

# **Reinhold at the Front**

Paul Alverdes



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# Reinhold at the Front

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NOT long before his death, Reinhold and some two hundred others who had volunteered for the war were marching with Corporal Kompes at their head along the towing path of a canal in Artois which was half overgrown with coltsfoot and hemlock. They were a draft for a Rhineland artillery regiment which had stayed where it was ever since the armies had dug in. It was the end of April, 1915, and the chestnuts were just in blossom. Corporal Kompes, who had been detailed to conduct the draft of recruits from the railhead where they arrived fatigued by lack of sleep after a long journey on bare wooden benches, belonged to this regiment. Yet he wore a Lancer's tunic, and the striped trousers, stuffed into down-trodden though highly polished riding boots, would have gone better with a smart morning coat. On his head at a rakish angle was a small round cap of faded grey, and he had a bright blue silk scarf wound round his copper-red neck. It was tied beneath his chin in a knot the size of a cherry-stone. A peeled willow wand, which served him as a riding switch, waved aloft from the leg of his left boot. In this get-up he jogged along on a tubby brown gelding at the head of the batch of recruits without a word said or a glance behind; while they hurried and stumbled after him in twos and threes as the path allowed. Now and again one or other of them was edged down the slope of the bank towards the brown sluggish water and then, exhausted, came to a stop in the long grass, not sorry to wait until he could fall in again at the rear of the column.

Reinhold was in a state of suspense. They had been told that they were now only a few thousand yards behind the front line. But all around them was utter silence. Listen as he might, not a shout nor a shot was to be heard, nor a soldier to be seen. Tall, rank grass of a deeper green than he ever remembered seeing, luxuriant creeping plants with stem and tendril tightly and smoothly coiled like snakes over broken-down hedges or rusted iron railings, fold upon fold of impenetrable thickets shimmering in a breeze that rose and fell, this was all that met his eye on every side. Later the ruins of houses were to be seen lying in disconsolate heaps in the leafy solitude, or the more extensive wreckage of a factory surmounted by gaunt and jagged gables and gaping roofs. It looked as though they were in the track of a great fire, and Reinhold even thought he detected that smell of singed rags and embers still glowing beneath the spent ash which ever since his boyhood had always stirred him to roving fancies of hidden crime and mysterious happenings. He remembered how, with a toy pistol cocked in his pocket, shaken by fear and yet irresistibly drawn on, he used anxiously to explore many an uncanny spot in the fields outside the town when autumn mists hung over them. There were forsaken brickfields and tumble down lime-kilns, or the ruins of a deserted factory. Rats rustled by and rubbish-heaps ran in little cascades under their feet. Every weed-choked threshold suggested murder and hid the secret of agonising death. Here it was the same. Where in this haunted solitude were the guns, he asked himself. Where were the horse-lines? Where was all the infantry concealed? Perhaps, he thought, we are bluffing the enemy and are very weak on this part of the front, and it is high time we came. Or else our fellows are lying worn out and weary in their hiding-places and we are too late and they will mock at us. And the Corporal with his tailored trousers, his Lancer's tunic that flouted military regulations, and the greasy cap looking as if it were smeared with flour, a cap for a baker and not for a soldier, in Reinhold's opinion—didn't all this point to hopeless demoralisation of the troops and rank insubordination?

Reinhold wore a tin helmet with a spread eagle on the front. This bird, however, went hooded into battle, for he dwelt in the perpetual darkness of a linen cover. The helmet wobbled on Reinhold's head at every step, like an inverted basin on a windy gate-post, as though the eagle struggled in the darkness to take flight for home. For this reason Reinhold had let down the chin-strap, though it made him hot. All the same he would have been glad to see no caps at all out there, and nothing but helmets.

It was getting on for evening when he noticed infantry marching in column on a road some distance away across the canal—battalion after battalion. He was horrified to see that they were marching to the rear with their backs to the enemy; and after them came artillery with all their guns and baggage train, carts heaped high with all sorts of utensils and even furniture, as though the war were over as far as they were concerned and they were off home without a thought for anyone else.

Reinhold could not understand how a movement to the rear could possibly be permitted at this distance from

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the enemy, and he began to have a hideous doubt of the vigilance of those in command. The only hope was that the retirement was merely apparent and that in reality it was a turning movement which would enable them after a successful ruse to fall more disastrously upon the foe. He wished he could go to the edge of the canal and shout across to them for confirmation of this hope. But they swung clattering by, black with a golden mist of dust behind them, and did not seem even to see the newcomers.

All at once Reinhold sprang out from the silently plodding column and clattered panting up the steep side of the embankment, half blinded by the rim of his helmet which at the first step had been jerked down over his nose. He was going to urge Corporal Kompes to hasten onwards. He very nearly barged into the hindquarters of the horse, for at that moment Kompes stopped and raising himself in the stirrups leant forward a little, while his mount straddled its legs and made water copiously. At this the men fell out along the path and among the poplars; Reinhold pushed his helmet back from his forehead and, feeling rather ashamed of himself, followed their example. It began to dawn upon him that nothing was going to turn out in the least as any of them had expected or could have imagined.

Dörries, another war volunteer, was marching not far from Reinhold. He was a thoroughly ugly fellow with an undershot jaw and an immensely wide mouth, and his thin lips, always moist, were encircled by a colourless strawky down. He wore shooting spectacles, as they were called—not a very becoming apparatus. The steel hooks were lengthened by broad bands of grey elastic which were drawn tight and made his unusually large ears stick out all the more emphatically, so that the light shone through them in a ruddy glow. Where the steel hooks joined the lenses there was a small hinge moving on the arc of a circle, and by this means it was possible to adjust the lenses vertically at any desired angle to the eyes. If, for example, Dörries was lying on his stomach with his face to the ground and wished to direct his eyes to the front he had only to adjust his spectacles to the corresponding angle. He was not a little delighted with this wonderful mechanical resource and therefore he always had it on his nose, even when the prospect of having to lie on his stomach and look out to his front was extremely remote. For in his opinion it gave him the air of being a picked man to whom the care and employment of a particularly delicate and dangerous implement of warfare had been entrusted.

In fact, however, he did not even know how to fire a gun and still less how to hit anything. He was indeed the only one of the batch who, after a short trial, was not allowed to have any further training in gunnery. For he was a bit weak in the head and often incapable of grasping the simplest facts, let alone of retaining them, and it was said that as a child he had for a long time been considered a mental defective. He was the son of a very well-to-do father and therefore had been able to go from school to school and from coach to coach. Nevertheless when the war broke out the united efforts of all concerned had not succeeded in getting him above the third form. He was then twenty years old and as strong as a horse.

But when Lieutenant Wessel told him in the barrack square that nothing would ever make a gunner of him, for it would only mean exposing the infantry of Prussia to the risk of extermination, he was deeply dismayed. He went very red as he brought his heels together and said: "Very good, sir," and his chin with its fringe of downy hair began to tremble uncontrollably. He stood by himself for a moment blinking hard at the tip of his nose through his shooting spectacles, looking very pitiful—as he always did whenever he tried to think. Then his eyes filled and he went off to the stables to report for other duties, as he had been ordered to do.

This, as a matter of fact, was the only time that his fellows had seen him upset, for Dörries was usually of an imperturbable cheerfulness and always took the merciless chaff of his comrades with a smile and a sparkle in his eye as though he enjoyed it. This often disarmed even the most brutal among them and many of the others felt an irresistible charm in him. The result was that they all got to like him and everyone had been delighted when his name was called out among the rest on the draft.

Kranz alone, the beautiful Kranz, or the Bridal Wreath, as he was called, disliked and even loathed him. Not that he let him see it, but he avoided him whenever he could, and never spoke a word to him if he could help it.

Kranz was an art student and meant to be a sculptor. He was the only one of the batch who was marching in boots of his own, made of red Russian leather, and in highly polished leggings of the same material. He had also had his own cover made for his helmet and it fitted tightly without a crease. This gave him the air of an officer or a Fähnrich at a distance and Corporal Kompes no sooner set eyes on him in the railway station than he decided to take it out of him for this get-up. His face was small and his features delicate; his forehead clear and wide; his eyes large and of the purest blue. With the boyish complexion beneath his thick brown hair he might have been called really good-looking but for his impassive and even frigid expression. He was well made and his movements had such an air of breeding that even his garrison uniform—the greasy blue overcoat patched with old bits of horse cloth, the trousers green with age and the down-trodden boots of glass-hard leather—looked as though it had been made to measure.

"Idiots are always happy," he would say contemptuously of Dörries, or: "Have you ever seen a loony who didn't grin?" But he himself was far from gloomy. True, shortly before the draft left, as he sat on the table in the recruits' barrack-room in a spotless white shirt and well cut breeches, he showed them a tube containing a whitish powder



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or rather, as a closer inspection showed, minute crystals in the form of tiny bars. He was in the act of sewing it into the lining of his overcoat together with his first-aid dressing.

"As far as I'm concerned," he said in explanation, as he held it out once more for inspection, "anyone who likes may stump round later on without a leg or two. For myself, I don't care about that. One or two of these crystals on the tongue or just scattered on the wound and it's all up in a second without your needing even to swallow them." He spoke with an air of complete indifference and they all looked with envy and horror at the deadly drug and grudgingly watched it disappear in the lining of Kranz's coat.

In spite of this, his comrades thought of the beautiful Kranz only as a favourite of fortune, the darling of women and children, as they said of him in a phrase which was then much in vogue with them. The originator of it was a strong man who went the round of the Fairs, a colossal and hairy monstrosity, and he laid claim to this title on his bills. His comrades meant by it, however, the mysterious and to them utterly inexplicable gift that Kranz had of pleasing and charming without knowing when or how he did it.

One day, for example, the commandant of the garrison, a retired general, turned up unexpectedly to inspect the recruits. He was as old as a raven, and as he waddled about on his bow legs he expressed, in a tearful voice, his dissatisfaction with even the smartest performances on the horizontal bar and the most astonishing familiarity with the Morse code. Kranz alone, who could do nothing of all this, held his attention. He was asked his name, his antecedents and his age. "Very good, very good indeed," the old boy said for no earthly reason, looked him up and down once more from head to foot with his blood-shot eyes and stumped along to the next squad of recruits, who stood glazed with suspense; but he did not appear even to see them.

It was even more incomprehensible that the old soldiers, who were held in greater awe than all the generals and sergeant-majors put together accepted Kranz from the first as one of themselves. They even allowed him to address them in the second person singular and to go into their barrack-room at any hour without knocking and pay the homage due from all recruits to the emblem of their power and dignity. This was a large sheep's bone stained brown with age and tobacco smoke which hung by a rusty chain from the roof of their room.

Kranz got whole bunches of letters by every post in envelopes of the most extravagant shapes. They were often sealed four or five times over in silver and gold or in iridescent hues and written on paper of delicate or even startlingly loud colours and nearly all of them had to do with assignments. Kranz could not always help two or more such appointments coinciding and this compelled him to take his fellows into his confidence and to ask their assistance.

Sometimes on such occasions Reinhold gave his coat a careful brushing, ran his buttons once more through the button-stick, put on spurs, although they were forbidden, and girded on his sabre. This was an imposing weapon resurrected from old army stores and stamped with the year 1813, as broad as a girl's hand, which reached to his arm-pit when it stood upright on the ground. Thus equipped, he presented himself at the appointed spot on the old walls or in the public gardens and there, blushing with confusion, saluted some young lady. He did it with the utmost reluctance, and only to please Kranz; for very often she took him for an obviously inexperienced but extremely offensive little cad and refused even to hear what he had to say. He could only with great difficulty make himself known as the envoy of his friend Kranz, who regretted that he would not be off duty until an hour later. It was his business after that to keep the girl at all costs from the place where Kranz, in the meanwhile, was occupied with another adorer. Very often there were three or four others similarly engaged; little Ziemerer perhaps among them, Ziemerer of the Suebo-Vandalia, of whom more in another place. It was these multiple concerns with the other sex that had brought upon Kranz the nickname, Bridal Wreath.

Not all of his affairs, however, were so innocent. One early morning Kranz sat on his bed, which was next to Reinhold's, examining his chest and shoulders and sadly shaking his head. He had got back to barracks on the sly an hour before reveille as he often did; but he looked as flourishing as usual.

"She'll be the death of me," he said yawning, but putting his hand before his mouth. "I don't know what she sees in me, but it can't go on like this. She wants now to hide me in her house and not let me out till the war's over. She'll go out of her mind, she says, if I go to the front. It's all one to me and, Lord knows, I can't help it."

They were the marks of kisses, he explained in reply to Reinhold's anxious question. They looked like rose leaves imprinted by a small mouth on his bare skin. From this moment Reinhold was more deeply attached to him than ever. He had a foreboding that he himself would never reach this goal that defied his imagination and made him tremble at the mere thought for secret joy and fear. Hence he was proud to be going to the war in the

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company of a man like Kranz.

It is true that they all, without excepting Reinhold, frequently talked in a way that suggested an early and rapturous experience of the other sex; and the jokes they retailed in this connexion, often in the open light of day, would have made a harlot blush. In fact, however, the hundred or two boys who were then marching through Artois to join their regiment knew little or nothing of these matters from their own experience.

Yet there was one among them who knew something, more indeed than the Bridal Wreath himself. Or perhaps he, too, knew nothing, but merely plodded on like a horse and had forgotten all about it long since. It was Dörries; and he was the father of two stout boys, the children of a servant in his father's house. No one but Kranz, who lived in the same town, knew about it. And he kept the secret. It was also the secret, or at least the chief reason, of his dislike of Dörries. For it irked him greatly that he should have so little advantage in his affairs with women over such a stolid dolt. He could put down Dörries' success to nothing but persistence and physical importunity; and in this he was right.

Orders to entrain for the front had come through without warning, and Reinhold kept thinking of that day as he marched behind the idiotically smiling Dörries and Kranz whose silence was profound. The knife, for example, which he had pushed down the leg of his boot pressed on his calf and began to hurt him as he walked. He had bought it, only a few hours before they marched off, from Herr Siebenmühl who kept a shop where you could buy soldiers' necessaries and articles of equipment.

It was a knife with a fixed blade, a small sword indeed, about a foot long, furnished with a jagged stag's-horn handle which was more romantic to look at than comfortable to hold. A little tongue of bright red flannel was impaled on the blade with the object of preventing damp getting into the leather sheath.

"Look at the shape of the blade, my young hero," Herr Siebenmühl had said, going on to demonstrate to Reinhold that it might be thought of as a rhomboid—a form that made the knife particularly appropriate to hand-to-hand encounters, "for we don't of course want a bread knife—no, no, not a bread knife."

Reinhold had not known what to reply; he did not welcome the thought of hand-to-hand encounters, for he had small hope of tackling a grown man hand-to-hand even with a knife whose blade was rhomboidal in form.

Reinhold was seventeen years old, not very tall and rather narrow-shouldered. He had had his hair cut so short that it looked almost white against his thin and serious boy's face. He spoke very fast and eagerly and this made him stammer and trip over his words. He had a lively imagination which had tormented him from boyhood with forebodings of death and pain to come. Hence he was very fond of talking and often could not help expressing himself in a cheeky and impudent way; for as long as he was talking he could be merry and that was what he liked. When the news of war came he was lying in bed and shamming sick. Then he suddenly had the feeling of lying on his death-bed and wept for a while from exaltation and self-pity. Afterwards, however, he could not rest until he got to the regimental depot of the garrison and was allowed to put on a faded tunic smelling of sweat and leather and polish which still bore the name of its late owner sewn into the lining. It was printed on a square linen tab with a black surround like a death announcement.

And then one day the moment came when they fell in in two ranks along the interminable corridor of the barracks; and Lieutenant Wessel, who, owing to an abdominal wound which had never healed properly, was fit only for garrison duty, inspected them with a ceremonious but very grave air, wearing a helmet and white gloves. Then he began to read out from a small blue note-book the names of those who were on the draft.

An immense elation had taken possession of them that day. Instead of speaking they addressed one another in shouts. Their arms swept the air like sword blades and their eyes burned too brightly. It was as though their instinct warned them that their fate was sealed and they strove against it with all their might. So they gave their voices full play, perhaps for the last time, and let their eyes glance with all the joy of life. It was this, too, that made each one leap from the ranks with a bound as his name was called as if an abyss had to be cleared, and answer to it with a shout.

This was how it was that little Ziemerer lost his balance and fell headlong on the boarded floor of the corridor. The boards had been trodden and scoured by generation after generation of soldiers long since forgotten, and only the nails that fastened the boards down maintained the original level, each surrounded by a little mound of wood. But on this occasion Ziemerer's tumble aroused no laughter. They were all silent and looked to the front to avoid each other's eyes. Wessel also, merely gave a fleeting glance, passing it over with an upward twitch of his left eyebrow, and then his voice broke the silence as he called out the next man's name. Ziemerer, with the marks of the nails on his face and some of the sand off the floor round his mouth, got to his feet looking a little paler than usual, brushed the dust from his trousers and stepped back into the ranks with lips tightly drawn in.

Later Reinhold went to his pack and took out of it the box containing his washing things, also a small looking-glass and a long, narrow notebook with the word *Diary* printed on it above the flags of the allied armies waving in the wind. As, however, they were crossed, the artist had thought proper to give a separate and opposing wind to each of the two flapping banners. Reinhold put all these articles back on the top shelf of his cupboard at

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home, thinking that he would have no further use for them. Now he began to regret it and he decided to send home for them at the first opportunity.

## IV

It was a cold night in early spring and the stars climbed up the sky. Waiting with the rest among the ruins of a small village to be detailed for service with the different batteries of the regiment was Ziemerer. They all sat silent in a long row on the ground, sheltered from the wind by the wreckage of a house. Ziemerer only sat by himself on the far side of a ditch choked with debris. The collar of his voluminous grey overcoat was turned up and his helmet pushed down over his eyes, as though he wished to see nothing. His pack rested on his knees like a box and he hugged it jealously in his arms.

Ziemerer was not much liked. His body was short and so were his limbs and he had a long thin neck and a small face like a hare's with distrustful half-closed eyes. He came from a very poor home and his youth had been a hard and joyless one. For nine years he had gone to the grammar-school, where he had a scholarship, in the huge boots and the old clothes, cut down to fit him, which his elder brother had cast off. Hence he had become timid and secretly a little too pleased with himself, although when he raised his nose to sniff the air and glanced rapidly round with his furtive eyes he seemed to be on the scent of some concealed merriment at his own expense. Then while he was at the University he was left some money by an uncle and he decided to join a smart students' corps. Thus the Suebo-Vandalia became not merely the emblem but the very essence of his existence. The years he had lost in poverty receded as though by magic; and they were not really lost for they warmed and nerved him to sevenfold enjoyment of the passing hour when he sat at the bare wooden table of the Suebo-Vandalia club-room, amid the uproarious din and the smoke, and joined in the chorus in his croaking voice. "Was macht der Herr Papa?" they sang swaying in time. "Was macht die Frau Mama?" and then: "Was macht der Pi Pa Herr Papa, was macht die Mi Ma Frau Mama?" or: "Sassa Geschmauset, lasst uns nicht rappelköpfig sein!" On these occasions Ziemerer, like the rest, wore a braided jacket of hussar blue with black cording and a small brightly embroidered cap, and he too, like all the rest, loved everybody all round the table as he had never in his life loved anybody before. Every man of them was a Suebo-Vandal. And there he sat and knew no care except that all this should ever come to an end.

The cap was very small and as light as a feather, and it had to be worn on the back of the head. This made it necessary to walk with care even in the street—with a stiff neck and undeviating glance. And they had got the nickname, in the small university town, of head-back-balancers. For all that, Ziemerer's happiness lasted only for one term and then, like all the other Suebo-Vandals, he became a soldier.

He had kept his balanced gait, however, and one other peculiarity that did not make him popular with his fellows. Whenever he had the chance he slipped out of barracks to some little bar on the outskirts of the town and drank as much beer as he could hold or pay for. He did not enjoy it much all by himself, and it did not improve him either. Nevertheless he went back again and again and sat at the bar window with his eyes pinched up and drummed the tunes of the old songs with his fingers on the counter. He came back to barracks looking as white as a cheese but in fairly good order, balancing the back of his head on which was perched now a peakless forage-cap of faded blue. Unfortunately the iron beds were set in pairs one above the other like bunks, and it often happened that he had no time to climb down or else, fuddled with beer, forgot where he was in a manner that was thoroughly distressing for the fellow who was sleeping below.

So one night they all assembled before his bunk with candles and carpet-beating canes in their hands in order to tell him what they thought of him for bringing the whole room into disrepute by his disgusting habits. Ziemerer, his hair tousled, a malicious twinkle in his green eyes, and the bed clothes pulled up to the tip of his sharp nose, listened to their angry recriminations. "Now, children," he said thickly with a contemptuous wave of his hand as he lifted up his fuddled head, "clear out, all the lot of you. You're only small fry and poor things and you know nothing about it. No one who hasn't lived a student's life has lived at all or is worth talking to." But suddenly his face went an even deeper green and he uttered a cry of anguish like a wailing child; they scattered hastily in all directions as Ziemerer in his scanty night-shirt shot from his bunk like lightning and made for the door.

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After this he found every night that his bed had been lifted down and pushed into the corner behind the door with the pails and brooms. So there he lay by himself, unable sometimes to sleep for mortification. He did not consider either his debauches or their consequences as any dishonour, for it was not as though he drank for drinking's sake. He was merely holding aloft the banner of the Suebo–Vandalia in sadness and solitude and the others had no right to interfere with his ceremonial libations. Yet they most improperly menaced him with an apparition of the Holy Ghost, as whose ministrants they wielded carpet–beaters and leather belts, and he had to put up with it. He decided to demand satisfaction of them all with pistols after the war—in so far at least as they might by then have acquired the right to give it.

But what hurt him perhaps most of all was that he now shared no longer in the talks that were often kept up far into the night, nor in all the childish fun for which their exuberant youth still found energy after the hard day's training. For in reality he had remained a child and would dearly have liked to join in. He seemed to go suddenly deaf when they all laughed, or he tried to express his bottomless contempt for the whole world in general, and for all of it that was not Suebo–Vandalia in particular, by turning down the corners of his mouth and, when the occasion seemed to warrant it, by a repeated puffing through his nose.

At last, he scarcely exchanged a word with any of them and lived a life entirely apart from theirs. More and more frequently he returned to his corner among the brooms with signs of his ceremonial debauches on his face, taking care only to keep his head correctly balanced through the shifting haze of beer.

Now, however, the beautiful Kranz strode abruptly up to him in the darkness and bent right down to look in his face.

"That you, Ziemerer?" he asked. "Come over to us, man. We shall be falling in any moment and we want to make sure of all getting to the same battery."

Ziemerer got up, pushed back his helmet and without raising his eyes stared at Kranz's chest. With a sideways gesture of his hands he tried to express his contempt for this overture. Fortunately, however, the sleeves of his coat came down over his fingers and so Kranz was not able to make much of his gesture and perhaps did not wish to.

"Have a smoke, Ziemerer?" he asked under cover of the darkness, and held out a packet of cigarettes. Ziemerer seemed to have become suddenly hoarse.

"With pleasure. Many thanks," he croaked, making a curt bow and raising his hand to the rim of his helmet. He trembled so violently that he knocked the packet out of Kranz's hand. "Oh," he said helplessly with a foolish laugh, and as both bent down their heads collided with a crash that sent their helmets rolling in the mud. Fortunately Reinhold came along. The others had sent him after Kranz, for every one of the two hundred nursed a burning desire to be sent to the same battery as the Bridal Wreath. Reinhold gladly unfastened the superfluously large electric torch which he carried about with him suspended between the second and fifth button of his tunic. This too had come from Siebenmühl's shop. Instead of a bulb it had a fine glass lens with a metal shutter over it painted grey, which could be shut down half way or three–quarter way or altogether. A second and not less valuable device made it possible to show a yellow, a green or a red light and the fortunes of the present war depended very largely, in Siebenmühl's opinion, on a proper use of these possibilities. The price of a torch like this was naturally considerable, and so, too, was its weight, as Reinhold had discovered; for he had worn it on his chest during the whole march in readiness for use. Now he was glad of an opportunity to use it. With secret joy he opened the shutter to three–quarters of its extent and after brief consideration chose the green light. Unfortunately, however, while they were all three searching the ground, Corporal Kompes came back with a strange N.C.O. He had gone off somewhere leading his horse and there had received orders to take the batch of recruits allotted to his battery up to the firing position that very night.

"Out with that light, you bloody fools," he said roughly. "Out with that light, and get ready to move off. You'll see your God soon enough without that."

Ziemerer of the Suebo–Vandalia, however, was from that moment one of the rest and they kept together until the end.

The four guns of the battery stood in an old bean-field. They were not dug in, but each was trellised over with laths and wire and bean stems tightly woven together and almost overgrown with quickly growing creepers which the gunners had sown. A cloth, painted green, hung by day in front of the muzzles. It was forbidden to remove it except when the guns were fired. This was not often in those days. The white ruins of a small farm were to be seen among some chestnut trees beyond the bean-field. The cellars at the back were used as dugouts by the gunners. When the alarm was sounded they rushed out pell mell and ran crowding on one another's heels round the building and across the open to the guns. Reinhold was detailed to the first gun under the command of Corporal Kompes; Ziemerer and the beautiful Kranz to the second, while Dörries, with his shooting spectacles, belonged to the fourth.

The first night did not promise well for Reinhold. Feeling his way down behind Kompes, he found himself in an underground chamber dimly illuminated by a smoky stable lantern. There at a table of rough planks sat a young soldier with a melancholy face and the headpiece of a telephone fixed over his ears. Now and again he wrote something down rapidly in a note-book. The forms of sleeping men could be discerned in the gloom beyond on a row of mattresses. They all lay on one side in the same position and there was no room between them. Reinhold greeted the man at the telephone with an embarrassed attempt at familiarity, and throwing off his pack and belt sat down near him at the table. But the other stared back with an almost menacing air; then shook his head over such effrontery and went on writing in his book.

He was a reservist called Pünnemann and he had been with the battery since the outbreak of war. Pünnemann was a model soldier and highly thought of by his fellows and his superior officers. He had shown that he could be relied upon on all occasions; at the same time he was not greatly liked. He lived in the constant expectation of death, and believed that happiness and enjoyment were the forerunners of fate. Hence he never laughed. He did not even smoke and never drank, either, when the others drank. Before the war he had long since forgotten the God of his youthful belief and never said a prayer. But after his first engagement his faith came back in full force; and he believed in a God who was lord and ruler of bullets and shells and had got into the habit of commending himself to him on every occasion.

"If God wills," he would say, "I will go back to-night and fetch the post," or: "If God wills I will go to the wagon-lines to-morrow and get a new pair of boots." Also he spoke in a subdued voice, trod noiselessly and moved about with caution, for though he called upon God in deadly earnest he had no desire to stand in need of his protection. It was only when jokes were made in his presence that he was roused to anger; and then the offenders were sternly told off. The lousy fools, he said, who found anything there to laugh at would soon meet with their reward, but he would teach them not to involve the innocent. And he had in truth taught them more than once, for he was a big fellow and as strong as a horse.

Reinhold's cheerful face enraged him at once, for he did not see that it disguised as much timidity as embarrassment. For the moment he said nothing and merely looked at him now and again in a threatening manner; but he regarded it as a proper punishment following upon the heels of frivolity when Reinhold shortly afterwards tried in vain to cut himself a slice from the ration loaf, which Kompes had put in front of him, with Herr Siebenmühl's knife. The rhomboidal shape of the blade now came out in its true colours. It was impossible to draw it across the loaf and all that Reinhold could do, while Pünnemann watched him with growing satisfaction, was to make a few crumbs and an ugly notch.

"Let me look at it," Kompes said after a moment. "A nice thing," he said as he examined it with envy, "but it's a hog-spear, not a bread-knife. What do you want with it here?" Reinhold had no idea. Feeling very foolish he wiped the moist crumbs off it and put it back in the leg of his boot. He was very hungry, but he could not bring himself to ask for another knife.

Kompes was very content to leave it at that. He had a knife so sharp that it went through a fresh army loaf as easily as through butter. He decided to lend it to the boy next time or to cut the bread for him himself. But not that

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night, for it was a fixed notion with Kompes that young soldiers had first of all to learn to know their God. He made frequent use of this expression and it embraced a great deal. The whole war, for example, had no other purpose whatever but to teach people to know their God. It was a bad sign, however, if they were too eager about it—a sign of youthful effrontery and pushfulness. For Kompes himself was no lover of this God; indeed he would have given a lot never to have been compelled to get to know him. However, there he was and Kompes had got used to him. He would not have been sorry if all recruits on their first appearance at the gun-position had received five-and-twenty on their backsides in the presence of the whole battery, in order to shorten the process of getting to know their God. After this preliminary he would have been ready to take charge of them forthwith like a father, and already he had carried more than one of them back at the risk of his life, when they were hit. Corporal Kompes was in the Landwehr and had a wife and seven children at home.

Later Reinhold came upon the others outside against the wall. The light of the moon was partly veiled in clouds, and for the first time they saw Very lights in the distance constantly rising and falling. A confused noise could be heard on all sides, the rumbling of wheels, and the tramp and clatter of men on the march quite close at hand. From far and near came calls and shouts, quavering and long-drawn-out, and now and then bullets whistled overhead. But they, shivering with cold and fatigue, the breath steaming from their mouths, stood silently together with their coat-collars turned up and looked anxiously into the distance. Dörries alone was as cheerful as ever. He had made up his mind that the enemy trenches over there were held by niggers. "They come over every night with knives," he told them with glee, and cut the sentries' throats. Then they crawl back taking the heads with them."

Reinhold gave a start, and had to lean against the wall for a moment. He felt as though a knife were being drawn across his throat. I have no luck, he thought as he lay down to sleep later on a mattress. Kompes had found a place for him between two bearded Landwehr men who had grunted and grumbled loudly in their sleep when they were pushed aside. Now he lay there not daring to move in case he disturbed them. All the same he was proud to lie between such fellows. He was still trembling and nearly in tears for rage and despair over himself.

The reason was that Reinhold before leaving the garrison had several times been detailed for sentry duty at the prisoners' hospital which was housed in a school vacated for that purpose. At that time Negroes and Arabs, whose wounds were not serious, were sent there. They were gigantic men, black or brown, with long legs and pink palms to their hands, and this made it seem as though the skin had been removed, so that they grasped with the naked flesh. They wore gaudy uniforms and glaring red headgear on their woolly scalps. When he went the round of the wards, which smelt like cages, they used to try to frighten him with wild gestures, and gibed at him in their chattering and clucking speech. But at night they went rustling and creeping down all the passages into the courtyard and assembled in the outbuildings where the closets were. There they held counsel or locked themselves in to practise their obscenities with one another. When according to orders he came on his rounds to this building they issued from it screaming and howling, and tried to entice him in with shameless noises.

Reinhold was afraid of them. He was armed only with his clumsy sabre on which the date 1813 was stamped. It was as heavy in his boyish grasp as a two-handed sword, and he had no idea how to use it if it came to a pinch. So, though he carried out his orders by going every half hour on his solitary rounds, he left them to do what they liked and reported nothing either, because he was ashamed of his helplessness. It was then early spring. Leaning against a tree he waited many a night with longing for the first note of the blackbird that began to sing while it was still dark from the gable of the building and announced the close of night's horrors while the stars went pale.

Reinhold lay awake for a long time. He had promised himself to be a good and brave soldier. But it was hard, and hours of agony went by before he could reconcile himself to the thought of dying by the hand of a black man, if so it had to be. At last with his face pressed against the broad shoulder of the man next him he fell asleep.



VI

In spite of all, however, he often in the days that followed felt an exhilaration rise within him such as he had never known in his life before. It was almost like sheer happiness. The round of duty, certainly, was merciless and those in command seemed to forget that sleep was as much a human necessity as food; or else they didn't care. Torn from a sleep of utter exhaustion, Reinhold stumbled off with the others to the guns or to the appointed fatigue He ached acutely in every limb, and soul and body were so deeply sunk in sleep that all he wished was to stop a bullet so that he might sleep on there and then for all eternity. But then came the compulsion to take hold of something and to brace his body to the strain of lifting some heavy load in the darkness that almost hid one man from the next or in the dim unshadowed light of early dawn.

And then a will to endure even when there seemed no point and no hope, a strength he had never known before, suddenly sprang to life in him. It started up almost like the rage of despair; he clenched his teeth together in an iron grip and his eyes smarted with tears. All the same the change to a deeper understanding went on and it made him glad.

Often, for example, they had to carry long heavy timbers, required for construction of all kinds, from one place to another under cover of darkness. Like huge compass needles they swung to and fro and up and down on his shoulders trying to force him from his path or throw him to the ground. But he held on and staggered aching under his load through the mud and over ditches and on into the darkness. As he went he uttered meaningless words and whole sentences in time with his breathing. "In Hindustan," he panted as the unplanned wood grazed his cheek, "the fun began," or "He sank to rest on his mother's breast." How the nonsense came into his head he did not know. But they were words of magic and he repeated them over and over again until he could throw down his load at the end of the journey. Sometimes he met the Bridal Wreath there, or little Ziemerer. But they did not wait or set off again at a leisurely pace. Silently and with long strides they ran back through the darkness to fetch another load. Then he, too, let the bit of wood slip quickly from his shoulder and stumbled on breathlessly behind them as though a great joy awaited him.

Another time a heavy trench-mortar which had got stuck in a shell-hole to one side of the battery had to be hauled out on long ropes. A dozen or so gunners pulled on each at the command of a little officer. "Heave!" he shouted to give the time, bending at the knees and swaying like a dancer. The grey coil of men in the sallow light of dawn bowed forward and then tugged in one heave; and the monster of steel at which they pulled reared itself higher and higher out of its hole. Reinhold strained on the rope till his ears sang and his veins threatened to burst. Ziemerer was next to him. His face was as white as chalk and sweat streamed down under his cap, but he laughed and screwed up his eyes whenever Reinhold looked at him.

Kranz alone seemed this time to be half-hearted. His face was calm and his skin dry. He seemed to be sparing himself, or play-acting, as we used to say in those days when a man took it easy while cleverly assuming an air of great energy. But later when they sat together outside the dugout, it was found that the skin of his palms was torn to ribbons and bleeding.

Reinhold loved his country and believed in the righteousness of its cause. It is true that he was very little acquainted with it, and knew no more of it than a boy of his age could. He loved it as a God whom he had never seen and who had never declared himself to him. Perhaps that was just why he loved it so much.

He had never forgotten a story with the title "God sees all," in the reading book of his earliest schooldays. It told of a little boy who crept into his mother's storeroom to steal some sweetened cream. Suddenly he felt the eye of God directed upon him, and putting the bowl of cream back upon the shelf he crept out of the room again. The notion of a God who had created the world and yet regarded a small boy in his mother's storeroom had deeply stirred Reinhold, and this God filled him both with wonder and fear.

Later the time came when he ceased to believe in him, or indeed in anything else. But at once the fear came upon him, and also a complete lack of zest over all he set about to do, for he did not know what would come of him in the end. He could not help thinking again and again of the end, though he could not imagine how it would

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be. Listless and absorbed, he let his last years at school pass by like a dream. He liked best to stare at the eddying snow—flakes outside the window, sifted down and passing away, or at the never resting, ever changing play of the leaves on the trees. But even then the thought of God who saw all often made him uneasy and filled him sometimes with a secret yearning.

Then came the war; and his country was revealed to him as a God who saw all—even him; and watched how he behaved and bore himself, first in the barrack square and on the gunnery range, and now in this bean—field and in the landscape of Artois that extended beyond it. And sometimes it made him happy to think of it.

How it was with the others, he did not know. But little Ziemerer was no longer ill—tempered and distrustful. He had become good—humoured and obliging and often, as though for some reason of his own, smiled to himself with his screwed—up eyes and twisted lips; and the beautiful Kranz skinned his hands in the darkness when nobody saw or gave him credit for it. But they never spoke to one another of all this, and never to the end said a word of their country and its cause.

## VII

In those days the front was very quiet and the enemy sent very few shells over. Only the long distance batteries sought each other out and their shells came and went from far behind and far in front, crossing high in the air. But now and then bursts of shrapnel made a swirl of smoke right over the camouflaged guns or in front of the grove of chestnuts. In groups of four or six they burst with sudden unexpectedness in the vacant sky. A yellow flash quivered earthwards, then passed in smoke and dispersed almost with an effect of exhilaration, and then fresh bursts hovered and unfolded above the deserted fields. The old soldiers in those days cared little for them and soon the newcomers grew accustomed to this phenomenon too, as they did to a lot else on the ground and above it.

Gunner Biene alone betrayed an unceasing anxiety. Gunner Biene belonged to Reinhold's gun and shared the same dugout. He was the tallest man in the battery even if not the handsomest. His exaggeratedly long legs were certainly parallel with one another, but unfortunately, instead of being straight, they had a double curve like the handles of spoons lying together in a case. They were surmounted by a short body with a chest thrown into exaggerated prominence by an arched back. His hair was in tight curls and as red as a fox's and he had a moustache of the same colour, carefully twirled up into points above his fleshy lips. His face was snow white as though dusted with lime. Biene was a painter by trade and had volunteered at the beginning of the war. In spite of all his efforts he had never got used to the gun-fire. He had now been nearly six months at the front and had been often in action without disgracing himself. But he had never learnt to distinguish between the flight of his own and the enemy's shells or to foretell whether a shell would pitch near by or far off. In any case, whether it was due to a defect of hearing or whether he wished to exclude the possibility of error, he never failed at the first whisper in the air to throw himself down full length on the ground and to remain there until the explosion was over. Hence even on the quietest days he was always in a state of exhaustion.

"I don't like the look of it," Biene said to Reinhold one night, when the hail of shrapnel had been worse than usual. "I don't like the look of it. There's something coming. They've got something on. You wait. Before we know where we are they'll be on us. And then we'll be written off, all the lot of us. I know what I'm talking about, for this is how it always starts. You don't suppose they have their eyes open to notice anything. They've never noticed anything yet." Biene meant the artillery observation officers and the battery staff, which were quartered a few hundred yards to one side of the battery and gave the orders to fire.

Reinhold, too, nursed similar apprehensions. Still as on the first day he saw a lot happening all round him that he couldn't understand, for no one thought of explaining to him what it was all about. It was much the same as the day when he played his first game of football. He had never even heard the rules, but he did not wish to confess his ignorance and hoped that he would be able to understand the game by the light of nature. But the opposite was the case. He ran impetuously after the ball and gave it a kick whenever he could reach it, but he was only in the way of the others and got nothing but curses and blows for his pains.

Nevertheless he saw a lot else that he understood very well and it made him feel apprehensive and perplexed when he thought of his country that saw all. Many a night as he lay on his mattress he could not help imagining what he would do if he were a general or the Kaiser. He always came to the same conclusion—that he would arrange a great many things very differently.

And then there came the night when he was destined to bring down the rage of the whole battery on his head. Perhaps the misfortune had already begun at roll-call, which took place under the chestnuts behind the farm. The Commanding Officer had come over from his observation post for the occasion. He was an earnest man with deepset grey eyes in a sun-burnt face. His features expressed hard-won resolution, he was a lieutenant in the reserve and a solicitor in a small Rhineland town. His men loved him and had the utmost confidence in him, Gunner Biene, in spite of his many apprehensions, not excepted. They called him a fine fellow or, in order to give him even higher commendation, a fine dog. All the same, only the older men had the right to allude to him thus. Dörries, for example, who was eager to repeat what he heard others saying because he had so little to say of his

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own, remarked one evening that he was glad to belong to a battery commanded by such a fine dog. His remark was not received with the approval he expected. He was told at once that he would get one in the jaw if he ever again dared to liken the Lieutenant to a dog. Dörries did not understand the reproof, but was very glad to hold his tongue.

Reinhold had only encountered the Lieutenant once or twice, but these few occasions were enough to inspire a secret hero-worship. On this particular occasion the officer had already inspected each gun section and received the customary reports, when he observed Reinhold's cap. Reinhold had lately taken to wearing it cocked over his left ear as he had observed was done in the infantry. He meant to express by this that he was now to be reckoned among the war-tried veterans.

The Lieutenant, however, was terribly upset that evening. A young officer on his staff, whom he had loved like a brother, had just been shot in the stomach by a stray bullet and had bled to death there and then at his side. Without knowing it, he was ready now to relieve his feelings upon anyone, innocent or guilty, who came in his way. Hence he fell suddenly upon Reinhold and told him off because of his cap. They were the Prussian army, not a troop of gypsies, he said. He forbade such pantomime once for all. He would never tolerate the least lack of discipline in his battery. What did he mean by wearing his cap in that incredible manner? Was it out of defiance? This was a war, a war in bloody earnest, and not a fancy-dress ball. Hadn't he realized that yet? Thus he went on for some time, adding to Reinhold's pain by addressing him cuttingly as sir. The Second Lieutenant, who was that day in command of the guns, stood behind him meanwhile with his note-book in his hand and tried in vain to look unconcerned.

Reinhold stood by himself three paces to the front and could not understand it a bit. I didn't mean it, he thought with smarting eyes. I meant to be a good soldier, on my word of honour, and not a gypsy. I take great pains, as everyone admits, but you have never noticed that. Meanwhile he kept silence, as discipline obliged him to do, and taking off his cap put it on straight.

Kranz, too, wore his cap at an angle. Everyone now looked in his direction. He stepped three paces smartly out from the ranks and came to attention at Reinhold's side.

The Lieutenant stepped back and looked at him from head to foot with half-closed eyes.

"Oh," he said in a quieter voice, "and what do *you* want? What's this tomfoolery?" he then suddenly bellowed. "Get back into the ranks—march"

Kranz made an exemplary right-about-turn and marched back to his place. The end of it was that Reinhold had to spend that night on guard at the guns in full marching order, helmet on his head and bayonet at his side—as a field punishment.

When the men had been dismissed and were crowding round for their letters outside the dugouts, the Commanding Officer came along again. He walked backwards and forwards under the trees and wiped the leather band inside his cap with a white pocket handkerchief. While he did so he glanced irresolutely across at the men. When the Second Lieutenant sprang smartly towards him he hastily motioned him away, put on his cap and went slowly away holding his riding switch by the loop.

## VIII

The night was dark and starless. From time to time rain came down in a drizzle. Reinhold went to and fro behind the guns in the sallow, hovering gleam of the Very lights which alternated with a darkness all the more intense. He had fastened the chin-strap of his helmet tightly beneath his chin, and he wore his belt with the heavy revolver in its leathern holster and his bayonet and canvas haversack over which hung the water-bottle, according to the regulations at that time for men on sentry duty. But he did not find that his equipment weighed on him. Rather, the tight strap round his chin and the loaded belt filled him with a secret warlike joy. His face was set and now when no one saw him his step was lighter and more elastic than in broad daylight. And yet there was another feeling—almost a physical sensation. It seemed to come more or less from where his heart was and to spread from there through his whole being. It was not quite unlike the physical effect of fear and yet it was quite different, for it neither impeded his movements nor made him tremble as fear would. He felt it without knowing what it was. It was really the nearness of death and the consent of his being to take death upon it.

Sometimes Reinhold went beneath the trellised camouflage of one of the guns. There was a smell of oil and grease there as in a workshop. He laid his hand on the metal of the breech which seemed to exude a cold sweat, and felt the leather of the lanyard. Sometimes, too, he shone Siebenmühl's electric torch along one of the muzzles. They were inclined slightly upwards and all loaded, as the order was for every night. There was a confused noise from some distant part of the front. Otherwise all was so still that Reinhold could hear now and then the gentle whisper of the rain in the grass and on the leaves.

All at once a machine-gun started up in front and as suddenly ceased. An isolated report or two followed, and then there was silence again. Soon after there were four noiseless flashes right in front; then a hundred times in one moment the flashes from the muzzles of the enemy's guns quivered a sword's length sheer into the sky in front of him and as far as he could see to right and left. Instantly hundreds of Very lights soared and spread their ghastly, quavering illumination and every rifle and machine-gun opened fire at its utmost rapidity. In a moment the whole front was in a tumult. It blazed and groaned and shook with explosions. There was a shrill whistling and a screaming like the screaming of cats; green lights hung linked in the air and the ghostly patter of the spent fuses danced on the camouflage.

Reinhold's first feeling was that something must be done at once or else the golden opportunity would be lost. A phrase from the gunnery regulations also shot dimly through his head. It said that a good soldier when left to his own resources must know of himself what to do. So without the loss of a moment he rushed to the nearest gun and fired it. Half dazed by the terrific report he staggered from under the camouflage and went on to the next. When he had fired the last of the four it occurred to him that according to regulations he ought first to have given the alarm. Shouting as he ran, he made across the open for the dugouts. Meanwhile the gunners were already stampeding round the corner of the ruined farm, scattering fan-wise as each ran to his own gun.

Reinhold glowed with ardour. Perhaps the ghost of a young Commander-in-Chief or some happy warrior of olden time, awakened from its long sleep, hovered over the fields of Artois and kindled his boyish soul. "Come on, boys. Give them hell. There's a scrap on over there." With this he turned back, as he was in danger of being swept off his feet, and hurried after them. But they did not hear him. In the raging din not one of them had been able to recognise the report of their own guns and, perhaps, half dazed with sleep, they did not even see he was there.

"Stand to your guns," now roared out Lieutenant Engels who was in command of the guns that night. He gave the first range and target and they quickly turned the little wheels of the sights, leaning half over the handspike in a fever of excitement. Then when the command rang out they pulled off and pulled yet again, for they thought the striker had refused to act as had often happened before. Meanwhile instead of the expected thunderous report they heard only the striker's hollow clack. At each gun the gunners began to blame each other and to flash their torches into each other's eyes, and each had a different way of accounting for the misfire. Besides all this, they were drunk with sleep and half stunned by the ceaseless flash and thunder of explosions all round them, and so it went on

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beneath the camouflage of every gun for a considerable while until one found out that a barrel was hot, another opened the breach and a third burnt his hand on the smoking shell—case that was then at once ejected.

During all this time the Second Lieutenant was kneeling behind the battery with the telephone receiver clapped over his ears. Engels was a man with a pointed white beard who had seen years of service. He was a soldier to the backbone. Long before the war he had put in twelve years' service with the army as a non-commissioned officer, some of them under the old Kaiser. Earlier he had been proud of this and on ceremonial occasions had been glad to display the gilt medal with the medallion of the old Emperor on the obverse side. Nor had he let himself be put out of countenance by the jesters who were accustomed to call this medal the Order of the Orange on account of its reddish gold colour and the frequency of its occurrence. Since the outbreak of the war, however, he had not been able to feel the same pride in it; and indeed he underwent a singular transformation which made him look with positive pain on his military past. For now though he wore the epaulet of a lieutenant, he had to make it clear to everyone by a small trefoil on his collar that he was not the same as a real lieutenant. This irked him all the more because he held the young war-time officers in secret contempt and was in fact far superior to them in military experience and capacity—and yet at the same time there was nothing he more ardently desired than to wear a collar, minus the trefoil, like theirs. So he seized every opportunity of showing up and putting the young officers silently to shame. Opportunities were not lacking, but somehow he had never yet found any real relief.

Now, as he knelt there, he was always starting up as though to run to the nearest gun, but he could not leave his post and was compelled to kneel down again. "Here, sir," he yelled down the telephone, and then shouted to the gunners: "Why don't you fire? Are you out of your minds? From the left—first gun—fire, damn you." Then with a curse he had to be silent for he heard the commanding officer's voice at his ear who, in turn, was in a fever to know why the battery was not firing, and promised them all a court martial and incarceration as lunatics without fail on the following morning.

It was utterly in vain that Reinhold tried to make himself understood. As white as a corpse and in utter consternation at what he had done, he went up to the lieutenant time after time. But the old fellow was bobbing up and down and twirling around in despair, and though Reinhold stood to attention and shouted: "Excuse me, sir, I have fired the guns already—all four of them," he was either not heard or not understood and at last he turned away and tramped off to his gun. There, meanwhile, the puzzle had been solved, a fresh shell was slid into the breech and the first discharge thundered out, followed by the flash and roar of the others. But in the brief pause before the next round Corporal Kompes had time to rush out from beneath the awning. With blows and kicks he drove Reinhold away from the heap of shells piled up behind, where he was trying to be of some use, and threatened to fell him to the ground if he ever laid a finger on a gun again. It was the same when Reinhold ran off to the other guns. After every round they turned on him with abuse and drove him off, threatening him with the direst penalties if he dared so much as touch their gun or their ammunition. They called him every name they could lay their tongues to and asked him again and again what he thought he was doing there.

What indeed? Girt about with iron, with his helmet pressed down over his boyish face, he crouched trembling in a shallow ditch behind his comrades who sprang shouting to and fro; and he was no use to anyone. The air was rent with the uproar, showers of earth pattered on his tin helmet, clods hit him between the shoulders like blows of a fist and took away his breath. At last he was ordered back to his gun by the lieutenant to carry ammunition. They had had their first casualty. So up he got and began to lug the heavy shell—baskets along. They were made of withies and each one contained two shells and the two cartridges belonging to them. They weighed little less than Reinhold himself. He bent down and put his arms round them, for he had not the strength to hoist them on to his shoulder as the older men did. To prevent the basket bearing him down, he leant his body back and walked with his knees bent outwards, as you see in a music-hall turn when a man juggles with heavy iron weights. So he went on till morning—staggering from a hollow to one side of the battery with a basket clasped to his chest; when he got to the gun he shook out the shells and went back with the empty basket to the hollow to fetch another.

On each journey he passed Gunner Biene, sometimes treading on one of his hands or kicking him in the face without meaning to. Gunner Biene, according to his usual practice, had often flung himself down in the course of the night. Once he must have lain there too long or perhaps he wished to take a short rest in safety. Anyway, he got the full charge of a shrapnel shell like a shower-bath of lead as he lay full length, and was peppered all over. He managed, however, to sit up and utter one long cry of astonishment and lament, as though this was not the way he should have been treated. Then he fell forward again on his face and died.

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Not far from him the reservist, Pünnemann, sat hunched on the ground. His head was tightly pressed to his knees which he embraced with his arms. He had begged piteously to be left sitting in this position, because it was not God's will that he should live any longer if he were moved. A splinter of steel a foot long had hit him between the shoulder-blades and stuck there like an arrow. No one dared to touch him and there Pünnemann remained till sunrise. Then he breathed his last.

At last, however, the firing ceased. For a while they all stayed crouching by the guns in silence, rubbing their eyes. Their faces were blackened in patches into which the sweat had trickled. Then the order came to move off. They took the dead with them and laid them down for the while on the grass, covered with ground sheets, and over these they put some of the chestnut branches which had been shot from the trees during the night. Then sentries were posted and the rest turned in to sleep.

IX

The next afternoon Reinhold was sitting on the ground against a wall by himself. He had long since been deserted by that ghost from the happier wars of times past. The sun was hot and it was so still among the ruined buildings that nothing might ever have happened. Most of the gunners slept on as though they would never wake, or, if they had awoken, they slept again. Others sat and lay about in the grass, silent and unsociable like himself, reading letters or writing home. He had spoken to no one and no one seemed to pay any attention to him.

Not far from him Dörries knelt in a hole half overgrown with grass and weeds which had probably been made months ago, perhaps in the autumn before, by the explosion of a heavy shell. His shooting spectacles were on his nose and he wore suspended by a leather strap from the top button of his tunic an iron implement like the key of a hydrant. In front of him was a shell, painted bright blue with brass fuse. Beside him on the slope of the shell-hole sat Kranz in an attitude of careless ease, smoking cigarettes and giving directions between the puffs without raising his voice. Then Dörries bent zealously over the fuse of the shell with the fuse-key in his hand and tried to adjust it to the required range and manner of explosion.

Dörries, too, had had a bad time of it the night before. A gunner of his gun was wounded not long after the shelling began. Whereupon Dörries was ordered to take over the adjustment of the fuses. He had been secretly afraid of this for a long time. The fuse-caps of the shells were stamped with a number of figures and marks according to which they could be adjusted in various manners so that the enemy might get the explosion from the air either forwards or backwards; or, again, the explosion might be delayed until after the shell had struck the trench. These various alternatives combined with alterations of the range were more than Dörries found himself able to cope with on the spur of the moment.

So under cover of the night he began making a few adjustments at random. In the initial confusion they were unobserved, or, if they were observed, it was only by the Bavarian infantry who manned the trenches a few thousand yards in front. Soon, however, Dörries proceeded to shoot only with shrapnel fire. The red mark that indicated this manner of fire was particularly deeply indented and not easy to miss. Meanwhile, after a third shot had exploded almost as soon as it left the muzzle, his eccentric behaviour was discovered and Dörries was forcibly removed from having charge of the fuse-key. The officer in command of the gun added the threat of handing him over to the Bavarian infantry next day.

However, at the end of the morning, when everyone except the posts were asleep Kranz waked him and set himself the task of giving him a little instruction. He patiently corrected the mistakes that Dörries made again and again, and with apparent indifference kept on repeating the same command in a sing-song voice till Dörries carried it out. In the intervals while Kranz thought over his next command Dörries gazed up at him in silence. The sun flashed on his glasses; his mouth, as always, was open; and the spittle ran down over his downy chin. His face was full of trust and admiration.

Now and then Reinhold raised his eyes and looked absent-mindedly down at them. Then he fixed his gaze again on a small piece of paste-board in his hand and turned it this way and that. It was the photograph of a young girl, who, with face bent, smiled up at the beholder.

A baggage-cart had driven up in the quiet of midday and a young driver with heavy, immobile features had handed over a post-bag to the man on guard. He had reddish hair and his face was covered all over with freckles. His name was Dull and he was to take back the dead. He had already lost two brothers in the same regiment. For this reason he had been attached to the wagon-lines in a village a good way back. He had a little workshop near the church and there he made all kinds of wooden implements for the use of the battery. He was a skilled carpenter by trade. He made coffins out of unplanned planks and light crosses of pine wood on which the name of the unit and the year were ready painted. He always had a good stock in hand when times were quiet and sent out supplies of them to all the units in the Division. He lived a somewhat solitary life as on account of his trade none of the soldiers in the back areas wanted to have anything to do with him. He felt this deeply, for he was an earnest and industrious young man who had always had a passionate desire to talk of the subtleties of his craft; and he had



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a mastery of it that few even of his fellow-craftsmen could equal. He now brought the same connoisseurship to all that concerned the dead, of whom he took scrupulous care, and was always glad to talk about them, in every aspect, and about the art of the undertaker as well.

With a professional air he inspected the two who had fallen, and while he removed the branches that still covered them, he explained that haste was called for. The warm weather, he said, and a thunderstorm perhaps on the way too—that was the worst of all. They could never stand that.

"Look here," he said with ready fluency to Reinhold, who, with Ziemerer and one or two others, went to give him a hand, "look here—that's how it is, my friend. You're still young, I see, and have life still before you. But one day it'll be your turn, if I haven't shut up shop myself by then."

With that he took the dead Pünnemann carefully below the neck, as though he was afraid of hurting or startling him, and looked in his face, shaking his head. "My God, Pünnemann," he said in his Rhineland speech as he slipped the end of a ground sheet deftly under his head, "my God, what days to be young in." After this Dull kept silence, and soon Gunner Biene and Reservist Pünnemann lay face to face under the tilt between the sideboards of the long cart. But as they were both tall men, their boots on which the mud of the rainy night was caked to white chalk stuck out at the back. When the horses set off over the churned up ground the feet of the dead men began to waggle as though life had come back to them.

Reinhold had had a letter and he gave a violent start when he recognised Liselotte's writing on the envelope. Liselotte was a friend of his sister's and he had secretly loved her ever since he had met her for the first time at a tea-party in his parents' house. On that occasion he had peeped through the keyhole, and there was her face so close that he thought she must have seen him too. Surrounded by a halo of bright hair, it seemed to shine through in a haze of gold. It was as though her picture hung on a black wall that went on to infinity on either side and as though candles, invisible to him, stood lighted in front of it had transformed it to a shimmering unattainability. For a long time he stood bent to the keyhole with beating heart until the small, keen draught that blew steadily through the aperture made his eyes water. Later, he made a habit of leaving the house when she was coming to visit them, but he always arranged it so that he met her on the door-step. Also he never failed to make all kinds of dark hints to his sister about his departure from the house and the way that he would certainly and infallibly go. Meanwhile Liselotte neither tried to detain him on the doorstep nor made any enquiry as to his errand, and so he stood for long hours not far from the house, hidden in the doorway of Pieper's shop, and kept a look-out on the windows behind which he knew that the two girls were, and suffered cruel pangs. When he was older he tried other means of declaring his love. With an immeasurable arrogance he spoke of the moral inferiority, nay, of the utter depravity that was woman's natural lot. He culled all this from various philosophical works, and his heart ached, while, masked by a scientific frigidity, he gave the two girls an exact account of the true character of women. He imagined himself to be speaking of the life of ants or the habits of the nomadic Kurds. He swore, too, that no woman should ever have power over him. His eyes had been opened in good time. But Liselotte heard his oath without any sign of regret.

All the same, something like a secret friendship began between them at this time. They skated on the ice and she took his hand into her muff; and she peeled apples and cracked nuts for him, looking mysteriously at him all the time.

Perhaps, after all, it was love. Yes, certainly it was love. He had never doubted this at the bottom of his soul even though the might of circumstance ordained that no word and no kiss could then seal the bond. Or might he count the three kisses imprinted with cool, half-smiling lips on his cheek in the way his sister kissed him, or the kiss she gave him when they said good-bye on the platform before he left? And had that really been a good-bye at all—with everyone laughing and shouting as the train steamed out and no one having a doubt of his return? It was no more than if they were leaving to go into camp. perhaps Gunner Biene and Reservist Pünnemann had one time or other left for manoeuvres in just the same way.

Certainly he had scarcely ever thought of her since. Only now and then, when he squeezed himself in between the Landwehremen, his whole being blazed up in longing for her. But it lasted only for a moment while he pressed his head against the broad shoulder of the man next him. Then sleep came down and swept away past and present in one.

And now he held her letter in his hand, hesitating before he opened it. The last months had been years, and had not the time come for an avowal? He murmured over to himself the words that her letter must surely contain,

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words of tenderness and warm affection, yes—words of passion. He almost felt himself repaid by them for the night past and it was long before he ventured to open the envelope. When he did so he found that it contained nothing but her photograph. He read once more the hurried words written on the back: "For dear Reinhold, with an affectionate greeting from beautiful Remagen. Long life and victory. Liselotte." And along the side "To-morrow we're off to Rudesheim."

So there he sat, the dear Reinhold. To-morrow they were off to Rudesheim. In the air there was still the same sickly odour of explosives. He could smell it too on the sleeve of his tunic when he passed it across his face. It was just the very smell of the caps in the little round pink boxes with the virulent green lids that he used long ago to shoot off in his toy cannons.

That night had cost him much. He had lost the affection and even the respect of his fellows, and yet in truth he longed for their love and to be held in honour among them. And yet who could tell whether, by opening fire instantly, he had not achieved some result? God knew it and perhaps, too, his country might know it. But what did this little goose with her three lines know of all that? How did she know that he was not already among the dead. She was an insignificant little creature, and now, unfortunately, she had made it only too clear. But soon he began upon a secret justification of her behaviour, and his nostrils started to quiver again and he had to wipe them with his sleeve.

Meanwhile Corporal Kompes came walking towards him. He had taken off his Hussar tunic on account of the heat and wore a sweater with blue and white stripes which was stretched tightly over his chest and had clearly been intended for a boy. Reinhold got to his feet and stood to attention.

"Young man," said Kompes gently as he laid his hand on his shoulder, "young man, you're a terror. You want to win the war all by yourself. However, we'll say no more about it. There are plenty of others out for the Iron Cross. Go slow, I tell you; that's the way for young colts. Got a cigarette for an old fellow?"

And now the others came lounging up as though at a pre-arranged signal, all the old soldiers who had driven him away from their guns with blows and curses. Absent-mindedly, as they came along quite by chance, they kicked in front of them the fuses or cartridges that lay about, or knocked up shell splinters out of the grass with their feet or kept an eye out for aeroplanes. Many of them, like Corporal Kompes, wore boys' sweaters which almost burst over their chests. Others had bright coloured woollen cardigans on, or overalls of faded blue, and the first gunner of the third gun had his braces on over a gaily embroidered old-fashioned waistcoat of black velvet with a silver watchchain dangling from it. Round their necks they wore the grey collar-slips, *[Note]* and on their heads the little caps with the coloured cockades above the middle of their foreheads. Their faces were lean and serious.

*[Note]* A bib worn under the upright collar of the uniform.

"All sorts o' stuff," they muttered and by this they might have meant the whole war or the events of the past night. Or else they said: "Meine Herren!"—for this was the form of address they liked best to use among themselves. They felt, too, that it adequately expressed their views about the scrap of the night before. For the first time they treated Reinhold as one of themselves. But some merely stood there without uttering a word, listening, and looking from one to another. When they encountered Reinhold's eyes they gave an awkward laugh under their moustaches and scratched themselves and nodded at him.

X

Nevertheless, from this night onwards, Reinhold began to lose the feeling of happiness and comradeship which he had known in the early days, and soon quite other feelings arose and tortured him with a vehemence he had never thought possible.

For a while, certainly, the enemy did not renew the attack and once more the days passed in comparative peace. The battery seldom fired a shot, and scarcely a shell fell in its immediate neighbourhood, but now each one made them nervy, for any single shell from the other side might announce the imminent renewal of an attack which had only been temporarily broken off. Hence they all kept quite still whenever the white or blackish brown puffs of smoke appeared, and listened as though listening for signs of bad weather; or else they stood in groups with puckered eyes and tight lips behind cover from which they could see the front and try to ascertain the exact spot where the shells exploded. Then they argued with one another about the conclusions that might be drawn.

Engels, too, had a report brought to him of every shell that pitched near by, and instantly appeared each time at the entrance of his dugout, his cap in his hand, and waited there with a deeply puzzled look on his face till all was quiet again.

Sometimes even the Commanding Officer came across from the observation post and had a detailed report made to him. Once he assembled the whole battery under the chestnut trees and made a speech. He stood balanced forward on his toes as he spoke, with his elbows close to his side, incessantly looking from one to another of the half circle standing round him and twitching his face in quick spasmodic jerks. He wished, he said, to thank the battery for its magnificent behaviour. It was an honour to be in command of such men. Then he praised the dead as gallant and loyal soldiers whose memory the battery would ever hold in honour. Very probably, however, worse times lay ahead. They were opposed by a tried and obstinate foe. He asked therefore of each one of them an implicit obedience and an unflinching resolution in carrying out his duty "even," he added almost in a shout as though he brought it out with a great effort, "if it had to be, to the last man. You all know," he said in conclusion, in a calmer and almost embarrassed voice, "that you can count on no less from me." With this he took off his cap and began, according to his usual custom, to wipe the inner leather band with a white handkerchief.

"Aye, aye, sir," the gunners shouted in chorus. Dörries shouted louder than them all, for the speech, like almost everything else that happened, pleased him greatly. Reinhold, however, had not opened his lips. It seemed to him that the address had been aimed exclusively at him, and that the Commanding Officer had read his inmost soul.

It was some days now since Reinhold had begun to be afraid. Often he had to fight an almost insuperable longing to leave his post at his gun and run to the rear, back and back as far as his legs would carry him. He dreamt, too, in a half sleep, with intense longing of hiding himself in his father's garden till the war was over. He wanted to dig himself a hole behind the raspberry canes and sleep there till everything became a dream. It came over him like the onset of an illness and when it was over his torture was all the greater. For he had seen that in his inmost heart he was ready to pay any price, even the most dastardly, in order to get out of it. Then he felt shame in the sight of his country of which he no longer dared to think, and shame in the eyes of his comrades, all of whom he had secretly betrayed. The sight of their unmoved faces could not at once restore his confidence, but gradually he glowed again with the hope that his fear would not return. But it did.

Sometimes he thought of telling them about it, for he believed that then it would cease of itself. But he shrank from doing so as soon as he saw Kranz's unruffled face and heard him talk of all that occurred in the same tone as he did of clouds or rain. His only complaint was the dirt, which he found demoralising, and with an apologetic air he would show his grease-marked and weather-stained tunic which, unlike the rest, he never discarded except in the dugout. This seemed to be all he took exception to or thought worthy of mention.

For Dörries, on the other hand, it was exactly the same out there as if he were in a picture-house or rather at the so-called Kaiser-panorama, which he preferred because as a rule he could make very little of a film. But he visited the panorama with passion whenever he had the chance. It was a kind of giant peepshow and behind the peepholes beautifully illuminated and motionless pictures of all sorts went past. Often he looked on with an ever

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increasing rapture at the same series three or four times in succession without knowing it. It was the same out there; he scarcely gave a thought to anything. Enough that over and over again astonishing things happened which he could watch and take part in. He forgot them all the moment they were over, but his delight remained.

Apparently, too, there was no use trying to confide in Ziemerer of the Suebo-Vandalia. One night, when he was on battery telephone duty with him in the little dugout specially assigned to this purpose, he made a few cautious attempts to hint at his trouble. But Ziemerer was beforehand with him. Would Reinhold allow him to ask, he said suddenly in a ceremonious and embarrassed manner, whether he had come to any final conclusions about his future career at the university? When Reinhold said that he had not, a gleam came into the little face like a hare's surmounted by the cap which here, too, he always wore lightly balanced on his head, and his little green eyes began to sparkle with a cordial affection. With a real benignity he described this circumstance as being quite in order—a favourite expression of his—and then confessed, raising his hand to the rim of his cap in a partly humorous and partly ceremonious salute, that he had formerly misjudged Reinhold. He had, to put it plainly, thought him a little bumptious and a bit soft. In fact, however, he was a stout fellow who never turned a hair. Reinhold tried to protest, but Ziemerer would not allow him to speak. He was paying no compliments, he assured him warmly; the others, too, recognised it, and he himself had heard Engels and Kompes talking about it. Therefore he would think himself lucky to have the honour of introducing Reinhold one day to the Suebo-Vandalian club-room. Reinhold blinked and could no longer bring himself to speak of his fear; and the end of it was that Ziemerer formally "notched" him for the Suebo-Vandalia—that is to say, he took his solemn promise to join that students' Corps when the war was over. "Let's drink to it," said Ziemerer in conclusion, and he filled the tin mugs on the table in front of him with rum from his ration.

Encouraged by this success he went on to win Kranz over too. Cautiously and, indeed with deference in every word, he attempted to talk him out of sculpture and to suggest the delights of studying law, say; if he could not reconcile himself to this he might in any case study the history of art and this would equally qualify him to become one of the Suebo-Vandalians. But he did not meet with a sympathetic response to his overtures from Kranz.

On the other hand, he could not persuade himself to make the same offer to Dörries. True, he would certainly have made a lusty and probably invincible duellist for the Suebo-Vandalia. But it was extremely doubtful whether he would ever in his life attain his "maturity." Ziemerer meant by this—pass his matriculation. Actually, however, one could only talk of maturity when the arrival at this stage was signalled by the immediate entry into a smart students' Corps. Otherwise a man was not, properly speaking, mature.

In the nick of time, however, Ziemerer hit upon another marvellous plan. One day the Commanding Officer pulled out his watch when Ziemerer was near. It was adorned with a brightly coloured ribbon of about a finger's length, attached to it by small silver rivets, and Ziemerer since that day cherished the belief that he had recognised the colours of his club. He did not indeed venture to address the Commanding Officer on the subject, but he at once made enquiries at home by letter to which so far there had been no reply. Whereupon he decided to bring it on himself. "To bring a thing on one" was at that time a very common expression. Usually one brought a thing on one in a bad sense and then it was connected with a punishment. But it could also happen in a good sense and this was what Ziemerer intended. His idea was to introduce himself to the Commanding Officer's notice. Profiting by the opportunity, he would then mention that he was a member of the Suebo-Vandalia, and perhaps make the claim to brotherhood. His plan hung together with a phenomenon called the London night express, which was the cause of the first onset of panic that Reinhold experienced.

On quiet days the battery was frequently put through gunnery practice in a methodical fashion. This was according to orders from a higher staff, and even the older and experienced men had to take part in it. Exactly as on the garrison gunnery range the gunners crouched and kneeled behind their guns and directed the muzzles upon imaginary targets and adjusted the fuses to the required ranges and explosions as even Dörries, thanks to Kranz's private instruction, had meanwhile learnt to do without mistake. He put on a knowing face as he did so, like a connoisseur of wine who opens a selected bottle, and perhaps he was the only man in the whole battery who put his whole heart into it. For Engels, who took charge of the practices, was chiefly concerned in being able to enter up on the prescribed report at night that the entire battery had been through the one or two hours of gunnery drill in a proper manner. For this reason he was always glad when he could say that the battery had for the moment exceeded its allowance of ammunition, or that enemy fliers just above the gun position made a cessation of fire

imperative.

During these pauses the gunners often amused themselves by calling out from one gun to the next to ask Corporal Kompes the exact time. Kompes had sent home for a phosphorescent alarm watch through an advertisement in a newspaper. According to the advertisement it was a miracle of the watch-maker's art; and Kompes believed it; for he could not, in spite of many jocular remarks from his fellows, persuade himself that anything printed in a newspaper could be untrue. The watch was indeed illumined by night like a glow worm, and at first went beautifully. This caused Kompes to boast of it immoderately. Soon, however, the watch began to sound its alarm at the wrong time, and not long after it stopped for indefinite periods in a quite unforeseeable manner and then suddenly ticked on again as though nothing had happened. Kompes at first kept this a secret, but as he had made such a point of always having the exact time the defect could not be concealed for long. From that moment it became a joke which never failed of its effect to ask Kompes for the exact or Division time. Kompes had devised an appropriate answer—namely that it was the exact time for the enquirer to lick his arse. This answer, familiar as it became, was equally certain to arouse the unbounded delight of all hearers. It was not, however, so appropriate when the lieutenant himself asked the question in the presence of all the other men. Kompes then went purple with rage and, pretending to be deaf, muttered savage curses into the gun-shield in front of him.

This watch, too, came from Herr Siebenmühl's store. It would have gone ill with Herr Siebenmühl if he had shown himself on the bean-field in Artois at that time. However, he did not show himself there. He went on selling watches with luminous dials, knives with blades of rhomboidal form, and pocket-torches with shutters and a three-coloured light long after all those who asked Corporal Kompes the time were dead and when Kompes himself would have been unable to make them any answer.

One day late in the evening this little entertainment was once again in progress when the London night express unexpectedly passed on its way over the battery. On that part of the front the London night express meant a gun of extremely heavy calibre which usually fired on the German lines in the evening when the sun was just behind it. It was supposed that it must be an English naval gun in a concrete emplacement, though so far it had not been possible to locate its exact position. It fired shells the size of a man, and the sound of their passage through the air on a flat trajectory and at no great velocity was not unlike the thunderous rumble of a train going by. For this reason the phenomenon was named the London night express.

It had not occurred for some while. This time it came so low over the battery that every voice ceased and all stared at one another with blanched faces. The night express reached its terminus. Instantly a huge inverted cone of brown earth shot up from a low ridge a few hundred yards behind, just where a whole crowd of infantry laughing and shouting were engaged on some fatigue or other. Then it reared itself up in a swirling column of smoke as high as a church tower. There it stood for a moment while the earth pattered and rattled down far around, even as far as the battery. Then it cleared off, swaying like a falling tree, and disappeared. All this time there was complete silence. But suddenly, from over there, came a confused and long-drawn wailing and howling of men. The sound was still to be heard when next a few figures emerged from the fresh brown of the churned up earth and began to run with a strange exaggerated motion. They ran as one runs in dreams with knees wildly thrown up without being able to advance an inch. They were mortally wounded and they started to run as though they could in some miraculous way outrun the past and undo what had been done. But soon their knees gave and they collapsed and were lost to sight. All the time the crying and wailing went on. And now the gunners, glued to the spot with their faces all turned to the rear, began to groan or to break out into wild cries and curses in voices that shook. Then they shouted for spades and stretchers and some of them started forward to go to the help of the wounded and to dig out those who were buried. But Engels stood in their path. "Not a man stirs," he shouted wildly. "Not a man leaves this spot. You'll soon see why." The men went grumbling back to their guns. In a short while a column of men became visible on the left shoulder of the ridge. Led by a thin-legged officer, they marched slowly in parade step, carrying spades and stretchers, towards the fresh shell-crater. Everything was now still; the party vanished into the shell-hole and only the officer's voice rang out as he gave orders. At this moment the night express passed low over the battery once more. The gunners shouted, while Engels began waving his cap above his head and running on his old stumps towards the ridge. But already the fountain of earth went up in spray exactly on the old spot, the cloud of smoke ascended and in it for a few moments the figure of the officer could be recognised as he whirled aloft. It could distinctly be seen that he held a spade in his hand. After that all

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was still and continued to be still. The night express, too, did not come again.

XI

Ziemerer's plan was nothing less than to discover the position of this gun. It was a somewhat fantastic plan, for only a fluke could bring it off; yet he found a helpmate in Bette, a N.C.O. who belonged to the same gun as he.

Bette was a young fellow with a pale, good-natured face. The corners of his mouth were always turned down and his arched eyebrows lifted with an air of reflection above the small, very blue eyes; and this gave him a worried expression. Bette was the son of Westphalian peasants and had passed into the regular army with non-commissioned rank at the end of his military service. He had only been a short time with the battery, transferred, it was said, from another regiment. In reality he had been released from a military prison before completing his sentence. He had spent half a year there, always haunted by the look of consternation in the face of Gunner Zeck whom he had shot.

He had been sitting at the table with his fellows in their billet in Belgium in the first weeks of the war, handling his revolver which he was going to clean. Suddenly a cartridge, which he must have forgotten, went off. A profound silence followed. All sat dazed, and Bette was already hoping that the bullet had passed harmlessly through the open window into the garden. But then a thin trickle of blood ran down little Zeck's cheek and Bette heard him ask in a plaintive voice whether he had been hit. Immediately afterwards his face went grey, his head fell on the table and his body turned sideways and sank from the chair to the ground, and there he lay dead.

Whatever they might say, Bette could not feel that he was clear of guilt or regard as pardonable the negligence which had cost Zeck his life. It was not in him, he said, to take things lightly; and his father and mother were the same. It was hard on him, but many Westphalians were like that.

Consequently, when he was allowed to return to active service, he looked for an opportunity of redeeming his guilt and in his hard, unsparing fashion he had silently made up his mind to pay for it with his life—which now could never be any pleasure to him.

After some consideration, he told Ziemerer that he would support him in his enterprise and put the experience and resources of a N.C.O. at his service. The night express sometimes came over by night as well as in the evenings. When this might happen could not, of course, be foreseen, nor indeed whether it would happen at all. It was, therefore, a question of patience to lie in wait for its muzzle flash, and then of accuracy in plotting from various points the exact spot whence it came.

The two were out on the job many a night when there were no working-parties and all but the sentries slept. Bette was glad enough to sacrifice his sleep, for he was afraid of the faces that tormented him in his dreams; and Ziemerer appeared to be untireable, and whistled and croaked to himself in eager anticipation of addressing the Commanding Officer as his club-brother. They took with them all kinds of surveyor's instruments and maps in yellow cases; also the torch with the three-coloured light which Ziemerer had begged Reinhold to lend him. Often they returned, with heavy, blood-shot eyes and drawn mud-stained faces, only when the infantry was on the move.

For always at dawn before the sun was above the horizon and only a faint suspicion of light loomed over the landscape the infantry was on the move. The grass was still grey, the whole world was grey, when the first figures appeared among the ruins of the farm on the bare ridge in front of the battery. Their wide coats flapped and waved, for the belts were unfastened, and their necks and often their faces, too, with little caps on top or helmets with ill-fitting and tattered covers, were enveloped in woollen comforters. In silence and haste one behind another in a long line and at wide intervals they tramped along from the trenches and on to the rear. Now and then there was a muffled stretcher on the shoulders of four men. The stretchers swayed to and fro, now up, now down, according to the inequalities of the ground, and behind them, muddy and sunken-eyed, came stumbling figures—their coats hanging from their shoulders with empty, flapping sleeves, and round their heads or within their unbuttoned tunics as the staring white of fresh bandages. Others came two by two along the track, holding each other round the waist or shoulders, as lovers do or affectionate friends. But they had no eyes for one another. They stared in front of them with craning heads, straining on towards an invisible goal and tottering sometimes

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like drunken men.

Others again pushed two-wheeled carts in front of them, like costers' barrows. They were jolted at all angles, but the completely muffled figures who lay on them did not stir. Sometimes a pair of boots projected from the ground sheet, or a bent and stiffened arm. On many of them could be seen as well a half upright form propped behind by the arms, the nodding head with its sightless eyes sunk low on the breast. Single figures again brought up the rear, carrying rifles and bandoliers and hung about with clusters of empty dixies, or laden with an assortment of buckets and sacks.

All of them were in a hurry as though flying before a storm coming up behind, and from time to time they quickened their pace to a short, stumbling trot. But another procession of men came to meet them who seemed to be in no less of a hurry than they. And these, too, were encumbered with all kinds of loads, picks and shovels, poles and stakes, and the folded stretchers steeply slanted on their shoulders like great rolls of cloth. They earned also the wooden crosses as tall as man which Driver Dull made in his workshop. For just behind the front line in a shallow depression there was a small burial-ground where the infantry buried many of their dead forthwith. Although in that forward position it might not be a burial-ground for long, they were very scrupulous in seeing that even there all the dead had crosses to their mounds. They did not exactly think of Jesus Christ to whose memory this sign was dedicated; but they did not wish to withhold from a comrade what by an unwritten law was as much his proper due as his ration, his pay and his leave. Therefore it did not scandalise them that Driver Dull kept a stock in hand of the crosses required, and they filled in the gaps he left with paint-brush and paint from the company stores.

Many a time at dawn Reinhold stood shivering in the wet grass after a night on guard—his coat-collar turned up, his hands plunged in his trouser-pocket—and looked across at them. The blackbirds were singing already in the chestnut trees, and the starlings chattering among the ruins. Now and again, however, a report like the snapping of a tightly stretched wire broke ominously on the ear, or a sharp whisper passed over, as though for the fraction of a second a jet of steam was forced through a narrow vent. A hollow explosion was heard aloft that turned into a shrill singing sound and the shrapnel bullets pattered among the branches, or whipped through the grass, or went crashing and smacking against the walls. Then everything was still. Cautiously and tentatively the blackbird began to sing again, and the tramping and coughing which had been lost for a moment reached his ears once more through the sharp morning air. Reinhold was appalled. He could not understand where all the dead and wounded came from every morning, even when there had been no fighting. If this went on there would soon surely be no one left in the trenches. And even so he tried in vain to picture to himself how it would all ever come to an end.

The old soldiers in the battery, too, watched with an ever closer concern the daily procession which they had so often watched before. The dead, Kompes declared, drew more dead after them, and to show what he meant he told them again how his father had died and after three days had pulled his mother after him, though, as Kompes said, she was still frisky enough. Hence when he had the opportunity he used to count the dead as they were brought back and the crosses carried forward, and he was inwardly contented when the figure thus arrived at did not exceed a certain number that in his experience was permissible.

"Look here, my boy," he said to Reinhold, "I'll tell you how it is with the infantry. It's the same with them as with ants. When you only see a few and they aren't in a hurry, then it's all right. But when there are many and they run about, then we learn to know our God again."

It was very soon seen that he was right. The nights became breezier, the crackle of rifle-fire in the trenches always more insistent, the artillery sought out their targets with less and less disguise. And the last casualties were hurried from the trenches to the rear when the concealing grey was already becoming coloured, when the foliage became green, the stones white and the earth brown. Behind the gun position, too, large dumps of shells were collected and stowed in the pits excavated for the purpose. Reinhold did not relish the sound of the ammunition column coming up, and was disconcerted when he saw the unmistakable signs of zealous energy on every hand.

One night Ziemerer was lying out with Bette on a little knoll not far from the battery; for Engels had forbidden them to go far away on account of orders to be in instant readiness in case of an alarm. This knoll was just high enough to permit of observation over the flat country behind the enemy's lines, but it was visible to the enemy as well, and so no one dared show himself there by day. They lay in silence behind the rotting stump of a poplar waiting for the great muzzle to flash. It quivered out more frequently now than before. Perhaps Ziemerer was too



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free with his three-coloured light on the map which lay open on the ground in front of him, for a shell swished over just after midnight and shattered both his legs. It must, as Bette said later, have been fired from a quick firing gun just behind the enemy front line. Ziemerer felt a pang as though iron jaws mauled his knees, and he could not restrain a long-drawn cry. It sounded like the tremulous scream of a wounded hare. But he did not lose consciousness, much as he would have liked to, and he regained his self-control. He remembered what was due to the Suebo-Vandalia. But the Suebo-Vandalia would never know how one of its members had conducted himself. That was a pity and he was sorry.

Bette was uninjured. He wished to complain of his luck, but he could not succeed. A thin trickle of joy percolated through when the shock was over and mingled with the pity he felt for Ziemerer. When he came back with Stubbe, the Medical Corps sergeant, Ziemerer was lying still but for an occasional tremor and grinding of his teeth. Stubbe had a moustache and a genial rubicund face. He at once bound the legs above the wounds with the rubber rings he had brought with him in his large wallet, saying all the while in a sing-song voice: "Steady now, steady," though Ziemerer was perfectly quiet and no one else made a sound. But when they set about carrying him down off the knoll, the iron jaw made another grab and Ziemerer uttered his cry once more in an unexpectedly piercing scream.

They had better leave him there, he then suggested, leaning against the tree stump, perhaps. And then tears rolled down his face. If they left him there he would not yell any more, he promised, It had only taken him like that for a moment. So they propped him up there for the time as he asked, and Bette silently sat beside him. After a while Stubbe came back again. "Now then—just a moment," he said gently, unbuttoning coat and tunic in order to inject a narcotic into his chest. Bette held the torch. Beneath his green woollen shirt next his skin Ziemerer wore a silk ribbon. It was the colours of the Suebo-Vandalia.

An amazing sense of well-being at once took possession of Ziemerer. Perhaps he had lost too much blood, or else Stubbe had exceeded the proper dose. In any case the drug instead of having the effect of a narcotic raced through his empty veins with a soft rush of elation. It was exactly as though he were drunk. And as a drunken man suddenly finds life no longer hopeless and forgets grief and pain, so Ziemerer, too, felt his agony no more and thought no more of death. In a frail voice he began to sing a song. It was a song they had often sung in Frau Thienemann's Beer-garden when their heads began to go round. He was there again now, although he sat on the ground in the grass.

"Oh, when Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday's here,  
And I am with my own Laurentia!  
Laurentia!"

The Laurentia of the chorus had to be sung in a wistful and seductive tone, long drawn out. He sang it over and over, even after he had not strength left for the rest of the song. Now and again he raised his hand to his cap in a ceremonious salute, as though in recognition of some mark of attention. Bette, however, could not see whom he saluted or to whom he signified his recognition, though he sat beside him and supported him and held his other hand in his own. With their backs to the enemy they sat together until Ziemerer died. This he did quite unobserved at early dawn.

## XII

This same night Reinhold was alone on night duty in the Battery telephone dugout. He heard Ziemerer's cries and was told later by Stubbe how seriously wounded he was and that there was no hope for him.

Stubbe was laden with all sorts of wooden contrivances, some of which he left in Reinhold's charge. They were small ladders with straight or curved steps, or wooden rails, attached to one another in pairs by bosses wound about with straw, over which was arched a tunnel formed by a series of wire hoops. They were almost like rat-traps to look at, and Reinhold took them to be rat-traps when he first saw them. They were really splints and casings for broken and shattered limbs which Stubbe used to make in his spare time. Usually they hung on the walls of the aid-post dugout, or were leant up near the entrance. But sometimes Stubbe had premonitions and prophesied a raid or an attack. How he did so he was unable to explain, but he had often been proved right in the event. It was just a feeling, he said with a lofty air, waving his hairy hand to and fro before his eyes, as though the seat of his mysterious gift lay there or somewhere in space in front of them. He was afraid on these occasions that a direct hit on the first-aid-post might bring all his forethought to nothing at one blow, and therefore he liked to have his stock dispersed beforehand among the different dugouts. He was not welcomed on these occasions, but Engels openly commended his foresight; and so the others put up with the sight of his ill-omened apparatus. When everything was over, or if his premonitions had deceived him, Stubbe collected all his implements together again.

Stubbe had not been gone long when Reinhold heard Ziemerer singing. He trembled as he stared at the small flame of the tallow candle on the table in front of him and did not move. He had a horror of the sight of Stubbe's wooden contraptions. Later, however, the sound of Ziemerer's "Laurentia—Laurentia!" came to him more and more like the high sing-song of a drowsy child, and he began to wait for it when it was silent for a while, for it told him that Ziemerer was still in the land of the living. When he heard it again he was glad and hoped that he would still, be in time to get to him after he had been relieved. But the voice came with ever longer pauses and seemed, too, to grow weaker and weaker. Meanwhile the warning buzz of the telephone rasped on his ears and he replied with the prescribed reports.

Suddenly everything around him was still as though he were submerged in water. Then he heard the murmuring and clucking of a stream. He was sitting in a meadow in front of a beech wood with dark foliage and tall grey trunks, he lay sunk in a heap of fragrant hay, dreaming that he was in the war and as he dreamed gently on he felt already an immeasurable joy at the thought of waking up and finding that nothing of it all was true and yet had been true. But little Ziemerer had lost himself in the wood behind. He was wandering to and fro and calling out Laurentia and listening to the echo which answered him from one direction after another with a hollow reverberation. But suddenly the wood grew tempestuous with a cold blast of wind and Reinhold felt himself seized and caught up into the air. Kranz stood in front of him; he had his helmet on and his revolver in his belt. His eyes were on fire with impatience and anger.

"Get off with you, man," he ordered him peremptorily. "Get off. How could you fall asleep here?" He pushed Reinhold aside, threw his helmet on the table, pushed the head-piece over his ears and began calling through to test the connexion. "Off with you," he repeated impatiently while Reinhold hurriedly got himself ready. "The infantry have gone by. There's something up. The ration party's gone long ago. Leg it for all you are worth. I'll stay here for you. You've never even waked your relief."

Reinhold stammered out his thanks. Then he thrust the empty sandbag that hung on the door through his belt, seized the two tin buckets which stood beneath it and ran past the chestnut trees across the open. It was his job that morning to fetch the ration for his gun from the field-kitchen. Just before dawn he had to wake his relief and then get off. But he had fallen asleep while Ziemerer sang and called out Laurentia.

Man—Kranz had called him. Reinhold had never heard this word from him before. He ran as though for his life. The buckets knocked against his legs and he had to brandish them in the air with outstretched arms like wings. Strange that Kranz had had his helmet on in the middle of the night. But it was night no longer. Day was

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dawning, and in the east a sulphur-coloured slit was opening between earth and sky. It was like an ambushed, hostile eye. He ran straight towards it.

Before he had even reached the little village, he met Dörries and the rest of the ration party coming back. Dörries stared at him with startled eyes and put down the steaming buckets he was carrying. But Reinhold rattled past without hearing what Dörries shouted after him. He ran on down the long street of the shell-shot village, hoping to see the field-kitchen; but it had gone. Soldiers with rifles and packs were sitting all about among the wreckage of the houses. They said nothing and scarcely turned their heads. All wore helmets and were waiting for orders to move on.

Reinhold went on—down into the hollow with the apple orchards behind the village and past the little wayside chapel; and then he climbed the hill beyond with panting breath. There at last he saw the field-kitchen on ahead. The horses trotted slowly along and brown smoke curled up from the stovepipe. He stopped and putting down his buckets shouted after them through his hollowed hands, but the two men on the seat paid no heed. He ran on and shouted again till at last they pulled up. But the two kept on staring to their front without turning round and did not move till he got up to them.

Every morning, when the infantry moved up, the field-kitchens of the several batteries drove up too from far in the rear and made a halt of perhaps half an hour behind the gun positions. There the cooks met the ration parties from each gun and dished out the rations for the day. Then they drove off again without delay, for they had no desire to make a long halt among the front line soldiers whose looks and ways made an unpleasant and disturbing impression on them.

"You've turned up then?" said one of the two, a round-about fellow in a dirty tunic, as he lowered himself painfully from the seat. He was thoroughly annoyed, as he had hoped to do a deal with the remains of the rations, and now there would be nothing in it.

"There's not much left," he lied after a look into the copper. "It's all been dished out. How were we to know there was anyone else coming?"

Then he filled Reinhold's buckets half full—cocoa and milk in one; meat and beans in the other. Without a word Reinhold held out his empty sack and the man dropped a loaf into it and a few bags of biscuit and sugar. With some reluctance he produced them from under a netting which was stretched over the top of the cart behind his seat.

"You'll have to make that do for to-day," he said as he pressed a thumb into his pipe and looked intently under the belly of one of the horses. Then he clambered up again and drove off.

Reinhold hung the sack over his shoulder in dismay, picked up the buckets and set off on his return journey. He was sorely afraid of confronting his comrades, for he had got scarcely half their rations.

Very few of the men at that time were regular soldiers or knew what soldiering meant. What they were called upon to experience was so entirely different from anything they had ever known that they sometimes scarcely knew whether they were still on the earth. Hence when they were eating they felt a secret assurance of having returned to it once more. They sliced their bread with deliberation and spread it with fat or laid bacon on it and chewed silently. Their faces were sunk over their plates; they blew on the hot soup as they relished spoonful after spoonful with lowered eyes as though they could not bear to be interrupted. Or they glanced aside into the distance with a lost expression that was never seen at any other time in their lean and earnest faces. They were back again for the moment in the days of peace from which they had all come. At that time the provisioning of the German army was still fairly good and the men had not yet to put up with starvation rations.

When Reinhold got back to the gun position there was silence everywhere. They were eating in every dugout. Usually this was the principal meal of the day, for the food was still fresh and sometimes even hot. Before going to his own dugout he went with his buckets to those of the other guns and asked whether they would spare him a little to help him out; he had been late, he said, and there hadn't been enough left. But he was refused each time and he could expect nothing else. No, he was told without compunction, they couldn't do that. They couldn't ask that of the men, for who could say when they would get another meal. There was a change in the weather, they said, pointing at the sky where the usual sounds of rifle fire far and wide had increased to an incessant screaming and whistling. But perhaps, they added, there might be a bit over, and then they would bring it along.

Shame and remorse prevented Reinhold uttering a single word when he went in to his fellows. But they said nothing and scarcely looked at him. They were sitting at the table and eating off their tin plates a meal that

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Corporal Kompes had meanwhile cooked for them over a little stove. It was biscuit fried in fat. He had scattered some of the coarse brown sugar over it which served also as horse-fodder. As they chewed away they looked into one another's faces with enforced resignation.

"Here you are," said Kompes with a look at Reinhold as though he wished to remind him of a secret understanding between them. "Here you are with what's to follow. Just what I thought. The brethren have done the dirty on you." It was his custom to describe as brethren all those who were abhorrent to his soul. It was the strongest term of abuse he could lay his tongue to.

There was a secret, too—but only from Reinhold. Kompes had extracted a solemn promise from the men not to come down on the little man, as he called him ever since that eventful night, for his lapse. "It might happen to any one of you," he said, and they could not help admitting it—though the admission cost them something, for the lapse came hard on them. But it was one which would meet with a severe punishment if disciplinary measures had to be taken. Nothing in the last resort could have inclined them more profoundly to leniency. All the same, what had happened only the other day? A raw recruit had come along and tried to give himself airs. They had punished him for it. It was only right.

But when Kompes had divided out all that Reinhold had brought among the bowls held out to him and when they smelt the inviting fragrance of pork and large beans, they could scarcely restrain themselves any longer. They gobbled it up and stared at the bottom of their bowls which they saw only too soon.

"I wish the brethren would bring us a proper ration for once," one of them began savagely, and then remembering the compact he ended his remark with a compunctious shake of the head. "They can do what they like with us," a second said angrily. "but they must at least put something in our guts. We've the right to ask that."

This met with unanimous agreement. So, too, did a third speaker who now turned sarcastically to Reinhold. He was a lively young fellow, a carpenter by trade, and Reinhold was fond of him. They called him the Hamburger. With his fingers extended he held out his well licked spoon in front of him as though he toyed with the long stalk of a rose.

"Your dear father," he then said to Reinhold in a highly polished tone on purpose to wound him, "must surely have plenty of cigars in his cupboard to spare for the dear Hamburger and the dear No. 1 gun."

At this they all laughed, Kompes as well, and looked at the Hamburger with great admiration.

Reinhold sat silent. He was tired out. He did not touch the biscuit nor the pork and beans which Kompes had helped him to along with the others. An indefinable feeling of love took possession of him. But he did not know how to express it. When he was getting up to go and find out at last how little Ziemerer was, the alarm rang out. Like a thunderclap the noise of battle broke out again with greater fury than before. Without a word they all rushed out to their guns. The sun had just risen in full glory over the green, luxuriant earth.

Until nearly midday Reinhold worked the handspike of his gun. It projected, with the trail of the gun-carriage, a little way beyond the camouflage and Reinhold could see what went on round him. On the knoll in front of the gun position a small figure lay motionless in the grass, covered by a yellow horse blanket with a black edge. Bette was now kneeling at the telephone behind the guns and near him Engels stood or walked to and fro upright in the hail of shrapnel bullets.

For the first time Reinhold really saw the infantry. There were many and they were running, as Kompes had foretold. Bent low they sprang forward in groups and in whole swarms on the left of the gun position where Ziemerer was lying, and on over the open grass. They carried their rifles at the trail and he saw distinctly that the straps hung in a loop to the ground. He was surprised to see that the fixed bayonets really flashed in the sunlight, as he had often read. They were running towards the scattered ruins of the farm where he had first seen them as they came out of the line in the grey light of dawn. They stood there for a moment under cover, lit up by the sunshine. They now had their rifles slung from the shoulder. All took a pull at their water-bottles, glancing uneasily round. Then they vanished one after another into a sunken road leading forward.

Sometimes they came in thin waves, officers and N.C.O.s in front, right through the firing battery. Sweat streamed down their red and freckled faces from beneath the tilted helmets and their eyes, glancing uneasily to and fro, gleamed with a feverish brilliance, or else were as black as coal. They looked half curiously, half enviously at the gunners, lingering a moment, and then on they had to go. But often one of the older N.C.O.s left the advancing line and ran up to Engels. They all seemed to know him, for they shook him by the hand and talked to him, and gave him pocket-books, rings and purses to keep for them until they returned. Then they shook hands

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again in farewell, and ran with long strides after their men, holding their swords in their hands to prevent them knocking against their legs. Their bearded faces were serious and preoccupied.

The sun was already high when the enemy who had taken the front line reached the high ground on the left where the farm was. A machine-gun opened fire at once and Kranz was hit with the very first burst. He was occupied that morning mending the telephone wires which connected the battery with the observation post. They were always being broken by the shell-fire. It was not far from where the London night express had found its target twice in succession. He was on his knees, bending over the wire, a knife, which he had been using, between his teeth. Suddenly Reinhold saw him shoot straight up into the air and then disappear in one of the freshly churned-up shell holes. After a moment, however, his helmet moved to and fro above the edge of the shallow depression to show that he was still alive and needed help. Immediately afterwards he was lost to sight again in the jets of dust whipped up by bullets striking the ground all round him, and Stubbe, who was already on the way to him with his large wallet suddenly stopped and hesitated, biting his thumb and turning back for the moment. But now the helmet appeared again for a few seconds. Then it suddenly flew eddying up into the air. It had been shot out of Kranz's hand.

Now Dörries set out, in a pause while the guns ceased fire for a moment. The smile had left his face. It was tense, not with fear but excitement, and he looked straight down at the ground in front of him under his spectacles. Perhaps it was his excitement, too, that gave his steady tramp its impressive inevitability. He walked on just as he did when he was told in the barrack yard to go at a slow march for two hundred paces to the stables and back again. He had done it with cheerful obedience, as though a great distinction had been conferred on him.

Bullets whistled past him, but he reached the shell-hole without being hit and jumped down into it. The gunners who were watching him with feverish excitement slapped their knees and shouted to each other with delight. They all thought that Dörries would now bandage the wounded man and give first aid and then keep in cover until they could both come out with safety. To their horror, however, he emerged again immediately. They shouted and waved, but he was not going to be put off. He held Kranz against his chest in his arms. Kranz had clearly lost consciousness, for his head hung low and nodded loosely at each step.

Dörries made straight for the dressing-station dugout, for he could think of nothing else to do with the wounded man. He did not, however, get far. Once or twice he staggered, stopped irresolutely and looked about him and then plodded on. But suddenly his knees gave. He lifted the wounded man higher in his arms in order to save him as long as possible from the fall. Then he could do no more. Bending his head backwards and lifting his load on his outstretched arms so close to his face that he lost his cap and spectacles, he fell forward to the ground and lay motionless with his arms extended and his face resting on Kranz's chest. Kranz, too, moved no more.

Towards midday Reinhold was hit with a bullet through the left breast. It felt as though an invisible hand had struck him with an iron bar and smitten him to earth. However, he jumped up again immediately, and it was found that the bullet coming from the side had penetrated above the breast bone and passing through the muscles over the ribs had gone out again on the left side.

"Not even touched the lung," Stubbe said exultingly when Reinhold sat in his dugout, while he carefully bandaged him. "There you are," he said at last, buttoning up the tunic again, "and now you're off home and don't you ever come back, for this is no place for you."

Kompes, too, who came in, expressed his delight.

"Well, Reinhold," he said without a trace of envy, "you're well out of it." This was the first time he had called him by his Christian name. "We shan't be here much longer ourselves," he went on. "They've got us taped and they're making short work of it." Just as he was about to go back to his gun he stopped again in the doorway. "Perhaps," he said with embarrassment, "you'd leave me that fine knife of yours. You won't need that any more." Reinhold gladly gave him the knife and Kompes drew it at once from its leather sheath. The blade was getting rusty. It looked like the belly of a trout, silver with red spots.

Soon after, the order came through that all walking wounded were to make their own way to the rear, and Reinhold set out. The infantry had counter-attacked and pushed the enemy back a bit, and there was a momentary lull. Reinhold's head teemed with thoughts, but he could not keep hold of any of them. He tried to think of the dead, but he was surprised to feel no grief for them. He felt as though they still lived or as though, living or dead, he had not lost them. Then again a distant future flashed out and was gone. Sometimes he laughed to himself and quickened his pace. His wound had long since ceased to hurt.

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When he reached the hollow with the apple trees he came on a crowd of wounded from the infantry. They sat and lay about beside the little wayside chapel and they warned him not to go on over the hill. There was a heavy barrage on the further slope. So Reinhold decided to wait there too, and rest himself. He felt suddenly tired and fell asleep.

When he awoke, he was alone. Evening was coming on, but there was still a glassy brilliance in the atmosphere. He was a little cold. Slowly he began to recall all that had happened, but all his joy had left him. He undid his tunic and touched his breast. The bandages were dry and the wounds did not hurt. He took a deep breath, bent his knees and moved his arms to and fro. When he realised what he had resolved upon it gave him a shock at first. But the resolution became stronger and stronger. He wandered up and down among the apple trees carrying the little white canvas bag which contained all his belongings. It held his washing things which he had had sent after him, also the notebook with the flags on the cover in which he had never written a word, and a small copy of Goethe's *Faust* bound in leather, a book which many of the volunteers of those days had in their packs, though they never found time to read it. He wandered up and down and knew that the eye of his country, which saw everything, was on him.

After a while he heard the sound of wheels approaching. It was the field-kitchen of a neighbouring battery. He stepped out into the road and held up his hand and asked for a lift. "We're going up the line," they said in reply. "That's why," said Reinhold, and got on to the step of the cooker.

"Do you belong to the 4th Battery?" one of the two called back to him. "Things look bad there, they say."

Outside the village the vehicle suddenly stopped and the two drivers bent low on their seats. "Heads down," they shouted for they heard bullets whistle over them. Reinhold jumped down. He must have jumped clumsily. A piercing pain went through his chest and took his breath away. It was almost as though he had been hit again, and he had to sink on his knees and stay where he was, one arm round the trunk of a tree and his face pressed to the bark, till the giddiness passed over. Half dazed, he could still hear the horses' feet and the heavy thump and rattle of the wheels till they were lost in the distance. After a while, however, he was able to take a deep breath and get up and go on; but he was careful not to have a look at the bandages.

It was dark when he found himself under the chestnut trees. He looked across to where the gun awnings used to be, but they were not to be seen—only the guns were there and the sharp edges of the gun-shields showed up black against the greenish sky in which the first lights went up. There was a smell of burning. What appeared to be flattened hay-cocks lay about here and there over the bean field. They were the dead, as Reinhold now saw, but he did not recognise any of them. A faint light shone out to the rear from the dugouts. A man who now came by was Corporal Kompes.

"Kompes," said Reinhold and stopped still. He suddenly felt very tired.

"Hamburger," shouted Kompes, running up to Reinhold, "Hamburger! here—we've got a visitor."

He put one arm round Reinhold and lowered him gently to the ground.

"What's up Reinhold?" he asked. "Are you bad? Did you get another? Didn't you get through?"

"Got through fine—fine," said Reinhold. His throat and mouth got hot suddenly and he had to cough and spit.

"Stretcher-bearers!" Kompes shouted. "Stubbe! Here!" The Hamburger came up and clapped Reinhold on the back—not knowing what else to do. "Old man," he brought out with difficulty, "listen to me. You can still hear me, eh? Well, listen—no offence meant about this morning early. That was just—you understand?"

Stubbe now came up and began to undo Reinhold's tunic, and Engels came too and could be seen by his white pointed beard, and Bette and all the others. All—no, very far from all. It was only a thin circle standing round him. Engels bent down. "But what are you still here for?" he said almost sternly. "You've no business here."

Reinhold looked round the circle of faces and said nothing. Then he turned aside and held his hands up to his mouth.

Stubbe let him sink into the grass.

"All up," he said in a low voice to the others, and motioned them away. "Steady now, steady," he said to Reinhold, as his habit was. But Reinhold was no longer there.