I was nothing but a mass of mud myself and I collapsed, and then four hours later I had to present myself for inspection to Himmelstoss with all my gear spick and span[50], although my hands were raw and bleeding. Kropp, Westhus, Tjaden and I had to stand to attention without gloves in freezing weather, with our bare fingers on the barrels of our rifles, with Himmelstoss prowling around us waiting for the slightest movement so that he could fault us. I had to run eight times from the top floor of the barracks down to the parade-ground at two in the morning in my night things, because my underpants were protruding half an inch more than they should over the edge of the stool where we had to lay out our kit. Himmelstoss as duty corporal

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[39] **Plato** – Платон (ок. 427–347 до н.э.) – древнегреческий философ

[40] **Goethe** – И.В. Гёте (1749–1832) – немецкий писатель, философ

[41] **errand boy** – мальчик на побегушках, посыльный

[42] **snapping to attention** – вставать по стойке «смирно»

[43] **by the same token** – к тому же

[44] **Frisian Islands** – Фризские острова (архипелаг в Северном море)

[45] **He was reckoned to be the stickiest bastard in the whole barracks** – Он слыл в казармах самым страшным тираном

[46] **room orderly** – дневальный в казарме

[47] **On your feet! Advance! Get down!** – Встать! Марш! Лежать!

[48] **full pack** – полное походное снаряжение

[49] **sodden ploughed field** – мокрое вспаханное поле

[50] **gear spick and span** – безупречно вычищенное снаряжение

ran beside me and trod on my feet. At bayonet practice[51] I was regularly paired with Himmelstoss, and I had to use a heavy iron weapon while he had a handy wooden one, so that it was easy for him to beat me black and blue[52] around the arms. However, I once got so furious that I rushed blindly at him and gave him such a clout in the stomach that it knocked him flat. When he tried to put me on a charge the company commander just laughed and told him to be more careful; he knew Himmelstoss of old, and didn't seem to mind that he'd been caught out. I got to be first class at climbing on the assault course[53], and I was pretty nearly the best at physical jerks[54]. We trembled just at the sound of his voice, but the runaway post-horse never broke us down.

One Sunday, when Kropp and I were detailed to lug the latrine buckets across the parade-ground on a pole between us, Himmelstoss happened to come along, all poshed up and ready to go out. He stopped in front of us and asked how we were enjoying ourselves, so we faked a stumble, regardless, and tipped a bucketful over his legs. He was furious, but we had reached breaking point.

'You'll get clink for that[55]!' he shouted.

But Kropp had had enough. 'Not before there's been an inquiry, and that's where we'll spill the beans[56],' he said.

'Is that how you talk to an NCO?' roared Himmelstoss. 'Have you taken leave of your senses? Don't speak until you're spoken to! What did you say you'd do?'

'Spill the beans about Corporal Himmelstoss! Sir!' said Kropp, standing to attention.

Then Himmelstoss got the message, and cleared off without saying anything, although he did manage to snarl, 'I'll make you lot suffer for this,' before he disappeared – but it was the end of his power over us. During field practice he tried again with his 'Take cover![57] On the feet! Move, move!' We obeyed all his orders, of course, because orders are orders and have to be obeyed. But we followed them so slowly that it drove Himmelstoss to despair. Taking it at a nice comfortable pace, we went down on to our knees, then on to our elbows and so on, and meanwhile he had already shouted another enraged order. He was hoarse before we were even sweating.

From then on he left us in peace. He went on calling us miserable little swine, of course. But there was respect in his voice.

There were plenty of decent drill corporals around, men who were more reasonable; the decent ones were even in the majority. More than anything else every one of them wanted to hang on to his safe job here at home for as long as possible – and they could only do that by being tough with recruits.

In the process we probably picked up every little detail of parade-ground drill that there was, and often we were so angry that it brought us to screaming pitch. It made a good few of us ill, and one of us, Wolf, actually died of pneumonia. But we would have been ashamed of ourselves if we had thrown in the towel[58]. We became tough, suspicious, hardhearted, vengeful and rough – and a good thing too, because they were just the qualities we needed. If they had sent us out into the trenches without this kind of training, then probably most of us would have gone mad. But this way we were prepared for what was waiting for us.

We didn't break; we adapted. The fact that we were only twenty helped us to do that, even though it made other things so difficult. But most important of all, we developed a firm, practical feeling of solidarity, which grew, on the battlefield, into the best thing that the war produced – comradeship in arms.

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[51] **bayonet practice** – учебный штыковой бой

[52] **beat me black and blue** – бить меня до синяков

[53] **assault course** – полоса препятствий

[54] **physical jerks** – гимнастические упражнения

[55] **You'll get clink for that** – Я вас упеку за это в крепость

[56] **and that's where we'll spill the beans** – и тогда мы все выложим

[57] **Take cover!** – Укрыться!

[58] **if we had thrown in the towel** – если бы мы сдались

I'm sitting by Kemmerich's bed. He is fading more and more visibly. There's a lot of to-ing and fro-ing around us.[59] A hospital train has come in, and they are sorting out any of the wounded that can be moved. A doctor goes past Kemmerich's bed and doesn't even look at him.

'Next time round, Franz,' I tell him.

He lifts himself up on one elbow, propped against the pillow. 'They've amputated my leg.'

So now he has realized after all. I nod and by way of a response I say, 'You want to be glad that you got away with that.'

He doesn't say anything.

I carry on talking. 'It could have been both your legs, Franz. Wegler lost his right arm. That's a lot worse. And it means you'll go home.'

He looks at me. 'Do you think so?'

'Of course I do.'

He says it again, 'Do you think so?'

'Of course you will, Franz. You just have to recover from the operation.'

He signals to me to come a bit closer. I lean over him and he whispers, 'I don't reckon I will.'

'Don't talk such rubbish, Franz, you'll see yourself that I'm right in a couple of days. It's not such a big thing, having a leg amputated. They patch up a lot of worse things here.'

He lifts his hand. 'Just have a look at my fingers.'

'That's all because of the operation. Just get a decent amount of grub into you, and you'll pick up again. Are they feeding you properly?'

He points to a dish, but it is still half full. I begin to get worked up. 'Franz, you've got to eat. Eating is the main thing. And the food's pretty good here.'

He shakes his head. After a while he says slowly, 'I used to want to be a forester.'

I try to reassure him. 'You still can be. They can make amazing artificial limbs these days – you hardly notice that they aren't real. They fix them on to the muscles. You can move the fingers on artificial hands and you can use them, you can even write. And besides, they are making improvements all the time.'

He lies there for a while without a word. Then he says, 'You can take my flying boots for Muller.'

I nod and try to think of something to say that will cheer him up. His lips are pallid, his mouth has got bigger and his teeth look very prominent, as if they were made of chalk. His flesh is melting away, his forehead is higher, his cheekbones more pronounced. The skeleton is working its way to the surface. His eyes are sinking already. In a few hours it will all be over.

He isn't the first one I have seen like this; but we grew up together, and that always makes it different. I've copied school exercises from him. In school he usually wore a brown jacket with a belt, with parts of the sleeves worn smooth. And he was the only one of us that could do a full arm-turn on the high bar[60]. His hair flew into his face like silk when he did it. Kantorek was proud of him for being able to do it. But he couldn't stand cigarettes. His skin was very white, and there was something feminine about him.

I glance down at my own boots. They are big and heavy and my trousers are tucked into them; standing up, you look solid and strong in these wide-legged things. But when we undress for swimming we suddenly have thin legs and narrow shoulders. We aren't soldiers any more then, we are almost schoolboys again; nobody would believe that we could carry a full pack. It is really strange when we are naked; we are civilians again, and we almost feel like civilians.

Whenever we went swimming, Franz Kemmerich used to look as small and slim as a child. Now he is lying there – and for what reason? Everybody in the whole world ought to be made to

[59] **There's a lot of to-ing and fro-ing around us** – Вокруг нас – шумная суматоха

[60] **a full arm-turn on the high bar** – крутить «солнце» на перекладине

walk past his bed and be told: 'This is Franz Kemmerich, he's nineteen and a half, and he doesn't want to die! Don't let him die!'

My thoughts run wild. This smell of carbolic and gangrene clogs the lungs, like thick, suffocating porridge.

It gets dark. Kemmerich's face gets paler, it stands out against his pillow and is so white that it looks luminous. He makes a small movement with his mouth. I get closer to him. He whispers, 'If you find my watch, send it home.'

I don't argue. There is no point any more. He is beyond convincing. I'm sick with helplessness. That forehead, sunk in at the temples, that mouth, which is all teeth now, that thin, sharp nose. And the flit, tearful woman at home that I shall have to write to – I wish I had that job behind me already.

Hospital orderlies move about with bottles and buckets. One comes up to us, glances at Kemmerich speculatively and goes away again. He is obviously waiting – probably he needs the bed.

I get close to Franz and start to talk, as if that could save him: 'Maybe you'll finish up in that convalescent home[61] in Klosterberg, Franz, up where the big houses are. Then you'll be able to look out over the fields from your window, right across to the two trees on the horizon. It's the best time now, when the corn is ripening, and the fields look like mother-of-pearl[62] when the evening sun is on them. And the row of poplars by the stream where we used to catch sticklebacks. You can get yourself an aquarium again and breed fish, and you can go out without having to ask permission and you can even play the piano again if you want to.'

I bend down over his face, which is now in shadow. He is still breathing, but faintly. His face is wet, he is crying. So much for my stupid chattering.

'Come on, Franz —' I put my arm around his shoulder and my face is close to his. 'Do you want to get some sleep now?'

He doesn't answer. The tears are running down his cheeks. I would like to wipe them away, but my handkerchief is too dirty.

An hour passes. I sit there, tense and watching his every movement, in case he might want to say something else. If only he would open his mouth wide and scream. But he just weeps, his head turned away. He doesn't talk about his mother or his brothers and sisters; he doesn't say anything. All that is probably already far behind him; now he is all alone with his life of nineteen short years, and he is crying because it is slipping away from him.

This is the hardest, the most desperately difficult leave-taking I have experienced, although it was bad with Tiedjen, too, who kept on shouting for his mother – Tiedjen was a great tough chap who held the doctor away from his bed with a bayonet, his eyes wide open with terror, until he collapsed.

Suddenly Kemmerich groans, and there is rattling in his throat.

I'm on my feet, rush outside and ask, 'Where's the doctor?' I see a white coat and grab hold of it. 'Please come quickly or Franz Kemmerich will die.'

He pulls away from me and says to a hospital orderly who is standing nearby, 'What's all this about?'

The orderly replies, 'Bed twenty-six, amputation at the upper thigh.'

'How should I know anything about it?' the doctor snaps, 'I've done five leg amputations today.' Then he pushes me out of the way, tells the orderly, 'Go and see to it,' and rushes off to the operating room.

I'm shaking with anger as I follow the orderly. The man looks round at me and says, 'One operation after the other since five o'clock this morning – crazy, I tell you; just today we've had another sixteen fatalities – your man will make seventeen. There's bound to be twenty at least —'

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[61] **convalescent home** – санаторий для выздоравливающих

[62] **mother-of-pearl** – перламутр

I feel faint; suddenly I can't go on. I don't even want to curse any more – it's pointless. I just want to throw myself down and never get up again.

We reach Kemmerich's bed. He is dead. His face is still wet with tears. His eyes are half open, and look as yellow as old-fashioned horn buttons.

The orderly nudges me. 'Taking his things with you?'

I nod.

'We've got to move him right away,' he continues. 'We need the bed. We've already got them lying on the ground out there.'

I take the things and undo Kemmerich's identity tag[63]. The orderly asks for his pay book[64]. It isn't there. I say that it is probably in the guard room, and leave. Behind me they are already bundling Franz on to a tarpaulin.

Once I get outside, the darkness and the wind are a salvation. I breathe as deeply as I can, and feel the air warmer and softer than ever before in my face. Images of girls, fields of flowers, of white clouds all pass rapidly through my mind. My feet move onwards in my boots, I am going faster, I'm running. Soldiers come towards me, their words excite me, even though I can't understand what they are saying. The whole earth is suffused with power and it is streaming into me, up through the soles of my feet. The night crackles with electricity, there is a dull thundering from the front line, like some concerto for kettle drums[65]. My limbs are moving smoothly, there is strength in my joints as I pant with the effort. The night is alive, I am alive. What I feel is hunger, but a stronger hunger than just the desire to eat —

Muller is waiting for me in front of the huts. I give him the flying boots. We go in and he tries them on. They are a perfect fit – He digs into his kit and gives me a decent chunk of salami. And there is hot tea with rum as well.

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[63] **identity tag** – личный опознавательный знак

[64] **pay book** – солдатская книжка

[65] **kettle drums** – литавры (ударный музыкальный инструмент)

III

We are getting reinforcements. The gaps in the ranks are filled, and the empty straw palliasses[66] in the huts are soon occupied. Some of them are old hands, but twenty-five young replacement troops straight from the recruiting depots have been assigned to our company as well. They are almost a year younger than we are. Kropp nudges me. 'Have you seen the kids?'

I nod. We strut about, get ourselves shaved on the parade-ground, put our hands in our pockets, look at the new recruits and feel as if we have been in the army for a thousand years.

Katczinsky joins us. We wander through the stables and come across the recruits, who are just being given their gasmasks and some coffee. Kat asks one of the youngest of them, 'I bet you lot haven't had any decent grub for a good long time, eh?'

The recruit pulls a face[67]. 'Bread made out of turnips for breakfast, turnips for lunch and turnip cutlets with turnip salad in the evening.'

Katczinsky gives an appreciative whistle[68]. 'Bread made from turnips? You were lucky – they're already making it out of sawdust. But what about beans? Do you fancy some?'

The young soldier colours up. 'You don't have to take the mickey[69].'

All Katczinsky says is, 'Bring your mess-tin.'

Curious, we follow him. He leads us to a big container next to his palliasse. Sure enough, it is half full of beans with bully beef. Katczinsky stands in front of it like a general and says, 'Eyes bright and fingers fight![70] That's the army motto!'

We are amazed. 'Bloody hell, Kat,' I ask, 'how did you come by that?'

'Old Ginger was glad to get it off his hands. I gave him three pieces of parachute silk for it. Well, beans taste just as good cold.'

With a generous flourish he gives the young soldier a portion and tells him, 'Next time you turn up here with your mess-tin, you'll have a cigar or some chewing tobacco in the other hand. Got it?'

Then he turns to us. 'You lot get yours for nothing, of course.'

We could not do without Katczinsky; he has a sixth sense. There are men like him everywhere, but you can't tell who they are just by looking. Every company has one or two of them. Katczinsky is the sharpest I know. I think he's a shoemaker by trade, but that's got nothing to do with it – he's a master of everything. It's good to be a friend of his. Kropp and I both are, and Haie Westhus half belongs to the group as well, but he is really only an instrument, working on Kat's orders whenever something's going on that needs a strong right arm, then he's a good man to have around.

For example, we turn up one night in some completely unknown place, a miserable dump[71] where you can see at a glance that it has been stripped of everything that wasn't screwed down[72]. We're quartered in a small, dark, factory building that has only just been fitted up for use. It has beds in it, or rather, bedsteads, a couple of planks with wire-mesh between them.

Wire-mesh is hard. We haven't got a blanket to cover it with, we need ours to put over us. Tarpaulin is too thin.

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[66] **straw palliasses** – соломенный тюфяк

[67] **pull a face** – скорчить рожу, скривиться

[68] **give an appreciative whistle** – присвистнуть с видом знатока

[69] **take the mickey** *(разг.)* – дурачить, насмехаться

[70] **Eyes bright and fingers fight** *(разг.)* – Разуй глаза, ловчее пальцы

[71] **miserable dump** – жалкая дыра (о населенном пункте)

[72] **it has been stripped of everything that wasn't screwed down** – растащили все, что не приколочено

Kat sizes it up and says to Haie Westhus, 'Come on.' Off they go into this completely unknown place. Half an hour later they are back with their arms full of straw. Kat has found some stables and that's where the straw comes from. We could sleep warmly now, if only we weren't so damned hungry.

Kat asks a gunner who has already been in the area for a while, 'Is there a canteen anywhere round here?'

He laughs. 'Not a chance. There's nothing. You won't find a crust of bread round here.'

'Aren't there any locals left, then?'

He spits. 'Oh yes, there are one or two. But they just hang around every field kitchen they see and scrounge what they can.' That's pretty bad. In that case we'll just have to tighten our belts and wait until tomorrow when the rations come up.

Then I see Kat putting his cap on. 'Where are you off to, Kat?' 'Just for a sniff around.' He slopes out.

The gunner grins sarcastically. 'Sniff away. Mind you don't strain yourself picking things up.'

We lie down, disappointed, and wonder whether to break into our iron rations[73] or not. But we don't want to risk being left without. So we try to get a bit of shut-eye instead.

Kropp breaks a cigarette in two and gives me half. Tjaden describes his local speciality, broad beans cooked with bacon. He is scathing about people who try to cook it without the right chopped herbs. But the main thing is that the ingredients have to be cooked together – the potatoes, beans and bacon must not, for God's sake[74], be cooked separately. Somebody grumbles that he will chop Tjaden into the right herbs if he doesn't shut up at once. And then it is quiet in the big room. Only a couple of candles flicker in the necks of empty bottles, and the gunner spits from time to time.

We are already dozing a bit when the door opens and Kat appears. I think I am dreaming: he is carrying two loaves under his arm, and a blood-stained sandbag full of horsemeat in his hand.

The gunner's pipe drops out of his mouth. He feels the bread. 'Straight up, it's real bread, and still warm.'

Kat doesn't say another thing. He has the bread and that is it; nothing else is of any importance. I'm quite sure that if he were dropped in the desert he would get a meal of dates, roast meat and wine together within the hour.

He gives Haie the brief command, 'Chop some wood.'

From under his coat he brings out a frying-pan, then he takes a handful of salt and a chunk of fat from a pocket – he has thought of everything. Haie gets a fire going on the floor. Its crackling can be heard all through the empty factory. We scramble out of bed.

The gunner isn't sure what to do. He wonders whether or not to congratulate Kat, so that maybe he will get a share too. But Katczinsky doesn't even notice him – he might as well be invisible. So he wanders off, swearing.

Kat has the knack of cooking horsemeat so that it is really tender. You mustn't put it straight into the pan or it will be too tough. It has to be parboiled in a little water beforehand. We sit around in a circle with our knives, and fill our bellies.

That's Kat. If there were some place where something edible could be found only in one particular hour in the year, then he would turn up precisely during that hour as if led there by some kind of inspiration. He'd put on his cap, go out, make a bee-line for it, and find it.

He can find anything – camp stoves and firewood when it is cold, hay and straw, tables, chairs – but above all he can find food. No one understands how he does it, and it's as if he conjures it out of thin air. His masterpiece was four cans of lobster. Mind you[75], we would really have preferred dripping[76] instead.

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[73] **iron rations** – неприкосновенный запас

[74] **for God's sake** – не дай Бог

[75] **mind you** – имейте в виду, заметьте

We've sprawled out on the sunny side of the camp. It smells of tar, summertime and sweaty feet.

Kat is sitting next to me, because he enjoys a chat. We had an hour of saluting practice this afternoon because Tjaden gave a major a sloppy salute[77]. Kat can't get over this. 'Watch out, lads,' he says, 'we'll lose the war because we are too good at saluting.'

Kropp pads across to us barefoot, with his trousers rolled up. He has washed his socks and lays them out on the grass to dry. Kat gazes at the sky, lets off a really loud one, and says dreamily by way of commentary, 'Every little bean, my boys, makes you make a little noise.'

He and Kropp start to argue. At the same time they manage to bet a bottle of beer on the outcome of a dogfight that is going on between a couple of planes above us.

Kat will not budge from a point of view that he, old soldier that he is, sums up with a little rhyme: 'Equal rations, equal pay, war's forgotten in a day —'

Kropp, on the other hand, is more philosophical. He reckons that all declarations of war ought to be made into a kind of festival, with entrance tickets and music, like they have at bullfights. Then the ministers and generals of the two countries would have to come into the ring, wearing boxing shorts, and armed with rubber truncheons, and have a go at each other. Whoever is left on his feet, his country is declared the winner. That would be simpler and fairer than things are out here, where the wrong people are fighting each other.

The idea appeals to us. Then the conversation moves on to drill.

An image comes into my head. Bright midday sunshine on the parade-ground at Klosterberg barracks. The heat is hanging there and the place is quiet. The barracks seem dead. Everything is asleep. All you can hear is the drummers practising – they have set things up somewhere and are practising without much skill, monotonously, mindlessly. What a trio: midday heat, the parade-ground and drummers practising.

The barrack windows are empty and dark. Battledress trousers[78] are hanging out of a few of them, drying. You look enviously across at the barracks, where the rooms are cool —

Oh, you dark and musty platoon huts, with your iron bedsteads, chequered bedding and the tall lockers with those stools in front of them! Even you can turn into objects of longing; seen from out here, you can even take on some of the wonderful aura of home, you great rooms, so full of the smells of stale food, sleep, smoke and clothes!

Katczinsky describes them in glowing colours and with great fervour. What would we not give to be able to go back to those rooms. We don't dare to think any further than that —

You rifle drills, first thing in the morning! 'How do you break down a standard-issue rifle?[79]' You PT sessions in the afternoon! 'Fall out anyone who can play the piano! Right turn! Report to the kitchens for spud bashing[80]!'

We wallow in our memories. Then Kropp laughs suddenly and says, 'Change at Lohne!'

That was Corporal Himmelstoss's favourite game. Lohne is a station where you have to change trains, and so that anyone going on leave[81] did not get lost when he got there, Himmelstoss used to practise changing platforms with us in the barracks. We were supposed to learn that you reach the connecting train in Lohne by way of an underpass. Our beds represented the underpass and everyone had to stand to attention on the left-hand side. Then came the order 'Change at Lohne!' and everyone

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[76] **dripping** *(зд.)* – топленое сало

[77] **sloppy salute** – небрежно поприветствовать

[78] **Battledress trousers** – солдатские штаны

[79] **How do you break down a standard-issue rifle?** – Из каких деталей состоит винтовка стандартного образца?

[80] **spud bashing** – чистка картофеля

[81] **on leave** – в отпуск

had to scramble as quickly as possible under the bed and out the other side. We practised that for hours on end…

Meanwhile the German plane has been shot down. It plummets, with a trail of smoke behind it like a comet. Kropp has lost a bottle of beer on it, and pays up with ill grace.

'I'm sure Himmelstoss is quite a quiet chap as a postman,' I say, once Kropp has got over his disappointment. 'So how come he is such a bastard as a drill corporal?'

The question gets Kropp going again. 'It isn't just Himmelstoss, there are loads of them. As soon as they get a couple of stripes or a pip or two they turn into entirely different people and start behaving as if they chew iron bars for breakfast.'

'So it's the uniform that does that?' I ask.

'More or less,' says Kat, and settles himself down to develop the point. 'But the real reasons are a bit different. Look, if you train a dog so that it only eats potatoes, and then after a while you offer it a chunk of meat, it'll still grab it because it's in its nature. And if you offer a man a bit of power, the same thing happens; he'll grab it. It's instinctive, because when it comes down to it, a man is basically a beast, and it's only later that a bit of decency gets smeared on top, the way you can spread dripping on your bread. The main thing about the army is that there is always somebody with the power to give orders to the rest. The bad thing is that they've all got far too much power: a corporal can harass a private, a lieutenant can harass an NCO or a captain can harass a lieutenant so badly that it can drive him mad. And because every one of them knows it, they all get used to the idea. Just take the simplest example: we're on our way back from the parade-ground and we're dog tired. Then comes the order to sing. Well, the singing isn't too lively because we're all happy if we can still carry our rifles without dropping them. And the next thing we know, the company is about-turned and we have an hour's punishment drill. On the march back we get the order to sing again, and this time we sing. What's the point of the whole thing? The man in command has got his way, because he's got the power to do so. Nobody's going to blame him – quite the reverse – he gets a reputation for being strict. And that's just a trivial thing – there are plenty of other ways for them to mess you about. So I ask you: whatever a man is in civilian life, what sort of job could he possibly find where he could get away with that sort of behaviour without getting a punch on the nose for it? The only place he can do it is in the army. See what I mean – it always goes to their heads. And the less they had to say for themselves in civvy street[82], the more it goes to their heads now.'

'They do say that discipline is necessary…' Kropp puts in casually.

'They can always come up with reasons,' growls Kat. 'And that might be true. But you mustn't mess people about. And you just try and explain it to a locksmith, or a stable lad[83], or a labourer, try and explain it to the poor bloody infantry – they're the majority out here, after all. All they see is that they get messed about, and then they get sent up the line, and they know perfectly well what's necessary and what isn't. I tell you, it's amazing that the ordinary soldier sticks it here at the front at all. It's amazing.'

Everyone agrees, because we all know that it is not till you are actually in the trenches that parade-ground drill disappears, and that it starts up again before you've gone back a mile behind the lines, no matter how big a piece of nonsense it might be, like saluting or formation marching. Because there is one unbreakable rule: a soldier has to be fully occupied all the time.

But now Tjaden turns up, red in the face. He is so worked up that he is stuttering, but he still gets the words out, grinning all over his face: 'Himmelstoss is on his way here. He's been sent to the front.'

Tjaden really detests Himmelstoss, because Himmelstoss decided to teach him a lesson in his own special way back in the barracks. Tjaden wets the bed – when he is asleep at night it just happens.

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[82] **in civvy street** – на гражданке

[83] **stable lad** – батрак

Himmelstoss insisted that it was pure laziness, and wouldn't be persuaded otherwise, so he came up with a method of curing Tjaden that was really typical of the man.

He hunted out another bed-wetter from one of the other barracks, a man called Kindervater, and put him in with Tjaden. The barracks where we did our training had the usual arrangement of bunks, one bed above the other, with the bottom part of each bed made of wire-mesh. Himmelstoss arranged things so that the pair of them were together, one on the top and the other on the bottom bunk. The one underneath, of course, had a really raw deal[84]. To compensate, they had to change places for the next night, so that the one from the bottom bunk got the top bunk, and could get his revenge. That was Himmelstoss's idea of self-help.

It was mean-minded, but logically it was sound. Unfortunately it didn't work, because the basic premisses were wrong: it wasn't laziness that made either of the two men do it. Anyone could see that by looking at their sickly complexions. The whole business ended with them taking it in turns to sleep on the floor. The one doing that could easily have caught his death of cold —

Meanwhile Haie has come and sat down beside us. He gives me a glance with his eyes twinkling, and rubs his great paws thoughtfully. He and I shared the best day of our army career. It was the night before we had to go off to the front. We had been assigned to one of the newly formed regiments, but before that we had been ordered back to the garrison for kitting out, not to the recruiting depot though, but one of the other barracks. The morning after that we would be leaving very early. That evening we set out to get even with Himmelstoss. We had sworn weeks before that we would. Kropp had even gone so far as to declare that after the war he would try for an administrative job in the postal service, so that later on, when Himmelstoss was a postman again, he could get to be his boss. He painted a rosy picture of how he would clobber him. That was the real reason that Himmelstoss never managed to grind us down: we always counted on the fact that we'd get him sometime, by the end of the war at the latest.

Meanwhile we wanted to give him a damned good hiding. What could they do to us if he didn't recognize us and if we were off early next morning anyway?

We knew what bar he spent his evenings in. To get from the bar back to the barracks he had to go down a dark lane without any buildings. We lay in wait for him there, hiding behind a pile of rocks. I had a quilt-cover with me. We were trembling with anticipation, wondering if he would be on his own. At last we heard his footsteps – that was a sound we knew very well indeed, we'd heard him often enough in the mornings, when the door would fly open and he would bellow, 'Out of bed!'

'On his own?' whispered Kropp.

'On his own.' Tjaden and I crept round the pile of rocks.

We could already see the light reflected off his belt-buckle. Himmelstoss seemed to be a bit tipsy and he was singing. He went past without noticing a thing.

We got a firm grip on the quilt-cover, moved forward quietly, slipped it over his head from behind and pulled it downwards, so that he stood there as if in a white sack, unable to move his arms. The singing died away.

The next moment Haie Westhus was there. He pushed us aside with his arms spread out, just so that he could have the first go. With great delight he took up a stance, raised his arm like a railway signal, his hand as big as a shovel, and gave the white sack a wallop that would have felled an ox.

Himmelstoss lost his balance, rolled half-a-dozen yards and started to yell. We'd thought of that as well, and brought a pillow with us. Haie squatted down, put the pillow on his knee, grabbed at where he guessed Himmelstoss's head to be and shoved it into the pillow. The noise was stifled right away. Haie let him take a breath from time to time, and what came from his throat then was a wonderful, high-pitched shriek that soon got cut off.

[84] **raw deal** – несправедливое отношение

Now Tjaden unbuttoned Himmelstoss's braces and pulled his trousers down. Meanwhile, he held a cane carpet-beater[85] between his teeth. Then he stood up and moved into action.

It was a wonderful sight: Himmelstoss on the ground, Haie bending over him, holding the man's head on his knees, with a fiendish grin on his face, his mouth wide open with delight, and then the twitching striped underpants, and the knock-kneed pair of legs which, trousers around the ankles, were performing spectacular movements with every blow that fell; and Tjaden, who showed no signs of tiring, standing over him like a woodcutter. In the end we literally had to pull him away, so that we could have our turns.

At last Haie pulled Himmelstoss to his feet again, and gave a private performance as the final act. He drew his right arm so far back before clouting him that it looked as if he was trying to pluck stars out of the night sky. Himmelstoss went down. Haie picked him up again, lined him up and gave him a second magnificently aimed wallop with his left hand. Himmelstoss howled, and fled on all fours. His striped postman's backside shone in the moonlight.

We made ourselves scarce[86] as fast as we could.

Haie looked around, and said with an air of grim satisfaction, though a bit oddly, 'Revenge is as good as a feast.'

In fact Himmelstoss should have been pleased: his principle, that we should train each other, had borne fruit[87] – when we used it on him. We had been dutiful pupils, quick to pick up his methods.

He never found out whom he had to thank for the whole thing. Anyway, he got a quilt-cover out of it; when we went back half an hour later to look for it again it was nowhere to be found.

That night was the reason that on the following morning we were able to set off in a reasonably cheerful state of mind. And because of that, some old goat was so moved that he referred to us as 'young heroes'.

[85] **cane carpet-beater** – камышовая выбивалка для ковров

[86] **make ourselves scarce** ***(разг.)*** – смылись, свалили

[87] **have borne fruit** – дал плоды

IV

We've been ordered up the line on wiring duty. The trucks turn up for us as soon as it starts to get dark. We scramble aboard. It is a warm evening, the twilight is like a blanket wrapped around us, and we feel comforted by this protection. It brings us closer together; even Tjaden, who is usually a bit stingy, gives me a cigarette and lights it for me.

We stand next to one another, packed tighty[88], and no one can sit down. We aren't used to sitting down anyway. At last Muller is in a good mood again; he is wearing his new boots.

The engines rev up, the trucks rattle and clatter. The road surfaces are worn out and full of holes. No lights are allowed, and so we run into the holes and nearly get thrown out of the truck. That possibility doesn't bother us much. What would it matter – a broken arm is better than a hole through the belly, and plenty of us would actually welcome a chance like that to get sent home.

Alongside us, long columns of munition trucks are moving up. They are in a hurry and keep on overtaking us. We shout out jokes to the men and they answer us.

We make out a wall, which belongs to a house set a little way back from the road. Suddenly I prick up my ears. Can it be true? Then I hear it again, perfectly clearly. Geese! A glance towards Katczinsky; a glance back from him; we understand each other.

'Kat, I think I can hear a candidate for the cooking-pot —'

He nods. 'We'll do it when we get back. I know my way around here.'

Of course Kat knows his way around. I bet he knows every drumstick on every goose for miles.

The trucks reach the firing area. The gun emplacements are camouflaged with greenery against air reconnaissance[89], and it all looks like a military version of that Jewish festival where they build little huts outdoors. These leafy bowers would look peaceful and cheerful if they didn't have guns inside them.

The air is getting hazy with smoke from the guns and fog. The cordite tastes bitter on the tongue. The thunder of the artillery fire makes our truck shake, the echo rolls on after the firing and everything shudders. Our faces change imperceptibly. We don't have to go into the trenches, just on wiring duty, but you can read it on every face: this is the front, we're within reach of the front.

It isn't fear, not yet. Anyone who has been at the front as often as we have gets thick-skinned about it. Only the young recruits are jumpy. Kat gives them a lesson. 'That was a twelve-inch. You can hear that from the report – you'll hear the burst in a minute.'

But the dull thud of the shell-bursts can't be heard at this distance. Everything is swallowed up in the rumble of the front. Kat listens carefully. 'There'll be a show tonight.'

We all listen. The front is restless. 'Tommy's[90] already firing,' says Kropp.

You can hear the guns clearly. It is the British batteries, to the right of our sector. They are starting an hour early. Ours never start until ten on the dot[91].

'What's up with them?' calls out Muller. 'Are their watches fast or something?'

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

Three guns thunder out just beside us. The gun flash shoots away diagonally into the mist, the artillery roars and rumbles. We shiver, happy that we'll be back in camp by tomorrow morning.

Our faces are no more flushed and no paler than they usually are; they are neither more alert nor more relaxed, and yet they are different. We feel as if something inside us, in our blood, has been switched on. That's not just a phrase – it is a fact. It is the front, the awareness of the front, that has

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[88] **packed tighty** – плечом к плечу

[89] **air reconnaissance** – воздушная разведка

[90] **Tommy** – прозвище солдат вооруженных сил Великобритании

[91] **on the dot** – ровно, точно

made that electrical contact. The moment we hear the whistle of the first shells, or when the air is torn by artillery fire, a tense expectancy suddenly gets into our veins, our hands and our eyes, a readiness, a heightened wakefulness, a strange suppleness of the senses. All at once the body is completely ready.

It often seems to me as if it is the disturbed and vibrating air that suddenly comes over us with silent force; or as if the front itself is sending out its own electricity to put those unconscious nerve endings on to the alert.

It is the same every time. When we set out we are just soldiers – we might be grumbling or we might be cheerful; and then we get to the first gun emplacements, and every single word that we utter takes on a new sound.

If Kat stands in front of the huts and says 'There's going to be a show' then that is his own opinion, nothing else. But if he says it out here, then the same words are as sharp as a bayonet on a moonlit night, cutting straight through the normal workings of the brain, more immediate, and speaking directly to that unknown element that has grown inside us with a dark significance – 'There's going to be a show'. Perhaps it is our innermost and most secret life that gives a shudder, and then prepares to defend itself.

For me, the front is as sinister as a whirlpool. Even when you are a long way away from its centre, out in calm waters, you can still feel its suction pulling you towards it, slowly, inexorably, meeting little resistance.

But the power to defend ourselves flows back into us out of the earth and out of the air – and most of all it flows out of the earth. The earth is more important to the soldier than to anybody else. When he presses himself to the earth, long and violently, when he urges himself deep into it with his face and with his limbs, under fire and with the fear of death upon him, then the earth is his only friend, his brother, his mother, he groans out his terror and screams into its silence and safety, the earth absorbs it all and gives him another ten seconds of life, ten seconds to run, then takes hold of him again – sometimes for ever.

Earth – earth – earth – !

Earth, with your ridges and holes and hollows into which a man can throw himself, where a man can hide! Earth – in the agony of terror, the explosion of annihilation, in the death-roar of the shell-bursts you gave us that massive resurgence of reconquered life. The madness, the tempest of an existence that had practically been torn to shreds flowed back from you into our hands, and so we burrowed deep into you for safety, and in the speechless fear and relief of having survived the moment, our mouths bit deeply into you!

With the first rumble of shellfire, one part of our being hurls itself back a thousand years. An animal instinct awakens in us, and it directs and protects us. It is not conscious, it is far quicker, far more accurate and far more reliable than conscious thought. You can't explain it. You are moving up, not thinking of anything, then suddenly you are in a hollow in the ground with shrapnel flying over your head; but you can't remember having heard the shell coming or having thought about taking cover. If you had relied on thought, you would have been so many pieces of meat by now. It was something else, some prescient, unconscious awareness inside us, that threw us down and saved us without our realizing. But for this, there would long since have been not a single man left alive between Flanders[92] and the Vosges[93].

We set out as soldiers, and we might be grumbling or we might be cheerful – we reach the zone where the front line begins, and we have turned into human animals.

[92] **Flanders** – Фландрия или Фламандский регион Бельгии

[93] **Vosges** – Вогезы (горный массив на северо-востоке Франции)

We move into a rather scrappy wood. We pass the field kitchens. Just beyond the wood we climb down from the trucks and they go back. They will be picking us up again before first light tomorrow.

Mist and smoke from the artillery is chest-high over the meadows. The moon is shining on it. Troops are moving on the roadway. The steel helmets give a dull reflection in the moonlight. Heads and rifles stick out from the white mists, nodding heads and swaying rifle barrels.

Further on, the mist clears. The heads turn into whole figures – tunics, trousers and boots come out of the mist as if from a pool of milk. They form into a column. The column marches, straight ahead, the figures become a wedge, and you can no longer make out individual men, just this dark wedge, pushing forwards, made even more strange by the heads and rifles bobbing along on the misty lake. A column – not men.

Light artillery and munition wagons move in from a side road. The backs of the horses shine in the moonlight and their movements are good to see – they toss their heads and their eyes flash. The guns and the wagons glide past against an indistinct background like a lunar landscape, while the steel-helmeted cavalrymen look like knights in armour from a bygone age[94] – somehow it is moving and beautiful.

We make for the equipment dump. Some of our men load the angled, sharpened iron uprights on to their shoulders, the rest stick straight iron bars through rolls of barbed-wire and carry them away. They are awkward and heavy loads.

The terrain gets more pitted. Reports come back to us from up ahead: 'Watch where you're going, there's a deep shell hole on the left' – 'Mind the trench' —

We keep our eyes wide open, and test the ground with our feet and with the bars before we put our weight down. The column stops suddenly; you bang your face into the barbed-wire roll that the man in front is carrying, and you swear.

A couple of shot-up trucks[95] are in the way. A new order comes: 'Pipes and cigarettes out!' We are close to the frontline trenches.

In the meantime it has gone completely dark. We skirt around a little copse and our sector is there before us.

There is an indistinct reddish glow from one end of the horizon to the other. It changes constantly, punctuated by flashes from the gun batteries. Verey lights[96] go up high above it, silver and red balls which burst with a shower of white, red and green stars. French rockets shoot up, the ones with silk parachutes that open in the air and let them drift down really slowly. They light up everything as clear as day, and their brightness even reaches across to us, so that we can see our shadows stark against the ground. The lights hang in the sky for minutes at a time before they burn out. New ones shoot up at once, everywhere, and there are still the green, red and blue stars.

'Going to be a bad do[97],' says Kat.

The thunder of the guns gets stronger until it becomes a single dull roar, and then it breaks down again into individual bursts. The dry voiced machine-guns rattle. Above our heads the air is full of invisible menace, howling, whistling and hissing. This is from the smaller guns; but every so often comes the deep sound of the big crump shells, the really heavy stuff, moving through the dark and landing far behind us. They make a bellowing, throaty, distant noise, like a rutting stag, and they go far above the howl and the whistle of the small shells.

Searchlights begin to sweep the black sky. They skim across it like huge blackboard pointers[98], tapering down at the bottom. One of them pauses, shaking a little. At once another is beside it, they

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[94] **bygone age** – ушедшая эпоха

[95] **shot-up trucks** – подбитые повозки

[96] **Verey lights** – сигнальные ракеты

[97] **Going to be a bad do** ***(разг.)*** – Вот влипли

[98] **blackboard pointers** – указка для школьной доски

cross and there is a black, winged insect trapped and trying to escape: an airman. He wavers, is dazzled and falls.

We ram the iron posts in firmly at set intervals. There are always two men holding the roll while the others pay out the barbed-wire. It is that horrible wire with a lot of long spikes, close together. I am out of practice at paying it out, and rip my hand open.

After a few hours we have finished. But there is still some time before the trucks are due. Most of us lie down and sleep. I try to as well, but it is too cold. You can tell that we are not far from the sea, because you are always waking up from the cold.

At one point I do fall into a deep sleep. When I wake up suddenly with a jolt, I have no idea where I am. I see the stars and I see the rockets, and just for a moment I imagine that I have fallen asleep in the garden at home, during a fireworks party of some sort. I don't know whether it is morning or evening, and I lie there in the pale cradle of dawn waiting for the gentle words which must surely come, gentle and comforting – am I crying? I put my hand to my face; it is baffling, am I a child? Smooth skin – it only lasts for a second and then I recognize the silhouette of Katczinsky. He is sitting there quite calmly, old soldier that he is, smoking his pipe – one of those with a fid over the bowl, of course. When he sees that I am awake he says, 'That made you jump. It was only a detonator, it whizzed off into the bushes over there.'

I sit up; I feel terribly alone. It is good that Kat is there. He looks thoughtfully at the front and says, 'Lovely fireworks. If only they weren't so dangerous.'

A shell lands behind us. A couple of the new recruits jump up in fright. A few minutes later another shell comes over, closer than before. Kat knocks out his pipe. 'Here we go.'

It has started. We crawl away as fast as we can. The next shell lands amongst us.

Some of the men scream. Green rockets go up over the horizon. Dirt flies up. Shrapnel buzzes. You can hear it landing when the noise of the blast has long gone.

Close by us there is a recruit, a blond lad, and he is terrified. He has pressed his face into his hands. His helmet has rolled off. I reach for it and try to put it on to his head. He looks up, pushes the helmet away and huddles in under my arm like a child, his head against my chest. His narrow shoulders are shaking, shoulders just like Kemmerich had.

I let him stay there. But to get some use out of his helmet I shove it over his backside, not as some kind of a joke, but deliberately, because it's the most exposed area. Even though the flesh is solid, a wound there can be bloody painful, and besides, you have to be on your stomach for months in a military hospital, and afterwards you are pretty certain to have a limp.

There's been a direct hit somewhere not far off. Between the impacts you can hear screaming.

At last it calms down. The shellfire has swept over us and moved on to the back line of reserve trenches. We risk a look out. Red rockets are shimmering in the sky. Probably there will be an attack.

It stays quiet where we are. I sit up and shake the recruit by the shoulder. 'It's all over, old son. We got through again.'

He looks around in bewilderment. 'You'll get used to it,' I tell him.

He notices his helmet and puts it on his head. Slowly he comes to himself. Then suddenly he blushes scarlet and his face has a look of embarrassment. Cautiously he puts his hand to his rear end[99] and gives me an agonized look. I understand at once: the barrage scared the shit out of him. That wasn't the precise reason that I put his helmet where I did – but all the same I comfort him. 'No shame in that, plenty of soldiers before you have filled their pants when they came under fire for the first time. Go behind that bush, chuck your underpants away, and that's that —'

He clears off. It gets quieter, but the screaming doesn't stop. 'What's up, Albert?' I ask.

[99] **rear end** ***(сленг)*** – задница

'A couple of the columns over there got direct hits.'

The screaming goes on and on. It can't be men, they couldn't scream that horribly.

'Wounded horses,' says Kat.

I have never heard a horse scream and I can hardly believe it. There is a whole world of pain in that sound, creation itself under torture, a wild and horrifying agony. We go pale. Detering sits up. 'Bastards, bastards! For Christ's sake shoot them!'

He is a farmer and used to handling horses. It really gets to him.

And as if on purpose the firing dies away almost completely. The screams of the animals become that much clearer. You can't tell where it is coming from any more in that quiet, silver landscape, it is invisible, ghostly, it is everywhere, between the earth and the heavens, and it swells out immeasurably. Detering is going crazy and roars out, 'Shoot them, for Christ's sake, shoot them!'

'They've got to get the wounded men out first,' says Kat.

We stand up and try to see where they are. If we can actually see the animals, it will be easier to cope with. Meyer has some field glasses[100] with him. We can make out a dark group of orderlies with stretchers, and then some bigger things, black mounds that are moving. Those are the wounded horses. But not all of them. Some gallop off a little way, collapse, and then run on again. The belly of one of the horses has been ripped open and its guts are trading out. It gets its feet caught up in them and falls, but it gets to its feet again.

Detering raises his rifle and takes aim. Kat knocks the barrel upwards. 'Are you crazy?'

Detering shudders and throws his gun on to the ground.

We sit down and press our hands over our ears. But the terrible crying and groaning and howling still gets through, it penetrates everything.

We can all stand a lot, but this brings us out in a cold sweat. You want to get up and run away, anywhere just so as not to hear that screaming any more. And it isn't men, just horses.

Some more stretchers are moved away from the dark mass. Then a few shots ring out. The big shapes twitch a little and then become less prominent. At last! But it isn't over yet. No one can catch the wounded animals who have bolted in terror, their wide-open mouths filled with all that pain. One of the figures goes down on one knee, a shot – one horse collapses – and then there is another. The last horse supports itself on its forelegs, and moves in a circle like a carousel, turning around in a sitting position with its forelegs stiff – probably its back is broken. The soldier runs across and shoots it down. Slowly, humbly, it sinks to the ground.

We take our hands away from our ears. The screaming has stopped. Just a long-drawn-out, dying sigh is still there in the air. Then, just like before, there are only the rockets, the singing of the shells, and the stars – and it feels almost eerie.

Detering walks about cursing. 'What have they done to deserve that, that's what I want to know?' And later on he comes back to it again. His voice is agitated and he sounds as if he is making a speech when he says, 'I tell you this: it is the most despicable thing of all to drag animals into a war.'

We go back. It's time to head for the trucks. The sky has become just a trace lighter. Three a.m. The wind is fresh and cool and at that livid hour our faces look grey.

We move slowly forwards in Indian file[101] through the trenches and shell holes and at last we reach the foggy area once again. Katczinsky is uneasy, and that is a bad sign.

'What's the matter, Kat?' asks Kropp.

'I just wish we were home.' Home – he means back in camp. 'Won't be long now, Kat.'

He is nervous. 'I don't know, I don't know…'

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[100] **field glasses** – бинокль

[101] **Indian file** – «змейка», колонна по одному

We get to the communication trenches and then back to the meadows. The little wood is in front of us; we know every inch of ground here. We can already see the graves of the rifle brigade, with the mounds of earth still piled up, and the black crosses.

At that very moment we hear a whistling noise behind us, it gets louder, there is a crash and then a roar. We've ducked down – a hundred yards in front of us a wall of flame shoots up.

The next moment part of the wood is lifted up above the tree tops when the second shell hits, three or four trees go up with it and are smashed into pieces in the process. The follow-up shells are already hissing down with a sound like a safety valve[102] – heavy fire – 'Take cover!' somebody shouts, 'Take cover!'

The meadows are flat, the wood is too far away and too dangerous; the only cover is the military cemetery and the grave mounds. We stumble into the darkness, and soon every man has flattened himself behind one of the mounds.

Not a moment too soon.[103] The dark turns into madness. It rocks and rages. Dark things, darker than the night itself, rush upon us in great waves, over us and onwards. The flashes of the explosions light up the cemetery.

There is no way out. In the light of one of the shell-bursts I risk a glance out on to the meadows. They are like a storm-tossed sea, with the flames from the impacts spurting up like fountains. No one could possibly get across that.

The wood disappears, splintered, shattered, smashed. We have to stay in the cemetery.

The earth explodes in front of us. Great clumps of it come raining down on top of us. I feel a jolt. My sleeve has been ripped by some shrapnel. I clench my fist. No pain. But that is no comfort, wounds never start to hurt until afterwards. I run my hand over the arm. It is scratched but still in one piece. Then I get a knock on the head and everything blurs. But as quick as a flash comes the thought: you mustn't faint! I sink down into the black mud but get up again immediately. A piece of shrapnel hit my helmet, but it came from so far off that it didn't cut through the steel. I wipe the dirt out of my eyes. A hole has been blown in the ground right in front of me, I can just about make it out[104]. Shells don't often land in the same place twice and I want to get into that hole. Without stopping I wriggle across towards it as fast as I can, flat as an eel on the ground – there is a whistling noise again, I curl up quickly and grab for some cover, feel something to my left and press against it, it gives, I groan, and the earth is torn up again, the blast thunders in my ears, I crawl under whatever it was that gave way when I touched it, pull it over me – it is wood, cloth, cover, cover, pretty poor cover against falling shrapnel.

I open my eyes; my fingers are gripped tight on a sleeve, an arm. A wounded soldier? I shout out to him – no answer – must be dead. My hand gropes on and finds more shattered wood – then I remember that we've taken cover in a cemetery.

But the shelling is stronger than anything else. It wipes out all other considerations and I just crawl deeper and deeper beneath the coffin so that it will protect me, even if Death himself is already in it.

The shell hole is gaping in front of me. I fix my eyes on it, grasping at it almost physically, I have to get to it in one jump.

Then I feel a blow in the face, and a hand grabs me by the shoulder – has the dead man come back to life? The hand shakes me, I turn my head, and in a flash of light that lasts only a second I find myself looking into Katczinsky's face. His mouth is wide open and he is bellowing, but I can't

[102] **safety valve** – предохранительный клапан

[103] **Not a moment too soon** – Очень вовремя

[104] **I can just about make it out** – Я смутно ее различаю

hear anything; he shakes me and comes closer; the noise ebbs for a moment and I can make out his voice: 'Gas – gaaas – gaaaaas – pass it on[105]!'

I pull out my gas-mask case… Someone is lying a little way away from me. All I can think of is that I've got to tell him: 'Gaaas… gaaaas.'

I shout, crawl across to him, hit at him with the gas-mask case but he doesn't notice – I do it again, and then again – he only ducks – it is one of the new recruits – I look despairingly at Kat, who has his mask on already – I tear mine out of the case, my helmet is knocked aside as I get the mask over my face, I reach the man and his gas-mask case is by my hand, so I get hold of the mask and shove it over his head – he grabs it, I let go, and with a sudden jolt I am lying in the shell hole.

The dull thud of the gas shells is mixed in with the sharp noise of the high explosives. In between the explosions a bell rings the warning, gongs and metal rattles spread the word – Gas – gas – gaas…

There is a noise as someone drops behind me, once, twice. I wipe the window of my gas-mask clear of condensation. It is Kat, Kropp and somebody else. There are four of us lying here, tensed and waiting, breathing as shallowly as we can[106].

The first few minutes with the mask tell you whether you will live or die. Is it airtight? I know the terrible sights from the field hospital, soldiers who have been gassed, choking for days on end as they spew up their burned-out lungs, bit by bit.

I breathe carefully, with my mouth pressed against the mouthpiece. By now the gas is snaking over the ground and sinking into all the hollows. It insinuates itself into our shell hole wriggling its way in like a broad, soft jellyfish. I give Kat a nudge: it is better to crawl out and lie up on top rather than here, where the gas concentrates itself the most. But we can't. A second hail of shellfire starts. It's as if it is not the guns that are roaring; it's as if the very earth is raging.

There is a crash as something black flies over and on to us. It strikes the ground right beside us: a coffin that has been blown through the air.

I see Kat move, and crawl across to him. The coffin has crashed down on to the outstretched arm of the fourth man in our shell hole. He tries to tear off his gas-mask with his other hand. Kropp gets to him just in time, twists that arm hard behind his back and holds it there.

Kat and I set about freeing the wounded arm. The coffin lid is loose and damaged, and we easily manage to wrench it free; we throw out the corpse, which flops down, and then we try to loosen the rest of the coffin.

Luckily, the man passes out, and Albert is able to help us. Now we don't have to be so careful, and we work like mad until the coffin gives way with a sighing noise to the spades which we shove in underneath it.

It is lighter now. Kat takes a piece of the coffin lid and puts it under the shattered arm, and we wrap the bandages from all our field dressing packs[107] around it. There isn't anything else we can do at the moment.

My head is throbbing and buzzing in the gas-mask, it is nearly bursting. Your lungs get strained, they only have stagnant, overheated, used-up air to breathe, the veins on your temples bulge and you think you are going to suffocate —

A grey light trickles into our shell hole. Wind sweeps the cemetery. I haul myself up to the edge of the hole. Lying in front of me in the dirty light of dawn is a leg that has been torn off, with the boot on it still completely undamaged – I see it all perfectly clearly in a moment. But now, a few yards away, somebody is standing up; I clean the goggles, and because I am agitated they mist over again at once, but I stare across – the man over there isn't wearing his gas-mask any more.

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[105] **pass it on** – передай дальше

[106] **breathing as shallowly as we can** – стараемся дышать как можно реже

[107] **field dressing pack** – индивидуальный перевязочный пакет

I wait for a few seconds longer – but he doesn't collapse, he looks around cautiously and takes a few steps – the wind has dispersed the gas, the air is clear – and gasping for breath I rip my mask away from my face too, and my knees give way[108]. The air pours into me like cold water, my eyes feel as if they could burst from my head, the wave sweeps over me and plunges me into darkness.

The shelling has stopped. I turn back to the crater and wave to the others. They scramble up and tear off their masks. We pick up the wounded man, one of us holds the arm with the splint on it. And in a group we stumble away as quickly as possible.

The cemetery has been blown to pieces. Coffins and corpses are scattered all around. They have been killed for a second time; but every corpse that was shattered saved the life of one of us.

The fence has been wrecked, the rails of the field railway[109] on the other side have been ripped out and bent upwards, so that they point to the sky. Someone is lying on the ground in front of us. We stop. Kropp goes on alone with the wounded man.

The man on the ground is a recruit. He has blood smeared all over one hip; he is so exhausted that I reach for my flask, which has tea with rum in it. Kat holds back my hand and bends over him. 'Where did you cop it, mate?[110]'

He moves his eyes, too weak to answer.

Carefully we cut away his trousers. He moans. 'It's OK, OK, it'll soon be better…'

If he's been hit in the stomach then he mustn't drink anything. He has thrown up, and that is a good sign. We expose the hip area.

It is just a pulp of torn flesh and splintered bone. The joint has been hit. This lad will never walk again.

I wet my fingers and run them across his forehead, then give him a drink. Some life comes into his eyes. It's only now that we realize that his right arm is bleeding as well.

Kat spreads out two field dressings as wide as he can, so that they cover the wound. I look around for some cloth, so that I can tie it up loosely. We haven't got anything, so I cut more of the wounded man's trousers away so that I can use a piece of his underpants as a bandage. But he isn't wearing any. I look at him more closely. It's the blond lad from earlier on.

Meanwhile Kat has fetched a couple more field dressings from the pockets of dead soldiers, and we place them carefully on the wound. The lad is looking at us with a fixed gaze.

'We'll go and get a stretcher now.'

But he opens his mouth and whispers, 'Stay here —'

Kat says, 'We'll be back in a minute. We're going to get a stretcher for you.'

It is impossible to say whether he understands or not; he whimpers like a child behind us as we go: 'Stay here —'

Kat looks all round and then whispers, 'Wouldn't it be best just to take a revolver and put him out of his misery?'

The lad is not likely to survive being moved, and at the very most he'll last a couple of days. But everything he's been through so far will be nothing compared to those few days until he dies. At the moment he is still in shock and can't feel anything. Within an hour he'll be a screaming mass of unbearable agonies, and the few days he still has left to live will just be an incessant raging torture. And what difference does it make to anyone whether he has to suffer them or not?

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[108] **my knees give way** – у меня подкашиваются ноги

[109] **field railway** – временная железная дорога

[110] **Where did you cop it, mate?** ***(разг.)*** – Куда тебя угораздило, браток?

I nod. ‘You’re right, Kat. The best thing would be a bullet.’ ‘Give me a gun,’ he says, and stops walking. I can see that he is set on it[111]. We look around – but we’re not alone any more. A small group is gathering near us, and heads are appearing out of the shell holes and trenches.

We bring a stretcher.

Kat shakes his head. ‘Such young lads —’ He says it again: ‘Such young, innocent lads…

Our losses are not as bad as might have been expected: five dead and eight wounded. It was only a short barrage. Two of our dead are lying in one of the re-opened graves; all we have to do is fill it in.

We go back. We trot along silently, in line one behind the other. The wounded are taken to the dressing station[112]. The morning is overcast, the orderlies scurry about with tags and numbers, the wounded whimper. It starts to rain.

Within an hour we reach our truck and climb aboard. There is more room on it now than there was before.

The rain gets heavier. We open up tarpaulins and put them over our heads. The drops drum down on top of them. Streams of rain pour off the sides. The trucks splash through the holes in the road and we rock backwards and forwards, half asleep.

Two men at the front of the truck have long forked poles[113] with them. They watch out for the telephone wires that hang down so low across the roadway that they could take your head off. The two men make sure they get them with their forked sticks and lift them over our heads. We hear them shouting, ‘Mind the wires![114]’ and still half asleep we bob down and then straighten up again.

The trucks roll monotonously onwards, the shouts are monotonous, the falling rain is monotonous. It falls on our heads and on the heads of the dead men up at the front of the truck, on the body of the little recruit with a wound that is far too big for his hip, it’s falling on Kemmerich’s grave, and it’s falling in our hearts.

From somewhere we hear the sound of a shell-burst. We snap to, our eyes wide open, our hands ready again to heave our bodies over the side of the truck into the ditch by the roadside.

But we don’t hear any more. Just the monotonous shouts of ‘Mind the wires!’ – we bob down – we’re half asleep again.

[111] **I can see that he is set on it** – Я вижу, что он решился

[112] **dressing station** – пункт первой медицинской помощи

[113] **forked pole** – палка с рогулькой на конце

[114] **Mind the wires!** – Осторожно – провода!

V

It's a nuisance trying to kill every single louse when you've got hundreds of them. The beasts are hard, and it gets to be a bore when you are forever pinching them between your nails. So Tjaden has rigged up a boot-polish lid hanging on a piece of wire over a burning candle-end. You just have to toss the lice into this little frying-pan – there is a sharp crack, and that's it.

We're sitting around, shirts on our knees, stripped to the waist in the warm air, our fingers working on the knee. Haie has a particularly splendid species of louse: they have a red cross on their heads. Because of that he maintains that he brought them back from the military hospital in Tourhout, where he claims they were the personal property of a senior staff surgeon[115]. He also wants to use the grease that is very slowly accumulating in the tin lid to polish his boots, and roars with laughter for a good half-hour at his own joke.

But today nobody takes much notice. We have something else far too important on our minds.

The rumour turned out to be true. Himmelstoss is here. He turned up yesterday, and we have already heard his familiar tones. Apparendy he was a little bit too vigorous with a couple of recruits on the training field. He didn't know that one of them was the son of the chairman of the district council[116]. That did for him.[117]

He is in for a surprise. For hours Tjaden has been running through the things he wants to say to him. Haie keeps looking speculatively at his gigantic paws and winking at me. Beating up Himmelstoss was the high point of his existence; he told me that he still dreams about it. Kropp and Muller are having a discussion. Kropp has managed to nab a mess-tin full of lentils for himself, probably from the sappers' kitchens. Muller gives it a greedy look, but gets a grip on himself and asks, 'Albert, what would you do if all of a sudden it was peacetime?'

'There's no such thing as peacetime,' replies Albert curtly.

Muller persists. 'Yes, but if… what would you do?'

'I'd bugger off out of it[118],' grumbles Kropp.

' Course[119]. And then what?'

'Get blind drunk,' says Albert.

'Don't talk rubbish, I'm being serious —'

'Me too,' says Albert, 'what else would there be to do?'

The idea interests Kat. He claims a portion of Kropp's lentils, gets his whack, then he ponders for a long while and offers the view 'Well, you could get drunk, of course, but otherwise it would be off to the nearest train – and home to mother. Bloody hell, Albert, peacetime…'

He grubs around in his oilskin wallet for a photograph and passes it around proudly. 'My missus.' Then he stows it away and curses: 'Lousy bloody war…'

'It's all right for you,' I say, 'you've got your wife and your lad.'

He nods. 'That's true, and I have to make sure they've got enough to eat.'

We all laugh. 'There won't be any problem there, Kat, you'd just requisition something.'

Muller is hungry and says he still isn't satisfied with the answers. He shakes Haie Westhus out of his daydreams of beating up Himmelstoss. 'Haie, what would you do if the war ended?'

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[115] **senior staff surgeon** – начальник медицинской службы

[116] **chairman of the district council** – председатель окружного совета

[117] **That did for him** – Это его и погубило

[118] **I'd bugger off out of it** ***(разг.)*** – Я бы свалил отсюда

[119] **Course** ***(разг.) (зд.)*** – Понятно

'What he ought to do is kick your arse from here to kingdom come[120] for talking about that sort of thing here,' I put in. 'Where did you get the idea anyway?'

'Where do the flies go in winter?[121]' is Muller's brief answer before he turns to Haie Westhus again.

Haie is suddenly finding it all a bit difficult. He puts his freckled head in his hands: 'You mean, when there isn't any more war?'

'Dead right.[122] You've got it in one.[123]'

'Then there'd be women around again, wouldn't there?' Haie licks his lips.

'That as well.'

'Christ almighty,' says Haie, and his expression softens, 'the first thing I'd do is pick myself up some strapping great bint[124]

[120] **kick your arse from here to kingdom come** ***(разг.)*** – всыпал бы тебе по заднице по первое число

[121] **Where do the flies go in winter?** – ответ на вопрос «Откуда?» – «От верблюда» (досл. «Оттуда, где мухи зимуют»)

[122] **Dead right** ***(разг.)*** – Точно

[123] **You've got it in one** ***(прост.)*** – В яблочко

[124] **strapping great bint** ***(прост.)*** – крепкая бабенка

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.