Sins in Winter

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Maurice Rowdon (1922-2009) earned degrees in History and Philosophy at Oxford University and published twelve books on animal/human intelligence and war. A novelist and prolific play write as well as a non-fiction author he also developed his own hermetic breathing system which he practiced in California. He and his wife lived between London and France during his last years.

NOTE.

Bleitnau, Schlossburg and Eiglenz are fictitious names for towns in Austria. All the other place-names in this book are actual.

It was extraordinary to him that he should be in what was once the Enemy's country, that he was to live behind the Enemy's lines. He looked again and again at a notice before him, at the edge of the firwood: DURCHGANG VERBOTEN. He had looked secretly at the tiny warning in the train-compartment, Nicht Hinauslehnen, and he had been excited. He listened closely when other people spoke.

The day was May 3, 1951. It was hot and the last part of his climb was very steep, by the side of a long ravine. He went ahead of the boy and turned to see whether the town of Bleitnau would be visible from the farm-house. But it was hidden behind trees, and he was happier. He waited for the boy to reach him, then told him to go into the kitchen and warn them of his arrival.

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In front of the farmhouse there was a sloping lawn, a cherry tree in blossom and a wooden Christ, utterly still in the afternoon sunlight. The moment he had turned the corner of the deep ravine, with the child going in front of him, he had recognised this slope. He had stopped suddenly on the narrow path and looked up in breathless relief and wonder, just as if he were coming back to a plce he had once known very well. Bleitnau, in the valley, had disappointed him. In the long, desolate main street, treeless and silent, he had wanted to turn back, to find a better place nearer Salzburg. But here a field went steeply up before him and at the top were the black wooden fence, the broken farm-gate, the cherry tree, and then, shining behind the leaves, a white and yellow farmhouse with its wooden balcony. It was familiar to him, and just what he had hoped for. Everything was warm and enclosed on this freak summer's day.

The long kitchen was rather dark, stifling and untidy, with flies everywhere. He went straight across to the oldest woman, Frau Glassner, and shook hands with her. She was a tiny woman dressed in black, with a dry, wrinkled face and long hands stiffened and swollen at the knuckles with rheumatism. She watched him carefully as he sat down, and whenever he looked at her she smiled quickly, her eyes sharp and small. All the time she was trying to divine him, not as the others were doing, by

looking at his clothes, but by looking into his eyes.

There was a scrubbed wooden table at the side of his bench, and here she put down a jug of milk and a glass for him. He took off his shoes and stretched out his legs, still sweating from the climb, and behind him, through a window just by his shoulder, he could see the bright and enchanted slope. Beyond it was a fir-wood.

He remembered climbing a green slope so steep that he had to lean flat against the horse's back, with his head down so as to avoid its neck as it jerked back furiously in the effort of the climb. He had loved these quick movements of the horse's head. Sometimes, when he was feeding it sugar from his hand, the horse would suddenly push its nose against his chest in affection and almost send him flying. It was a heavy, rather lazy creature with a fine black coat, and had belonged, not many weeks before, to a Cossack soldier.

At the top, among the trees, where the frost was still visible in the grass of the sloping lawn, he had jumped down and tied the reins to a post. It was a last slope to just such a farmhouse, with just such and enchanted lawn, and black, still fences and wooden gates.

He had looked in at one of the windows and seen no one. He had gone round to the back, across the mud near the barn which was frozen hard, and looked in at the dark entrances of the out-houses. But there was no one. He looked

further up the slope and saw one of the workers in a ploughed field wave down to him. He waved back, then decided to return to his horse. He was hungry, and the tips of his fingers were stiff with the cold. It was an hour after dawn, with a very yellow, clear sun, on one of the first cold days of autumn. This farmhouse had been in Carinthia, near the Yugoslav border.

He remembered coming up to it across a great valley of fir-trees, with the sun just risen. It had been quite dark in the woods, and when he was out of the valley he could see grey snow here and there along the hard, black path and among the leaves on either side. At the top he had looked back across the valley of gold and reddening leaves, sprayed out in a great gush of colour as far as he could see.

He used to take this ride each morning soon after dawn, and he would be back in time for breakfast. He had always been looking for a house where he might go secretly sometimes, perhaps with a girl from the village. He had intended to take two rooms in this enchanted house, one where he would eat and drink wine, the other where he would sleep. The farm-people would stable his horse and cook for him, and at dawn the following day he would be back in the camp before anyone had noticed his absence. This was a dream he never realised.

Yet he was powerful enough to realise it. It was

the autumn of 1945, and he was a victor.

In these first few weeks of peace he used to sit in a field by the camp and watch the girls talking to their father or turning the hay. For time was now his, and the future. The War was over.

He had listened carefully when one of the captains told him, in a low voice, sitting in one of the bivouacs after dusk, how he had taken a patrol to one of the houses in the hills, and how two women had been there, how one of them had taken him down to the dark cellar and told him breathlessly that she had hardly seen a man for two years, that she was like other women, that she could no longer bear this life, and how he had promised to go back with another officer one evening and stay the whole night. Brandon hoped that he and the Captain would go together, but no mention was made of the women again.

Always, during these first days of autumn, he had looked forward to having a room of his own quite separate from the others, where there would be great banked-up log fires and a shelf for his books,and his own coverlet brought from Jerusalem across the bed. But meanwhile he went on with his photography. He would turn the camera with its tiny silver levers over and over in his hand. He would take photograph after photograph of the yellow meadows skirted by trees, the wooden farmhouses and the pebbly stream in the village nearby. He would develop these photographs

in a dark-room behind one of the village shops. The shop-keeper had instantly agreed to his using it. Brandon used to go there regularly twice a week, and a young girl, hardly mature, brought him the paper and developing solution. Then she would stand and watch him at work, in the darkness outside the glow of his red lamp. One afternoon he turned suddenly and threw himself on her in the closed darkness, and she drew nearer to him with a girl's furtive wonder as he opened her blouse and bit her lips and cheeks. They swayed together in the forbidden quarters of this black room, as if far underground from the autumn sun. So many touches had been denied him all these years.

He thanked Frau Glassner for the milk and walked outside to the muddy cobbled yard of the cattle-house. He came to a dark passage-way where there was a cart with its shafts up and a he-goat watching him in the shadows, and inside the cattle-house he saw three mother-goats and their young leaping up to suckle, their tails wagging fast.

It was a heavy, warm, wet smell. He saw the cobwebs over the windows and in the darkness two horses. One of the chains harnessing the cows clinked, a horse stamped and shifted with a sigh, a cow turned slowly to look at him.

It was the smell of terror. A man had groaned one whole day and a night. He lay in the stall of a cattle-house near Faenza. He had cried out again and again to be taken further into the house, again and again he cried out, but it was not the time for wounded men, it was not their time of blessing.

And near him two dead men had lain with their arms held stiffly up towards the ceiling in dumb eternal supplication. Soldiers had dragged them out of the house by the hands, and their arms had not fallen back.

He had first joined his regiment at the beaches of Salerno, south of Naples, during the evening of the night when the English and American forces were almost driven back into the sea. The captain who welcomed him was a modest, pleasant man, but at that time a victim of battle-snobbery. That is to say, he merely shook hands with Edward Brandon and turned away, as if to say, We are not here to make polite exchanges; you must realise that while you have been idling in a North African port or kicking your heels in a home station, we here have been risking our lives, working day and night, and suffering the cries of wounded men. When he looked at Brandon in the eyes he passed him a silent message: Put away your childhood.

In the groves of Salerno Brandon learned that war was a highly serious matter. These men were as serious as monks. They listened to the yells of wounded men like novitiates walking in cloisters, with heads bowed. They were rather haughty with the youngster. They told him not to be foolhardy when he remained standing during a bombardment (not knowing the significance of the songs in the sky and the black fountains of earth), and they laughed at him for cowardice when, to oblige them, he went to ground at the slightest noise. Even the grimy gunners looked like chosen men who had seen Visions and heard Voices. In this holy war there seemed to be no sharpening of knives in the darkness, no dirty licence, no sudden murderous rush forward, no leader who jumped to his feet and persuaded his men to certain death.

Only in the very forward lines, when darkness surrounded everything, when men were alone and terrible again, when their democracy slipped from them like a ghostly mantle, was there sometimes a cry for blood, and then, two hours later, surprise at Staff. But back at the guns, everything was clean, ordered and thoroughly intellectual. We live at the beck and call of scholars. Even in war the hegemony is not shaken off.

Brandon would hear them talking after night-fall, promising to wipe that smile off his face with a really serious assignment up in front. As soon as there was a

ticklish river to cross, and a lot of blood to be mingled with it, his name would be the first on the list. This was how the scholars planned to make him "battle-worthy". On the whole, they succeeded, and he too learned how to go into battle like a scholar. A peg of rum for courage, or a Benzedrine tablet, would have been fatal to him: they would have destroyed that clarity of mind necessary for activities like writing a thesis or planning abstract murder. And after abstract murder there came that feeling of purity, of having done a sound work of scholarship.

During his early training as a Novice at Salerno, Brandon witnessed his first artillery barrage. When the German wedge was broken, the English infantry moved north along the Naples road, towards Cava di Terreni, and Brandon's regiment moved away from the beach into the hilly meadows, fresh and green, with secret clumps of trees and pebbly streams, above Salerno, out of sight from the sea except at the crest of each hill.

This was like the scene of his boyhood truancy in Hampshire, but better, because there were no long, downy vistas, which he did not like, just as he did not like the sea. Everything was close-packed, bursting, plump and very green. On the first day, when all the front was quiet, he went down to one of the streams, twisting and falling through a little wood, very cool and an age away from the guns, though they were only a few yards higher up, and washed himself all over, standing

naked in the middle. In these first few days, having not yet been chosen for a forward assignment, he had come to the conclusion that the War was an easy matter, a matter for the mind alone.

He had seen many photographs of brown-faced soldiers in North Africa and deduced from them a safer war in which machines would do most of the work, abstractly. He put away the nightmares of his childhood about muddy trenches and the endless decimation of men. He felt easy in these meadows.

So he bathed, strolled through the woods, read a book from his little library, lay on his camp-bed, slept, joked with the bombardiers, and chewed grass outside the command post very complacently. Several times during the day he walked down to the barn where a headquarters had been established. He simply stood out~~side~~ watching the pigeons on the roof, the cows near the entrance and the Italian family coming and going. He loved barns, the slush at their entrances, the smells inside, their warmth, the tumbled-in roofs, the piles of hay, the sighing of animals and the occasional resigned stamping of a hoof on the barn-floor, and the quiet shifting of great flanks.

But it was a silence before the attack, a silence with which he was not yet familiar. He knew that there were plans for a barrage that same evening, but he did not know the extent of this barrage. He only knew about it

in so far as it affected the twenty-four guns of his regiment.

When evening came he wandered back to the command post, and the captain told him sharply to stand by for any emergency task that might fall to him during the barrage. Brandon nodded, with his hands in his pockets, and the signallers in the command post were silent as the captain spoke, solemn like judges, as if they themselves had just been vindicated. Everything was ready. The shells and cartridge-cases lay in great piles behind the gun-emplacements, and the first shift of men was going on.

It was utterly dark and silent outside when the captain gave the order to the guns, "Take post!" five minutes before the barrage was due to begin. Brandon was still bored and complacent, expecting little. A runner came in with a written message, to say that the infantry were on their start-line. They would be waiting in the dark, crouched in the ditches, listening for the first shells to

make..

make protective arcs above their heads. The Captain turned in the dim light of the command post and looked at Brandon:

"Go outside and stand behind the guns. Be ready to transmit my orders if the loudspeakers break down."

He lifted the flap of the tent and walked through the darkness a few yards in the direction of the guns. He had brought a little megaphone with him, to help his voice should he have to shout, and he had noticed that one of the signallers had smiled secretly at this, as if it were only another sign of his being a Novice.

He heard the first faint order, "FIRE!" from another field far to a flank, then the order was instantly taken up again and again until it came from the loudspeakers of the command post behind him; and in one swift movement the dark, starlit night moved and a great booming and crashing sounded long into space, swelling like a slow, fathomless burst along the entire front, and Brandon started jumped, his mouth open, amazed at the great blue and yellow flashes meeting across the sky, and the earth in front of him leaping and rumbling with the detonations. All the night was rocking and flashing and booming, and he stood before the illuminated tent paralysed with horror at what had been let loose, for this was the whole great harbour drenched in a dome of deafening sound, gone mad in a last thunder of the universe.

But then his horror gave place to a strange,

willing exultation, and he joined the madness, he became wild with it and let himself go. He stood in the shaking, flashing dome, his eyes blazing, inspired by this last hour of the universe, for it must be the last. God must take notice. Yes, there must even be, at this eleventh hour, a God to take notice.

The men in front of him were pushing the shells home with their ram-rods, thrusting closed the steel doors of the breech, standing back for the mighty spout to recoil and give forth its burst, and the flash lit up the shy meadow and the tent behind. And Brandon wanted now to join in. His novitiate's first complacency had fallen through, and he was itching to be at one of the guns, pulling the hot lever with a lanyard after the sergeant's order, "FIRE!", running back to get ammunition, pushing the thin-nosed missiles home in the breech with a ram-rod. The War had now won him. It had done its work of inspiration, and he was now its happy child, his chin pushed forward, out to do a man's job, at last knowing that this dome of fire would stomach no children. He knew his place at last, and the first catechism had been said and learned. He was puffed up with War. His mind was huge with it. He was now its cunning scholar, doing all the right genuflections and signs of the cross and profound homages. The others were solemn like monks, all the men at the guns and the signallers in the command post, and now he had

joined them, bursting with metaphysics. He stood staring beyond the guns into the sky above Naples, chosen at last, and alone with his Vision. This was his first lesson: the pomp and thunder of war, promising glory.

But at Cava di Terreni, a few miles to the north and three days later, he was to receive his true baptism, by no means a baptism of fire.

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After a few days Brandon began to visit the dark kitchen more often, and to stay there talking to Frau Glassner and her daughter. The first brilliant freak summer's day did not repeat itself.

They talked about the price of food and clothing in Austria, about Frau Glassner's five cows, about the age of the dog, kept for her son's return from eternity, about the costliness of her two new piglets, about the excellence of goat-milk for babies, about the neighbouring town of Schlossburg where she was born, about town-girls who painted their cheeks beforea dance, about the War, about murder by night in fir-woods, about the snow in the mountains, about her long illness, about the taste of duck-eggs, about the Presidential elections and about church-going people. They sat leaning on the table, talking quietly to each other. They eyed each other with suspicion, then they smiled when they caught the other's glance. Both of them knew that something was withheld. They understood each other like conspirators.

[When...

When she wanted Theresa, her youngest daughter, a tom-boy with black, curly hair, to do something for her in the kitchen she spoke harshly, with a quick, gutteral utterance. Her eyes were wild and black when she shouted, and the child would jump as if a whip had been cracked.

Frau Glassner's face never slept. It was wrinkled, grey, and her lips were very thin, the tiniest blue thread across her face.

When she talked about money her mouth changed, it drew down sadly at the edges, and her eyes were smaller. When he told her that prices were not as high in Salzburg as they were in Paris her face took on this humble despair, because she was afraid that her guests from Vienna would go to Salzburg, where it was cheap, and not to her farmhouse. Sometimes she fetched a black scarf and wrapped it round her head, then huddled herself on the bench, as if she were afraid of something. Her husband had died after wounds in the First World War. He had come mad from the battle-front, and she had nursed him down to his silly grave.

She ate little, she never left the farmhouse, and she never touched schnaps. Her desires were dead. Her wrists gave her a lot of pain, especially in wet weather, and she held them in front of a blue ray-treatment lamp before she went to bed each night. Brandon came into the kitchen and saw her sitting on the bench by the wall frowning and holding her wrist, alone and older than the trees.

One morning she stood by the black dresser and told him that her son had been lost on the eastern front. The military authorities in Germany had written her a note telling her that there was no trace of her son in any of the prison-camps. She wrote letters about him to England, America, Russia and Poland. Perhaps he was still in Russia. Perhaps he would come back. She was keeping his dog, though it was really too old to be alive. He might one day step into the doorway. She stood near to Brandon as she spoke, tiny and watchful, looking into his eyes for signs of her son's return.

"He never went to Bleitnau drinking," she said.

Brandon saw him upturned on a hand-cart, head close to the gravel of the path, feet pointing towards the church-steeple. He came across him suddenly, under his feet in the dark, a sudden presence. He saw him swollen by a ditch. Frau Glassner's words did not move him in the slightest, because he knew too much. But he kept nodding his head in sympathy, just as he had done on countless occasions in Italy, Greece and other parts of Austria. The monologue was always the same, a terrible rune coming out of the earth.

It rained and the clouds lay low in the valley between the branches of the trees. The movements of soldiers and vehicles are slower in rain and mud, and moreover soldier's spirits are lower, so that it is advantageous to shell heavily. The shells make a splash as they

fall, swinging down suddenly from the sky. Let me die by summer! During the crossing of the River Volturno several men had walked away from the line in horror and disgust. One of these was a young musician. He stared at things and shook his head with a smile, saying, "No, I am sorry, I am sorry."

Brandon walked over the hill into the other valley through a ~~tiny~~ wood of fir-trees and past a flat, pink ski-hotel. The other valley was silent, dark and very cold. There was still snow on the peaks and among the foot-hills below him. A slight mountain wind blew, and behind him there was swampy grass where the snow had recently thawed. He hated these mountains. He wondered what had brought him here. Everything was deserted, he could hear no sounds from the town below. He began the descent.

Just at the moment when the first warehouses of Bleitnau came in sight, he heard voices behind him. He turned round at once. There were soldiers, thirty or forty yards behind. They were a platoon of American infantry. They were coming down the hill in single file and some of them were talking in low voices. He stopped to let them pass. They passed close at his side without turning towards him, thinking that he was Austrian. Their boots thumped heavily on the steps of the path. He looked with horror at their helmets, at the thin daggers sheathed in their belts, ~~at~~ at their quick-firing guns, at their

thick, sun-burned necks. He waited until they had turned the corner below him, then went on. He was astonished to discover that he was trembling violently.

He had noticed one of them in particular. His was the face of a man exiled from love. It was flushed with shame. Brandon remembered the photograph of himself taken immediately after the War. He remembered the eyes, appealing for mercy like a dog's.

His baptism took place in September, 1943. There were mossy statues among trees, and a terraced garden above. Also there were green garden-benches, and a fountain. Everything was deep green in the great terraced hollow, dark and enclosed. This was the fatal edge of Cava di Terreni, a town of tall villas and cobbled lanes with curving bridges overhead, and the faces of hungry people.

They came under cover of darkness from the beaches, and put their bivouacs and packs along the terraces, then began digging themselvesin. But by dawn they had dug only a few inches down.

When the sun was above the horizon there was a sudden swift breathing in the sky, and the first mortar-bomb fell in the midst of the trees, its smoke slowly rolling up and clinging among the leaves. Everybody lowered his head and turned to watch the smoke thoughtfully, knowing what must come. Eyes become young looked at the branches below: Is it I? is it I?

Most of the first shells fell with great celebration into the deep, shrouded place of statues, where a young Italian woman was sitting on one of the benches. A piece of shrapnel, very small, grazed past her temple and made a long wound, not at all serious: but she sat on the bench paralysed with horror, holding her head and crying out in brief astounded shrieks as the shells split and cracked and boomed among the trees. The men scrambled up and down the terraces amid the pungent, drifting smoke as the shells drew nearer, then flung themselves flat on the wet earth, hiding their heads. There was an endless scrambling to and fro as the shells came down in cruel hand-fulls.

One of the soldiers could no longer bear the Italian woman's appalled shrieking, and he shouted down to her: "Oh, shut up! for Christ's sake!" Then he murmured to himself, close to Brandon's ear, complaining: "She's not hurt as bad as all that." The same thing had happened at Salerno: a man with quite a mild wound in his leg had shrieked at the top of his voice continually for ten minutes or so. It is the shriek of terrified astonishment, more than pain: for the first sensation of a shrapnel wound is usually one of numbness, so that sometimes men do not know they have been wounded until they notice the blood on their limbs. The badly wounded seldom shriek out like this; more often than not they give up faint, pale cries

of "Help. Help." Near Cassino the captain who had seemed to Brandon a victim of battle-snobbery and who had very grudgingly grown fond of him, died in the dark, amid only mud, saying quietly that his arm was hurting, whereas his arm was untouched, and the wound was at the back of his head.

This shriek of terrified astonishment seemed to say: this cannot happen to me, not to me. That is what made one impatient, and finally pitiless: for why could it not happen to them as to anybody else? Had they enever divined what it must be like to be a victim? Had they seen the wounded and the dying, but only drawn themselves apart, as the specially chosen, as the clean people of ths suburbs, to whom nothing real could happen?

There were two casualties among Brandon's men, and when the shells lifted they were taken by stretcher to the kitchen of a house on the outskirts of the town. One was taken to hospital with a bad wound in his arm, and the other died slowly.

This was by no means a spectacular baptism. Everything was quiet in the room. There was nothing of great horror: only the moaning of an old woman, in sympathy, and the quiet, respectful treading of soldiers. Only a man died. But Brandon's discovery was such that he turned away quickly and began weeping.

The dying man's last action was something he

could not forget, and something he would never dare to describe as long as he lived. To see, with your own eyes, to see: that is absolutely necessary. The breaking-in had been accomplished.

. . . .

There was an iron-welder from the local railway at the table. He was about Brandon's age, and he had close-cropped hair and bloodshot eyes. He and Brandon sat close together, both in their shirt-sleeves, poring over a dictionary between them on the table, apart from the others.

There were five visitors from Bleitnau, two of them young women. They were town-people, neat in their dress and more alert in their ways than the farm-workers.

One of the men giggled continually at the efforts of the iron-welder and Brandon to make themselves understood to each other, sometimes in English and sometimes in German, but when Brandon spoke to him he instantly agreed, before the words were quite out, nodding his head solemnly, as if Brandon were a professor. Then he turned back to the women again and went on telling them his jokes.

The other man in the party was a batchelor, a plump and conceited man dressed in the traditional leather trousers. He poured himself glass after glass of schnaps and tried to fondle the young women, smiling weakly at them, looking first into their eyes, then at their breasts.

"He is forty", the iron-welder said to Brandon, "and he is still not married".

The batchelor sang and lolled back in his chair, laughing and crying out, his lips red and very wet. The iron-welder turned to the letter R in the German section of the dictionary.

"You are my redeemer," he said.

Brandon looked at the word in the dictionary to which the iron-welder was pointing, - redeemer.

"You are my redeemer against this man," the iron-welder whispered to him, pointing to the bachelor. "You are my excuse for not drinking with him."

The bachelor made several references to the dictionary on the table between them. He made jokes to the others about the intelligence of these two men and their beautiful book. He filled Brandon's glass with schnaps, then said, "Prost", thus obliging him to raise his glass and return the toast. He seemed to grow ashamed of his drunkenness, and Brandon's glances seemed to perplex him. He kept leaning over towards him and shaking his head, saying forlornly, "Nicht immer, na, na, nicht immer," wanting to explain that he was not always drunk.

Suddenly he pushed open the window and was sick on the lawn outside, then he called for a pint glass of water. He began to sing with the glass raised in his hand, then he pitched it high into the air so that the water came down in a shower over the table, drenching the iron-welder's shirt-sleeve and the dictionary. He looked solemn and contrite for a moment, but he was happy to have done this. He shook his head, musing quietly:

"They are so intelligent, these men."

He took out his handkerchief and began stroking the water off the book with exaggerated delicacy. He leaned over

towards Brandon and said:

"I am a small man."

He felt in one of his trouser pockets and fetched out his identity papers, signed and stamped by each of the four occupying powers. He showed it to Brandon, turning the pages slowly, as if it were an interesting book. Again and again he said:

"I am a small man. Everybody should be equal. I am a small man."

He yawned and rubbed his eyes. He looked about him for a moment, then he lay down on one of the benches at Brandon's side and fell fast asleep.

"The pig's off," Frau Glassner murmured, gazing at him.

Brandon went up to bed soon after half-past three and lay in the dark listening to their voices from below. He heard the shrill voices of the young women remonstrating, Frau Glassner's sudden hard shout, the iron-welder's laughter and the conceited chuckle of the bachelor, now awake again. He lay with his eyes open until first light, so strange was it to be behind the Enemy lines, to be in their very midst and yet be free.

The German soup-kitchen had been turned on its side by a shell, he had opened all the covers to have a look at the strange food, now spilled and cold. He had come across it suddenly, near a gravel path, and for a

long time he stared at the covers with fascination.

He remembered the hay-barn where the German rearguard had been only a few minutes before, how he had smelt the smoke from their cigarettes, still in the air, and looked closely at their ration-tins containing coffee still luke-warm. The sight of one of the Enemy strolling on the other side of the line was ecstatic and terrible to him.

He had felt an extraordinary wonder when he crossed the border from Italy into Austria in 1945. He sat in the jolting car smiling and talking at the top of his voice, excited as he had not been for weeks. A vast plain stretched out on either side of the arterial road, and everything he saw in the morning sunlight - the irrigation trenches, the inns standing amid quiet lawns, the ruined houses - had a fabulous and legendary look.

Frau Glassner's daughters would lie in wait for each other and jump out from a corner of the dark passage or from behind the yard-door. Theresa would see her mother coming to sit down and she would hold a spoon upright on the seat of her chair. She would wait for her mother to lean her elbows on the table and close her eyes, exhausted, then she would push one of her elbows away. They would pinch and

punch each other, and they would prick each other in the legs with the points of carving knives.

One evening a May bug flew in through the window like a pellet, very fast, then it flew about rashly and blindly under the light. One of Frau Glassner's former lovers, the father of two of her children, happened to be in the room, and he jumped up and caught the insect between his forefingers. He had a sharp face and a moustache, and in his eyes there was a quite dead expression.

He showed the insect to Brandon, leaning over the table. He was delighted to be able to do this. He watched Brandon for a moment, perhaps hoping that the May bug in his fingers, waving its vlack furry legs, would horrify him. He pointed to these legs and described how the insect gripped wood with them and how they were strong like pincers.

"It attacks the trees," he said. "It can ruin them."

The bug had a hard back and a globe-head with huge eyes. It turned its head slowly from side to side, like a sad god, and at the same time it struggled with its forelegs.

"A May bug must always be killed," he said. "And only a hammer will do it. Look, look."

He tapped it very hard on its back and then on its head with the nail of his index finger, showing Brandon

how hard its protective shell was. He was delighted to be able to hold it in this way. He pointed out the bug's forelegs and head and back like a scientist, turning it upside down each time while it struggled and turned its huge face from side to side.

That same evening Philip, a worker from one of the other farms, got very drunk and threatened to fight with Brandon. Everybody considered him soft in the head. He came into the house roaring for schnaps while Brandon and the miner were still talking at the table. He looked like a pirate, with a thick imperial moustache and a stubble beard, and fine blue eyes and black teeth. His eyes always blazed inside his tiny skull, and when he was drunk he made sudden, quick, wild gestures like a madman. He tore at his trousers and banged his great stick on the floor, roaring and singing, then he leaned his head back and smiled at everyone like a child. His light blue eyes were full of pity and honour. It was the face of fools and children.

Brandon went into the sitting room to eat his dinner and left the door ajar, while the other two went on drinking schnaps. They sang and shouted together, pulling each other about on the bench with helpless grins, and embracing. Soon they began to quarrel. Brandon could not understand the strange gutteral rush of dialect. But suddenly Philip stood up, kicked away the bench and the

butter churn before him, and stumbled towards the doorway leading into the room where Brandon was eating. He swayed there, frowning and smiling. He shouted something, then began waving his fists at him, his chin thrust forward and his chest bared. The miner instantly jumped up and held onto his arms weakly from behind, crying out like a stage-character, clearly intending his words for Brandon's ears alone: "Schwein, Philip! Du Schwein!" while Frau Glassner continued to sit at the table, resigned to the fruitless quarelling of men, her hands covering her face.

Brandon stood up, half bent over the table, ready to ward off Philip's blows if he came into the room. But suddenly Philip lowered his arms and began smiling again, like the happiest child. The miner let go of his arms, and Philip looked into Brandon's eyes as if a wonderful joke had just been secretly shared between them.

In those few moments Brandon had felt like the Enemy. Only from fools and children could he expect the truth... Often in the blind depths of Philip's mind must the words have sounded again and again: "The English, the Enemy." It was six years after the capitulation, but war is a life-time. Brandon felt a spy in this farmhouse. Indeed, he must often have looked like a spy, peering into the cattle-house, standing on the brow of the hill above the house for hours on end, listening closely to all their conversations, staring into the faces of all the men who

came from the other farms: a spy, rather than an Englishman on holiday.

Later that evening Frau Glassner locked Philip out of the house, but all night he stayed outside howling and singing like a madman. He rattled at all the doors and tried the windows, hour after hour, mysteriously, fumbling about in the silence, talking to himself, gasping, and letting out sudden dismayed shrieks.

But when he came the following day Philip was quiet and tender with everyone. He sat on the bench very sedately in his rags, like a prince, his torn shirt buttoned up, and he never asked Frau Glassner Theresa to fill his glass as he usually did. He took each glass offered him very graciously, with a little bow, and sipped it in a prim manner. He would have kissed his murderer on the cheek.

Frau Glassner talked bitterly about all the men who came to her house, just to drink her schnaps.

"A cock can fart," she told Brandon, "but it can't lay eggs."

Her eyes were narrow and shining when she said this, and she bent down, pushing out her behind obscenely, making a long farting noise with her mouth.

When the results of the presidential election were coming through she stayed close to the wireless-set until midnight. In his room Brandon heard her shout something,

than he heard her running up the stairs. She came straight to his room and called out: "The socialist is in! The socialist is in!" And he jumped off his bed and shook hands with her.

"So I shall keep my pension," she said. She was excited, she clapped her hands and laughed, she would not go to her bedroom though it was after midnight.

In the morning, at breakfast, she sat down near him and murmured, "I am too poor to pay forty-five schillings a year to the Church. Perhaps that will change now."

She described how the priests grew fat on her money. She puffed out her dry cheeks, imitating their

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grossness. She said that when a poor man died there was only the most perfunctory funeral. The bell went, "Ding, dong, ding, dong", very quickly, then it was all over. But when a rich man died, the bell tolled solemnly and slowly, "dong..dong...dong...dong", and crowds came to the church. She described this fiercely. She walked up and down in the kitchen, slowly pulling the stately bell with her thin right arm.

The sound of bells from the church would come winding and clanging up the hill to the house, changing furiously with each gust of wind, through the moving mists. Everything in the house was damp. There was no fire in his room upstairs. If he went down to the hot kitchen he found he could hardly breathe and was instantly involved in the slow, shouted conversations about the price of cloth in England or whether it was healthy to eat meat every day. So all he could do was to stride about his room, or lie on his bed with his shoes off and an eiderdown thrown over him, or go for impossible walks in the rain and mud, slipping and stumbling across the bouldery mountain stream near the house, climbing the stiles, and walking up the steep fields until he reached the sombre firwood where none of the birds stirred and where the rain dripped down to the forest-floor through the silence, leaf-surrounded.

Sometimes he would stand by his window at dusk and watch the valley become blueish and misty, like a huge

silent back-street just before total night. It was like the coming on of lamps in the street where he was born.

There was a house in Battersea, like a black hut, with a back-yard where a dog was always leashed up. He remembered the noise of one of the men falling downstairs; it was a kind of terrible catastrophic tumbling. The men drank until they were violent, then they went into the back-yard and fought it out. They wore bowler hats. He remembered their terrifying scuffling in the back-yard, and the silence among the women, with fools and children at their knees. Everybody was packed into one hot room. There were long roads of such houses, close together, a black land, their doors opening straight onto the pavement, a corridor into nothing, where nothing breathed. This was the Prison Settlement where his childhood had been kept.

From the gutter he graduated, after a brief truabcy, to war. Brandon was now twenty-eight years old, and of these twenty-eight years the War had consumed seven. He played truant to the War during the first two years, from the time he was seventeen until he was nineteen, and the time-limit made his happiness the greater.

His truancy was a steep green hill, a dark lower room underneath this hill, [illegible] a village with a church hidden and alone, the crest of a hill called the Shoulder of Mutton, breathing grass and trees, and his truancy was

a dream he had lived, turning in his country bed with joy and pain at dawn, before the town was awake. It was a truancy made possible by the War alone, and, logically, it was brought to an end by the War. He was evacuated from London to a small town in Hampshire with other school children a few days before the outbreak of war. When he arrived he stared at the grey, ruffled lake, at the small islands of tall trees, at the gravel path where chestnut horses were sometimes to be seen, at the cafes in the main street, at the cobbled square, at the rare green hills to the north, he stared at everything with astonishment and blessed the War for being the instrument of his release, in a place where at last he could breathe, where he was not watched, where the dawn came up with no ugly contradiction outside his window, and where at evening there were no deathly lamps but, instead, the starting of small animals in the grass.

He made a last, unsuccessful rebellion against his fate as a soldier four months after he had landed at Salerno. It took place in December, 1944. He flew into sudden rages, he spoke bitterly, he fixed his superior officers with hard stares, and he showed them that he did not care how they punished him. He walked about moodily with his hands in his pockets, and only with his close friends, in the command post, did he talk sincerely. Not long

before they had been calling him "the laughing boy". But the laughter gradually ceased and his brow began to wear a more thoughtful and scholarly look as the weather became colder and it was necessary to fight in the mountains above the River Garigliano.

A few days before Christmas he was sent up to a mountain range over looking this river from the south. There he trudged with his signallers from village to village on the snowy heights, behind the infantry battlaion to which he had been assigned. All of them had wireless sets or batteries ~~xxxxxxx~~ slung over their backs. They climbed up the mountain-paths bent forward like slaves. The loaded donkeys stumbled between the boulders, going before them. At the top was always a desolate place, grey from past battles, where there were no houses and few

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trees. They were paralysed with cold, against which their clothes were no protection, and at night they huddled up together in an airless bivouac among the rocks. He did not know which of the infantry commanders he should be supporting. He did not know eher the Enemy was. He did not know what tasks were expected of him. No one consulted him. No one, after the tactical conferences, told him what was happening along the rest of the front. They moved from one gloomy farmhouse to in the snow to another, along frozen paths, apparently for no purpose, since there was never any fighting, and there were neither rifle-shots or bombardments. The rations they had brought up from the valley behind them were not sufficient, and the wind came in like a dart from the sea. He hardly spoke to his signallers. But one morning on their way up the side of a mountain he turned and saw them all straggling far behind him, so he shouted down, "Get a move on!" One of them, the tallest, stung by Brandon's cry, began leaping up towards the crest like an animal, running with his body doubled up, the heavy wireless-set on his back swinging about, until he had passed Brandon. The other signallers were encouraged by this and also began running, until Brandon, weak and panting, was the last of them all. Now he wanted to shout at them again, to tell them that they must always be behind their leader... But he prevented himself from

speaking. His temper was becoming unmahageable.

At the top he had another fit of embittered fury when he saw the legs of a dead German sticking out of the earth. The sight made him furious against the infantrymen, against these mountains, against the Germans, against the War, against authority wherever it was.

On Christmas Eve, when the day was particularly dark and muffled by the soft grey snow-clouds just overhead, a Protestant service was held in the kitchen of one of the farmhouses, and carols were sung. He went along happily, hoping to be reminded of a truancy. But instead he found the singing coarse and dismal, the padre's sermon idiotic, and the cheering words of the colonel a lot of empty chit-chat. He left the kitchen frowning andstamoing with his feet, and he decided that he would leave these mutton-heads today, he would go back to the valley, no matter if it meant fifty courts martial. Time and time again he had asked over the wireless to be relieved before Christmas Day. He must be back at the command post on Christmas Day, because of the good food and drink which only came once a year and which might be the last he could enjoy before his death. He was bored, cold, idle and, worst of all, quitea alone with his signallers among these infantrymen, none of whom he knew or cared about. He

must have Christmas in the tents with his own people south of Cassino, with tinned turkey, letters from England, whisky and port in the evening, and many hours smoking over the command post fire. He would no longer bear this senseless, inconsiderate waste of himself. For the last three days he had not washed or shaved, just as an act of rebellion. He had slipped among the boulders, torn his clothes, fallen in the black mud, cut himself, had a piece of shrapnel pierce his trousers, and he refused, out of hot vindictive anger, to make himself look any better. He would go back to the tents like this, with four days' growth of beard and mud all over his face, his clothes black and torn. He intended to walk into one of the command posts and tell them that for the last week he had been trying to get some sense out of them as to what his tasks were, why he was with the infantry at all, and where the Enemy were: and they had not troubled to ~~answer~~ give him answers over the wireless.

He ordered his men to pack up their wireless-sets and without a word to the infantry commander he left the mountains.

When he arrived, five hours later, at the tents, he began to walk in a slovenly manner, his beret all awry, his map-case dangling at his side. His men followed all his moods to a detail, and most of the way down from the peaks they had been grumbling in low voices about the way in

which their regiment had been treating them.

The officer who saw him first was the man responsible for sending him out in the first place. The sight of Brandon strolling between the tents astonished him. He stopped in his tracks as Brandon, fixing him with a defiant stare, came nearer.

"What on earth are you doing here?" he asked.

Then, when he saw Brandon's muddy face and torn clothes, he began to smile. He had the gift of always appearing mature and sensible, though he was little older than Brandon. He looked on Brandon as something of a joke, a child.

"What's the matter with your face?" he asked. "Wasn't there any water up there?"

At once Brandon felt a terrible shame, so that a blush quickly suffused his face. The other officer added with a shrug, just as he was passing on: "Oh, well, another party will have to relieve you, I suppose."

It was from this moment that Brandon decided to become a dependable scholar.

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In his work as an officer Brandon combined the robe of the abstract murderer with that of the victim. His work fell into two parts: one when he was at the gun-position a mile or more behind the front line, commanding four guns; the other when he went forward

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with the infantry in the attack and sent orders for shell-fire back to the artillery lines by wireless or telephone.

At the gun-position he gave his orders calmly from a command post, and here he was usually warm, and the Enemy bombardments were not frequent. But with the infantry he suffered the falling of shells, the guns were distant mouths full of anonymous grumble, he suffered the crying of men, the lodging in flesh of shrapnel and bullet, the slipping in mud, the silliness of men after shock, and the hurrying of stretchers.

As he shouted his orders to the guns, his feet dry and his hands clean, God smiled and said, Wait, child.

He would be called out to go with the infantry every fortnight or so for three, four, six or seven days at a time. He would take with him on these expeditions two or three signallers and wireless sets. Thus, he travelled alone. He was with the infantry, and separate from them. They asked his advice and sought the protection of his guns. He could be the key to the success of a battle. He was a murderer whose survival was of the greatest importance to them and whom they often admired and flattered. With one word addressed to his signaller he could achieve the murder of countless Enemy in two, three or four minutes.

He remembered how the door of an Italian farmhouse

had been ajar as he came near: the table was laid exactly as the family had left it in the middle of a meal. Upstairs in the bedroom there were certificates of birth, marriage and death; crucifixes, letters, rosaries, Valentine cards, little pieces of lace-work and valueless trinkets; and photographs going yellow of childrencdressed for their first communnion and of brides and bridesmaids. Everything was heaped on the floor where other troops had searched the drawers. For Brandon these things were not certificates, rosaries, trinkets and photographs, they were rubbish on the floor. They were dead objects. He slept among them, or he pushed them out of the way to make a place for his map. For him these were eternally empty houses. In war the past is dead; the future is a lovely daydream . locked in the closed hall of the head. Only the present is important and eternal.

In a room overlooking a rising field the signaller brought him a message from Headquarters. He walked across to the graph-board at once and read it. The message was a little jocular.

It said that at two o'clock that same afternoon sixty or seventy Germans would be assembling on a hill within easy shelling range of the English lines. They intended to launch a surprise attack, but Headquarters suggested that the initiative be reversed.

There would be an artillery concentration on this

hill beginning at precisely two o'clock.

The guns of the entire division would be laid on this target. The distances for each gun would be very carefully computed so that the closest concentration of shells would be possible. If Headquarters were lucky sixty or seventy Germans would find themselves in the midst of this concentration.

They would find themselves without cover and nowhere to run on the summit of a naked hill.

The guns would be fired off at the very same moment so that the shells landed simultaneously, thus ensuring the maximum casualties.

Brandon and his signallers began computing the distances immediately. They were excited and flushed. They moved about briskly and they made little jokes to each other. The message had changed their day. The ache was less. They were planning murder, but abstract murder, that is to say, the murder of people they would never see, a murder that was never any more than an idea to them, the perpetrators.

Hence, they were for the moment cheerfully at home in their epoch, they fitted, they were playing the role for which they had been born.

In the dark entrance-hall of the Salzburg Natural History Museum there was a great stuffed sea-elephant with a black, pugnacious, scaly, oily skin. Brandon went up the narrow staircase to the rooms and on either side of him there were little skeletons, insects behind glass, stuffed birds, spears, coloured diagrams and segments of tropical trees. At the first landing he entered one of the rooms and walked across the loose boards.

Everything was dead and still, behind glass, staring out like all dead things. There was a terrible air of death, the stairs and the long rooms were dark and heavy, the sky was thick and low outside the windows, everything gaped and was still. And the men and women he saw trod softly up and down the stairs and through the rooms, the boards creaking and creaking as they went, like trespassers. Sometimes they peered closely into the lighted cases where the dead insects, the dead birds, the dead snakes, the dead bones and the dry flesh were exhibited, and sometimes their faces were green and howling carnival masks in the light from these cases. He felt sick with the signs of death, its ghostly attendance on this tall house with the creaking boards. There were a thousand and one silent funerals in this house near the tunnel in the brown rock.

He went past the human heads shrivelled to a quarter of their natural size, past the bony dinosaur, past the transfixed nest of ants and the bees' hive, past the coffins and the mummy, to the room where he heard a child sobbing.

He walked to the end of this room and saw the child standing alone by a curtain, and beyond the curtain he could make out little electric lamps and more glass cases, and also people moving. He looked at the child, but the boy simply stared before him, the tears on his cheeks, trying to keep back his sobs. Men and women walked past without looking down at him, then Brandon saw a pale, slim man with small eyes come out from the gallery behind the curtain and look at the child impatiently, and he heard him whisper, "Mutti kommt gleich!"

But the child could not stop weeping. His sobs were loud and outrageous in the room of still, dead things. And Brandon knew that there must be a dirty, enchanted thing behind the curtain. He saw the face of the child's mother as she peeped round the curtain at him, and she did not regret his tears.

So Brandon walked on past the curtain, and inside there was a greater hush than outside, though there were many more people. With his throat dry and painful he walked to the lighted cases and stared, aghast. He looked at the shrivelled creatures of the womb, some of them preserved in their mother's placenta, and then he lowered his eyes and saw the two plaster castes, one of a human penis and the other of a human lip, each painted with a red syphilitic wound. One of the bottled embryos was a cyclops with a single eye above the nose, another had two heads on one neck, another was strangled by its umbilical cord, and another was natural and whole, at four months, its legs drawn up

and its skin-hand raised to its mouth. He looked at the sobbing child's mother and father, and they were thoughtful and heavy like the guilty, watching and watching. And the glass case was a lighted morturary before him, marrying syphilis and love.

He walked past the curtain and the sobbing child again. His cheeks trembled, he could not smile. He wanted to lie down and in a silent room and wear this horrow out.

He stopped and looked at the white plaster statues. They represented the four human types, - the digestive, the athletic, the respiratory and the cerebral -, and they stood side by side, naked, white and blind, like patients in a hospital. They were murdered men, murdered as the sea-elephant in the dark entrance hall was murdered, so that there should be embalmed things for the trudging spectators.

Everything was embalmed here, everything was stuck on pins or stuffed or dessicated, everything was rendered eternal for the dreaming stares of abstract men. The museum is a biography, he thought, not of beasts, plants, or past epochs of men, but of ourselves the embalmers.

He walked past funeral after funeral in this House of the Embalmed, and the dead beasts stared beyond him.

He looked at the life-size replica of a Red Indian camp behind glass. He looked at the two tents, their canvas genuinely weather-beaten, at the woman feeding a child

at her breast, almost quick and warm, almost moving, and at the man and woman drinking at the mouth of their tent. They were there for all eternity, the same woman in the tent with her same outstretched hand, the same old man bowing before her with cloth to sell over his arm, and the same mother with her same smile, like the smile of a blind woman. And outside the glass Brandon and his fellow dreamers stared at this camp and dreamed it warm and quick.

He had left Frau Glassner's farmhouse the previous week and taken a room in one of the Salzburg inns, but now he wanted to go back to Bleitnau. He wanted to see the white stones in the ravine and the mountain water going over them. He wanted to see the hill behind his balcony. He wanted to hear the padded knocking of the mare's hoof on the lawn outside as she trotted between the trees, the water shaking in her belly. His horror and anger made him blind. He walked through Salzburg to the inn like a man with his eyes put out. He rushed up the stone steps to his room and slammed the door. He wanted to go back. He wanted to go back.

An accident could occur in Bleitnau, one of the men could collapse and die at work in the fields, but the accidents would not be hoarded up for your gaze, they would take their places in the days and years.

On his way back he had walked behind an old woman. She was leaning on the arm of a girl at her side. She

stepped carefully across the cobbles, and she was nodding and smiling to the girl. They walked close together, like mother and daughter, and perhaps they were going back from church, for it was Sunday.

He looked at her long coat and her flat-heeled shoes, and she seemed to change under his eyes, only because of the museum. He saw her suddenly as a patient, like one of the white plaster statues, he saw her as someone with symtpoms walking into hospital, one of many, with interesting senile affections of the liver, the stomach or the bones. She was no longer the Sunday mother with whom he might talk, no longer a woman who smiled and would die in her due time. The museum was behind him and reached forward its hand. He had embalmed her. He had murdered her. She looked like one of too many people, there were too many people in cities, there are too many of us in the epoch of abstraction.

Science, he thought, is the culture of the mortuary, it is the evil eye on life. With the doctor's marvellous cure must come the murder.

He stayed resting on his bed, and in the evening he went out, his epilepsy spent. He walked through the town, and was sane again.

Crossing the Mozartplatz he came to a narrow lane, and there he saw the tall Franciscan church where he had often been before. He decided to go in. The altar was hoarded up in light at the very end, but he chose to remain

in the darkness of the pews, near one of the huge pillars, quite hidden. He sat there for nearly an hour, watching a priest go to and fro across the chancel and re-arrange the flowers and the altar cloths, in utter silence.

At Cava di Terreni the spirit of the boy was yielded

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up, because only men are crucified. He walked out of the house where the dying man lay, and wept. From that time he tried to allow himself no self-pity, having signed his name willingly, so to speak, on the bonds of crucifixion.

In the churchyard of St. Peter's in Salzburg he saw a young American soldier wandering from place to place with his silver camera. He watched him as he stopped to take photographs of the tombstones and the little chapel, then of the entrance to the catacombs, where there was a black gate and behind it skulls. The young man walked post the private tombs, and everything he saw he studied with a view to making a photograph of it. He stood still and cocked his head to one side, then he held up his electrical exposure meter. He was a musing, quiet, tender man. He looked at the chapel and the tombstones and could see them in their embalmed state, when they would be clipped into the album and homely people would smile. He embalmed everything slowly and tenderly, with wonderful care, alone and unaware of being seen. He lifted the camera to his eye and then possessed the mouldy, bored stone for all eternity.

The nature of abstract murder was revealed to Brandon.

This was near Castel Poggiolo, several hours before he ran along the grass verge marked MINEN. There had been three sleepless nights in this valley, and they arrived at

a country mansion soon after dawn, in the flat of the valley. Headquarters was established in the mansion, while Brandon and a platoon of infantry went to one of the farmhouses nearby. He walked about the house, the battle had died, he was restless and unwilling to sleep. He must do something, compute a distance, talk over the radio, make plans for the Enemy attack. For three days and three nights his head had obeyed and worked and been cunning, now it could not stop.

He walked about the house, looking out of the window onto Enemy territory, perring about for some movment and seeing nothing. He wanted something to happen, a German demolition party to blow a bridge in the middle of the valley before him, or a platoon of German infantry to walk out of the two-storey house on the horizon. But the valley lay in silence and stillness. He passed unnecessary messages down the wireless to the artillery lines, he walked from one room to another nervously on the look-out.

Then he climbed up to the hay-loft. There was a little

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opening in the apex of the roof from which most of the valley could be seen. He quietly called his signaller upstairs. The signaller clipped on a cable extension to his wireless set and brought up the earphones. He sat at Brandon's side. Brandon continued to watch the two-storey house on the horizon. It was yellow and clean-looking, and still there was no movement whatsoever. He gave his first orders: "Target...Fire by order...One round gun-fire". They waited for these orders to be repeated back, and the word was given from the artillery lines: Ready. Brandon said calmly, not raising his voice at all: "Fire".

The first shell fell short of the house in the distance, a little burst and a puff of pretty white smoke. He added one hundred yards and again gave the order to fire. He waited for the shell-bursts in silence, leaning forward and peering through the window of the hay-loft. He was passing the time, he was playing an interesting game with these puffs of smoke in the distance. He achieved a hit on the left side of the roof and he warmly ordered all four guns to fire on this reference. The four shells fell immediately around the house, very close to the walls, so that for a moment they hid the lower floor from view. He gave the order to record the target for future use, then finished.

The afternoon grew dull. A winter wind came sideways across the valley. Brandon was called to the country mansion nearby. There he was told to take seven or eight infantrymen and two of his own signallers into the enemy lines by daylight.

He was shown the house he must occupy, and the house was the yellow house on the horizon. He was being taken by the hand to the place of his murder.

The commanding officer told him that he need expect no opposition, that the Enemy was believed to have fallen back a little beyond the yellow house and that the plan was for him to stay in this house and there await the evening attack, which would draw level. The forward troops would be told of his presence on the flank.

He could not understand where the Enemy were supposed to be, nor where the English were going to attack that evening.

He left the house with his men a little later. They followed behind him in single file, through some trees, then downwards into the open valley. They followed a straight line towards the yellow house, not troubling to skirt the fields because there was so little cover. Brandon looked from side to side at the hills above them, waiting for the Enemy to open fire. He turned and looked back at his men, and they were walking in silence behind him, palely, as they did when they walked into the attack. But they reached the other side of the valley untroubled.

They came close to the house and saw no movement through the windows. Brandon went to the door and pushed it open, and before him, in a clean living-room, there were five or six Italian people. He nodded to them and they all smiled carefully. They were not peasants, they must have been

from one of the big coastal towns. The furniture was dainty, and there were good carpets on the floor. These people were all over thirty, three women and two men.

They gave the soldiers chairs in the kitchen, and the women took the army rations and began cooking a hot meal for them all, to be eaten on plates, not in mess-tins, and with knives and forks from the house. Brandon watched the two younger people, a man and a woman, probably married. They were a little excited by the visit, and they bustled about the kitchen-stove making jokes to each other and marvelling at the army rations of beef and soup. The man had fine black eyes and crisp hair. He answered Brandon's questions intelligently, making everything seem calmer and more orderly than it was. He and his wife were clearly delighted to be cooking this meal for eleven mouths, they were excited by this new company. They made the soldiers comfortable, brought in more chairs, laid the table-cloth, poured red wine. There was a great noise in the kitchen and everyone was smiling.

Brandon asked the younger couple whether the Germans had been here, and the woman replied that they had left early that morning. Brandon looked at her with shame and said, leaning forward on the table:

"Were you shelled this morning?"

"Oh, yes!"

They all raised their hands and looked upwards, with their baptismal story to tell.

"Where did you shelter?"

They told him under the stairs just outside the door.

"Was the house hit?"

The young man answered and told him that one shell had hit the roof, but that was all.

"Only one room was damaged, that is all," he said.

"I did that shelling," Brandon said, then, tapping his own chest: "Io, io."

The man was charming with him. He smiled. He simply looked at Brandon as if he were valuable, as if he had been intelligent and good to throw the shells.

Before the meal was served Brandon asked if he could go upstairs. He went up alone and closed the door behind him. On the upstairs landing he saw the damaged room. He pushed the door open further and saw a long tear in the roof. He saw where the wall had fallen away into the room, the carpet covered with brick-dust, the broken dressing table, the pots and jars lying under the window, the roof-slates over the double bed. He was astonished at the force with which the shell had struck the wall. The puff of smoke had been pretty and the burst noiseless.

He walked into one of the other rooms and sat on the bed, unbuckling his binocular case. He looked through the window and saw that he was looking down the main street of a village to a square with a church on its right hand side. Between him and the main street there was only an orchard. The street was quite empty, and from the window he could have thrown a stone onto its pavement, so close was he.

He watched it for some time, then to his astonishment saw a German soldier come out of one of the doors and stroll like an evening walker up and down. He took up his binoculars and watched this man, so close and terrible, and he was especially fsacinated by the German's tin hat, curved over the ears. He wanted to hunt this flesh, to see it capitulate before him. It was wrong for the German to be walking freely so close by. He felt that he owned the man, like an animal with its feebly struggling prey. But he withdrew further into the darkness and went downstairs.

They were still noisy in the room below, but he shouted to them to be quiet.

"This house is on the edge of a village," he said. "And the Germans are still there."

He returned to the upstairs room with his signaller and brought down shell-fire on the street before him. He gave his position in code to Headquarters and instantly his commanding officer spoke. He told Brandon to return immediately at dusk, because he was in the Enemy lines, that he did not know how this had happened, that he must return the moment dusk fell, the very moment, and meanwhile to be alert with sentries out, that he did not know how this had happened.

At dusk Brandon took his men across the valley, and he felt sick, empty and nervous.

. . . .

Early one rainy morning he went down to a cafe at the end of the Stein Gasse for coffee. He sat next to one of the tall windows looking straight onto the narrow street, and he watched the people pass, most of them wrapped up under the rain, their heads down. He sat for a long time over his coffee, looking into the street, and the rain brought two memories, and these troubled and excited him.

The first was at Monte Cerasola when five or six men stopped along the white mountain path and stared at him with horror. It was a memory of the horror in their eyes as they stared at him, refusing to believe it. One of them said, <u>But we saw you lying dead lower down by the path. They reported you dead and we saw you.</u> They were shy and nervous, and under their inquisitive eyes he became a ghost.

The second incident was near Castel Poggiolo, a hill with a grey, round castle at its summit. It was when he had lost his way in the darkness. With him he had his own signaller and also an Italian farm-hand. His signaller was a small, complete man, with a thin moustache and faithful eyes. Brandon had forced the farm-hand to accompany them, to show them the way back to the English lines.

They stood listening in the middle of a gravel path, and it was utterly dark. They thought it was an English voice that had spoken, and they listened for it again. Then a man shouted from nearby: "Halt!" with the German pronunciation, and Brandon at once caught hold of the Italian's sleeve in

terror and whispered: "You have brought us to the Bosche position". For a moment longer they stood together, silent and staring. Then suddenly the Italian broke free from them and like a swift quiet deer leapt down off the path into the shrubbery. Brandon turned panic-stricken, then he began running. He ran down the gravel path in the opposite direction to the voice. He ran along the grass verge so as to make less noise and as he ran he saw at his feet notices marked with a skull-and-crossbones and the word MINEN in luminous paint. Behind him he could hear his signaller appealing to him, "Help me, help me", but he ran on in a long, panic-stricken stride, leaping and leaping forward along the grass verge, and then where the road met another, after two or three hundred yards, he stopped and waited, and everything was quiet.

The signaller came along the path, panting and exhausted with the heavy wireless set on his back. Brandon found himself ruthless. The signaller came up to him in the dark and he said he would never have thought it. He would never have thought Brandon capable of running away. But Brandon found himself ruthless and exultant. He tried to find in himself hot shame, but he was only exultant and without any pity for the signaller or any afterthought, like one who has been granted a further reprieve. He told the signaller that he could not have afforded to be captured with the maps, but he said this with a smile in the dark. He told him that all the English forward positions were marked on his map. But

he wanted to drink something and swear and dance about.

The two of them sat side by side in a barn and watched the field outside through the spaces between the logs. It was slightly less dark now, and between the winds the night was silent. It was a bad silence, with things that ogled them from outside the barn in the dark and voices brought to them by the winds. They decided to leave the talkative barn. They walked down the field and then along another path, listening all the time and stepping very quietly. They found the backyard of a farm-house and they were about to go in when just before them they saw a man. He was standing by the open door sharpening a long knife. They drew back into the shadows only a few feet from him, and they tried to make out whether he was a German soldier or not. He simply went on sharpening his knife, and now and then he looked up into the sky, as if he knew what was going on. He had a large round face which was white and flat in the darkness. They crept carefully back to the path and were astonished that he did not move. And as they were walking along the path again the bad silence spoke and the anonymous mouths grumbled in the distance, hoom hoom-hoom hoom hoom-hoom-hoom, and the sky sang like boys and all the shells ~~sang~~ swung down to the earth and shrieked in the furrows. They ran into a house, and it was occupied by English soldiers.

In the quiet aftermath they were given a guide, and he took them out into the field again and brought them nearer

and nearer the flesh of the battle, up hills, through woods, along gullies. Rain, black mud, white guiding tapes, farm-houses, men standing silently in the doorways, each man holding his terror inside his head alone, the mortuary all about, the quick shells jumping down from their ledges in the sky, the broken walls, the trees uprooted, flayed and black, the shouting men and sometimes weeping.

Why must they come again? Why were Cerasola and Poggiolo listening in his flesh?

When he came back to the guns from Monte Cerasola he wanted his fatigue to be noticed. He came across the field by the River Garigliano with his straggling signallers, pale and torn, staring before them. All those at the gun-pits turned to watch them. The gunners stood back to let them pass, watching them closely, imagining the battle as it must have been in the mountains beyond the wonderful river, and afraid of these human exhibits.

But Brandon had been little use in the mountains. He had merely hung back with his men under the shelter of boulders, watching the wounded cry out below. He had withheld himself, kept his men in the background, and only given help when it was asked for. He was not yet a scholar. He was not yet broken in. He had not yet learned the use of his nerves. He was still a Novice only accustomed to the sight of blood.

He drummed his fingers on his knee outside the command post, frowning. It was a smiling spring day, and he could imagine what the river looked like, grey-still and skirted by soft lawns, from Cerasola.

There was no work for him in the command-post, and he sat in the same chair until long after midnight, smoking and talking. He went unwillingly, at first only a little terrified, to his bed in the bivouac near the cookhouse. It lay between two hillocks, hidden from the guns. He was always most careful in choosing a site for his bivouac wherever they went. He would consult his hidden oracle and bide his time, going from the shelter of trees to the shelter of a hillock, from high ground to low, until at last the oracle spoke and gave him the place of safety.

There were no shells from the Enemy, for gun-emplacements were impossible in the mountains. Only very long-range guns could reach this place, and these he began to fear. He began to wait for the faintest whispering in the sky, quite without warning in this quiet, and then the black fountain of earth, too near his tent. The command-post was in a square brick building, like a wayside temple, and it was warm there, with people. He was fifty yards from this building, and much further from the guns. He could hear nothing. Most of the gun-crews were asleep. There was no machine-gun fire from the mountains, nor the distant falling of mortar-bombs, nor the sound of vehicles on the road, nor the low, tranquil talking of men close by.

He took off his clothes and lay down under the

blankets, putting out the small battery-light at his side. If he raised himself up on his elbows he could see no glow of cigarettes in the darkness, nor the sudden flash of a torch, nor the beacon used by the guns as a point of reference by night. He was utterly alone, and doomed as he closed his eyes. The terror mounted in him slowly. He lay in his bed and started at the slightest sound, sweating, and sometimes the breeze made the faintest of whisperings in the sky which quickly died away. He waited for the fatal shell because he had never before been so certain of its coming.

Again and again he decided to get up and return to the command-post, but did nothing. Still he lay with his mouth open, absolutely still and tense, under the frail bivouac. Once, soon after three o'clock, he pushed the damp blankets aside and began to dress. But he fell back again, knowing the folly of his terror and not wishing to give way. And again he began the agonising rehearsal for his death, when all his flesh seemed to feel the first moment of the fatal obliteration.

For he had done wrong. In the mountains he had not done enough. He was unworthy. Already the Novice was passing into the Scholar, and every new lesson learned brought a conscience with it, painfully. He had done wrong, and the guilty do not sleep.

The light of the dawn brought solace, a golden

blessing. He looked up suddenly and saw it through the exit-flap, shining from beyond the mountains, promising another spring day.

His mood changed. He got up angry. What terrible fate had put him among the brain-creatures, with their courage, their self-scrutiny and their little premeditations, their horrible genius for deciding between right and wrong? He was infected. The worm had entered. He wanted to be among creatures who killed and could forget, who loved and could forget, who made a fatal error and could forget; but not among those whose sleepless minds limped after them in the shadows, preying on them with ceaseless questions, menacing them with phantoms. He would not be one of those whose minds were talking all the time, who spewed themselves out down a sink-hole of words and self-questionings, who talked love but would not make it, who talked crime but would not with their own hands committ it, who talked prowess and did not have it, who talked decisions but could not take them.

He had come into the War, which otherwise meant nothing to him, in order to fling off the dread brain-creatures, only to find that he was in a very nest of them, that they infested the darkest places, down even to where a man shed blood, alone with God. They would not permit God a single glance onto the earth.

. . . .

In the corner of the inn there were two musicians, with a little card on the table on front of them: "Bitte, fur die Musik." Listening to them closely there was a plump American soldier. He sat at their table nodding and smiling as they played. His coat was open in the front, his head was bowed, and he was happy and himself. When later two other sodiers looked in, thinner and younger, he called across to them and asked them to join him. They laughed and smiled with him, but without pleasure. They were brown-faced children, whereas the plump soldier was father, calm and expansive, flushed. They were exiles. That was the abashed horror in their faces. We are exiles. You glance at us; your eyes say, Soldier, and you turn away. We are boys. We have mothers. We have childhoods. We have names. And under the ammunition belt there is a photograph.

The eyes are always judging. They are always coming to a conclusion. Your name for us is not us as we tenderly know ourselves to be, all that we have, all that we can ever be, each of us alone, high and dry with his sins and stains, a whole world more than your mere idea. You name us soldier, but you name not us.

The two boys went across to the musicians and asked for a German song, only to be charming and to be smiled at in return. The musicians could not understand their English, and the boys could not remember the name of the tune they wanted. One of them agreed to try and whistle it, and when he began the silence fell and was terrible. He

whistled softly, without conviction, and gradually the murdering silence entered his flesh and at last he stopped whistling, paralysed and alone in his exile, the tune dead and forgotten on his hands. He said like a broken man: "Then it goes up to a higher pitch", waving his hand high in the air to wave away the ghosts. The musicians shook their heads again, and then the soldiers smiled at them with the faces of beggars and walked across to the door and stumbled sick and hot into the night.

On his last day at the fram in Bleitnau he had pointed the camera at Theresa, Frau Glassner's daughter, and she had changed under his eyes. Her eyes opened wide and ceased to look at things. She became utterly still, prepared for her embalming, - to be seen in what foreign countries by what eyes? All her anxiety, her little frown, her tom-boy's mouth, went in that moment, and an epoch stared through her face.

He lay in bed thinking about the time of his truancy. The old world had gone, and will there be again the accidental green world? Our world is a laboratory, he thought, and there are no accidents in science.

Each of us in war has his baptism, when the spirit of the boy is yielded up and we turn our backs on the old green world.

In war it is easy for people to die, even the wise and ageless and infallible. The world is prolific with

dying. It is easy for buildings to fall to the ground, even the eternal ones with the important frown. And the women we loved starve in camps, the churches where we prayed are canteens, and the villages of our truancy are trivial. By the time it is over the sacred and eternal things are no longer there. Do not say sacred and eternal. The words sacred and eternal are ridiculous. They do not belong to your world. Your religion is dead, and as for eternity, war is the shadow that constantly falls on your sleeve. If you still believe in the sacred and eternal you are only turning the other way; when you look back you will see the shadow still there on your sleeve.

Each war draws you nearer the void of abstraction, further from your silly, flushed, busy days. Our childish grandfathers rang bells at Christmas and prayed, they had whiskers and gold watch-chains across their waistcoats, but now their familiar places are empty, we are no longer allowed the folly of believing.

If Brandon dreamed of impossible women at night, in his soldier's exile from love, then so did the other, and the other also, and the other. Look into yourself and you find me. That is the lesson of the democratic war.

8/ [illegible]

He went to the American library in Salzburg and took down a book written by an American commander on the Italian campaign during the Second World War. He

leaned against one of the shelves and read one chapter after another very quickly, frowning and very excited, as if they carried a special secret for him. Where "the Commander brought his Corps close to the river" the library became heavy with memory, and there were voices. He raed the sentence again and again, dreaming the river back. It was the River Volturno. When he put the book back in its place he was stiff from standing so long, there was an ache in his right hip where he had been leaning hard against the shelf, and his eyes watered from having stared so long at the ppint. He was awed and troubled, like a child after sin.

He passed under the playing bells on the other side of the river at eleven o'clock that morning and knew how sad they were. They were set in a minor key, and they played to the time of the following words: The green world is almost gone, underneath the hill.

. . . .

They drew closer to Faenza, and there the Enemy stiffened and threw in counter-attack after counter-attack. The English pushed far beyond the yellow, newly-baptised house to within sight of Rimini, under heavy shell-fire and mortar-bombardments, through woods and across a valley with many shrubs and trees. The infantry company with whom Brandon was serving stopped at a house near the brow of a hill, against the very nose of the Enemy.

The infantry major wanted to leave this house at dusk the same evening, because Enemy troops could approach to within a hundred yards of it without being seen or heard. He disliked being so near the crest of a hill without commanding it. But Brandon was against giving up the ground they had won, that is, he did not want to return across the valley to their former positions, under heavy shell-fire all the way, then come forward again on the following day and pass under the same bombardment for the third time and perhaps have to fight for ground they had already captured. He and the Major talked in whispers, away from the other men. And the Major was soon persuaded. He was a loud, brisk, tender man, promoted up from a private soldier. He agreed to stay in this house with his men provided Brandon shelled the brow of the hill constantly throughout the night, laying down a line of shells the whole night through to discourage the Enemy patrols.

And on the brow of this hill, hidden in the dark, there was another house and, scourged by Brandon's shells again and again, it caught fire and made the bare, treeless brow of

the hill visible from their headquarters, which was a tactical advantage. Then it ceased burning and at dawn only smouldered.

During the night the Major put out patrols and then an attack to the Enemy post nearby. He found it strong, lost one man and two wounded, put sentries outside the house and decided to attack in daylight when there was some possibility of tank support.

At dawn the Enemy post was taken, the prisoners and the English wounded were brought in, and the battle stalked over the hill and a mile away, leaving the ploughed fields charred, the air bitter with fumes from the shells, the gates and fences broken, ~~the [illegible]~~ and the house on the brow of the hill still smouldering.

Brandon walked out into the little roadway and went towards the rising smoke behind the trees. He took a path through the trees and came upon it suddenly. The shrubs round it were black, the upper storey of the house had tumbled in. The door of the kitchen was hanging open.

He went to the side of the house and there was a movement in the bushes. He stopped and listened. He watched the bushes, then he turned hastily back to the house. He looked down and just before he stepped forward he noticed that part of his right boot was on the leg of a German officer. ~~This~~ His body was almost buried in the dust from the house, like ~~a~~ flat ~~caste.~~ parchment. He stepped wide and went to the

like flat parchment/

front again.

The house had been shelled, it had been shelled.

He heard the voice of a woman, it was the sound of moaning, it was from inside the smouldering house, and he went towards the hanging door.

As he stood in the doorway both of them tried to touch him. One of them was by the table, her eyes saw nothing, but she knew he had come, and the terrible flesh was open in her leg. He could not touch them. He could not bear to be there. The kitchen smouldered, he could not see the other wall because of the white smoke. The two old women came towards him, they had survived, they had survived. They prayed with their hands, they held up their hands and cried to him, they called on his mercy, help us, help us, the terrible flesh was open, they had suffered the night in flames, the world had been set alight and the sky had sung and the world's upper storey had tumbled down, and the officer lay in the garden in his vestment of dust.

He ran back to headquarters and went straight to the Major. He said he had been to the smouldering house. He looked into the Major's eyes and wondered. He did not know when pity and murder went hand in hand. He spoke shyly. He told him, watching him closely, that the two old women were there and that they had been there all night; and the Major jumped up and said: "Take me there". Then he called out to the stretcher bearers and went up the hill. Brandon followed him slowly. He saw him walk straight past the hanging

door into the kitchen. And when he arrived at the doorway he saw the Major standing there white and appalled, his arms round their shoulders, shaking his head and saying, No, no, no.

Brandon learned terror in the late summer of 1943, and it was from another man. Battle has music and words which must be learned, and its usual noises conveyed no terror to him on the first, second and third day of his arrival at the beach-head, even though during these days the English were nearly pushed back into the water and the Enemy was in some places nearly one hundred yards from the beach. But on the afternoon of the fourth day he saw terror in the eyes of another man. He saw the man start, then throw himself to the ground. And a shell fell only a few yards from that man. From that time Brandon knew what songs to listen for, and which were the dangerous songs, and which were the barks without a bite. Terror is protection. And he threw himself to the ground with the other men.

The bombardment of a city from the air has one music, a battle another. He was often afraid.

Cerasola happened in February, 1944, about five months after his baptism, but he was still bewildered by battle, he still did not know how to talk over plans with the infantry, compute figures and register targets and pass messages down the wireless simultaneously with feeling terror and keeping

an ear open for the shell with his name on it. Later he learned how to do this. His nerves became worse, not better, but bad nerves made him alert to the slightest noise, and they were an insurance against death. He did not like it when he ceased to fear. Fear was his magic. It made him go to ground at the right moment. He was aware of the shells before he heard them singing through the sky or saw them explode. Fear was his hidden oracle. According to his hidden oracle he waited a little here, ran forward there, occupied this house instead of that, apparently for no good reason. And he did not trust the oracles of other men. He knew men who had no oracles. Their eyes were helpless. The shells loved them and claimed them. He would stay and talk with men in a roadway for just as long as he felt it to be safe, but when the hidden oracle spoke he would leave them and take cover. Never herd.

His will to save his own skin slept only once, for less than twenty seconds, on the southern bank of the River Volturno, with the man's elbow grinding and grinding into his side. He suddenly became dull as the Barrel Organ sang its chord in the sky, he did not care, he lay there with his eyes closed, dully ready to enter death. But then the shells exploded, six of them together, at the top of the crater where he was lying, and his fear suddenly quickened again amid the deafening crashes, and he tried like all the men

round him to burrow and burrow his way into the black earth, scratching at it with his fingernails.

. . . .

He arrived in Greece from Italy during April, 1945, and he established his headquarters in Ligourion. His task was to administer an area of two hundred and fifty square miles between Nea Epidaurus, a fishing village on the Saronic Gulf, and the city of Nauplion.

He took two rooms at the very top of the village, under a hill covered with boulders and stones, so as to be near the night sentries, and sometimes he would walk out onto his wooden balcony at night and peer into the shadows, startled by rifle-shots. These would be soldiers from the national guard shooting at nothing, their faces grim behind the boulders.

He chose an old man with rags on his back for an interpreter. This old man stayed with him always, pushed little boys out of the way when he walked down the village street, secured for him the best wine out of the houses, spoke about his life in America before the First World War, exaggerated Brandon's powers to his Greek friends and enemies, advertised him to the best-looking girls, and leaned with him over a balcony one morning when the sun was high and was sad and spoke quietly.

"I want you to come and see my daughter," he said. "She is very sick. She is eleven years old,"

When Brandon met her she was lying on a couch in

the corner of their hut. She had very black eyes. She smiled at him as he bent down to take her hand, and her smile was so fresh and so utterly delightful, like a sudden coming of dawn, that he stepped back for a moment, feeling his murders heavy upon him. The hut was on the edge of a solemn cypress wood, where the wind listened, breathing most softly. It stood at the beginning of a path which led up to a museum and the amphitheatre of Epidaurus, where the priests of Aesculapius had worked their cures.

He took the child and her mother by car to Nauplion. He had been told the name of her sickness several times, but he spoke no Greek and the old man did not know the English word for it. The hospital was a white, oblong building behind trees, clean and hushed. He walked with the child into the recpetionist's office, then to the doctor's consulting room. The old man's wife nodded and smiled at everyone. She was a thin, pale woman, and she nervously rubbed her hands together, standing at the edge of her black abyss.

The doctor was fat and tall, with a white coat and hands covered with black hair. He looked at the girl and nodded quickly to Brandon without smiling.

"I have seen her before," he said.

Brandon asked whether she could not have another medical examination. The doctor shrugged and answered:

"I can examine her".

He took the child by the shoulder and walked with her into the corridor.

"But I tell you I know the case", he said.

The child stripped in one of the cubicles and lay down on the bed. She seemed used to these examinations. The doctor felt her pulse, listened to her chest and took her temperature. Brandon saw her flat dark wounds, like bruises, under her shoulder and across her chest and stomach, and when the doctor got up he asked him whether the child might not have a bed in the hospital. The mother could not look after her properly in a hut with no running water and no indoor lavatory. The doctor looked at the floor.

"But there are no beds", he said.

"Surely?"

"There are no beds. No beds are available. I am working sixteen hours a day."

Brandon wanted to strike him in the mouth. He shouted:

"The child is sick!"

"I have no beds".

The doctor watched him quietly, as he might watch a nervous patient before the anaesthetic. He was tired, he was wiser by a thousand deaths than Brandon. He suffered Brandon's command:

"You must find her a bed. Make a bed out of wood and straw. I am telling you to find her a bed."

"I have a waiting list of hundreds".

He took Brandon by the sleeve and spoke to him in French.

"The child will soon be dead", he said. "It is better that she should die at home."

And he added:

"My job is to cure people, you know. However, let her stay one night and go back in the morning."

~~The doctor and the murderer~~ They shook hands, and during the early evening Brandon returned to his farm-house at Ligourion, where documents and deputations waited on him.

His office was a wide and bare room. He had ordered a desk to be put there, with chairs, telephones and a carpet. On the wall behind the desk he had put up a large-scale map of the area between Nauplion and Nea Epidaurus, and on this map he pinned little red flags to denote which of the villages he had visited. It was in this office that he received deputations from the villagers, took reports from his own soldiers on their return from missions, listened to disputes between the mayor of one place and the mayor of another, arranged for the collection of food and medicines from Nauplion in lorries, talked over problems with the local traders and farmers, and gave advice to his sentries from the national guard. His work altered nothing, and most of it was invented. He arranged expeditions across the mountains with donkeys, he patrolled the silent country in the dead of night with his armed men, he seldom reached his

bed before two o'clock in the morning and he was always up by six. He used himself every minute. Every day he drove from village to village, he ate eggs and chops with the mayors, he drank their wine and agreed to have the mountains near them patrolled, he compiled reports about the incidence of tuberculosis, rickets and scabies among the village populations, knowing that these reports were either redundant or unwanted. And when he returned, tired and whole, to his office under the mountain with its bustling map he found patient villagers at his door, caps in hand, their lives waiting for his nod.

It was the same in Udine, during the summer of 1945, when thousands of troops and civilians of every European nationality were coming down from the north into Italy by horseback, cart, tank, car and lorry. He spent the same happy sleepless nights in the camps, and he felt the same bite move him to do more, then a little more, and then, with the second wind, more and yet more.

After abstract murder the abstract conscience begins to bite.

In Ligourion he could say to himself, I am whole again, and he remembered the days of his truancy. But during his truancy he had touched her black hair, kissed her mouth, watched her tom-boy's shoulders, and he had turned in his country bed with joy and pain. Now his wholeness was that of a child of war: that is to say, his love was abstract, it was towards a little girl he hardly knew, to families he could never see, to documents and deputations. He marked

off his love not with kisses, not with kisses in the doorway in the breathless dawn, ~~she a woman and he a man since four~~ as they whispered to each other with the leaves behind them, but with little flags on maps, letters to the mayor of Nea Epidaurus, with documents and deputations. And when he kissed now it was the mouth of a stranger like Helenie, whose face was a land where he found himself lonely, like the face of a girl in a brothel, the face whose eyes watch you suffer your bitter, dumb secretion.

One day he drove to Nea Epidaurus, and the crowd drew back as he came into the narrow, cobbled street. He switched the engine off and they were hushed, like the crowd round an ambulance. The mayor came out of a little doorway and shook his hand. He was a small muscular man with a brown cropped head, like a city workman. He always spoke in a low voice, never moving his tiny, pale eyes. He made a way for Brandon through the crowd and they went into the house together, into a dark room where there were huge flagons of wine, coils of rope, fish-nets and, hanging from a hook in the ceiling, a black pig, shining in the darkness.

The mayor closed the door and pulled the iron bolt across, and at once the crowd outside pushed towards it and tried to hear what they were saying inside. They sat down at a work-table and the Mayor poured out the yellow resin wine into three glasses. He introduced Brandon to an old man with thin light hair, a skin like a child's and eyes clear

and blue. This tall old man remained standing behind them while they talked, and whenever they said something with which he agreed he talked very fast and did a little dance with his feet. There was also a soldier from the national guard who leaned against the dark barred window smoking and watching the excited whispering crowd outside.

Brandon and the mayor made their quiet plans, and they shook hands before they left each other. The mayor told him that eighty people, some from this village and some from Arakhnaion, a mountain village in the Arcadian range, had been massacred by partisan soldiers earlier in the year. He was disappointed to see that Brandon took this calmly. Brandon looked at him under his eyebrows and asked him for proof. The mayor's lips became tighter, he lifted his head proudly and said:

"You shall see it with your own eyes."

He told Brandon that he would take him across the gulf to the place of the massacre, and there Brandon would see the bodies of the victims for himself. They agreed to meet again.

Brandon returned to the village the following week, early one clear morning. A long motorboat was at the beach waiting for them, its decks covered with sacks. On the other side of the gulf there were blue mountains, impossible in their early mists. The waters of the gulf were flat and blue, and the motor-boat lay by a wooden promontory, chugging.

The villagers were very excited by this excursion and had broughttheir children down to the beach, but neither the mayor nor the tall old man took any notice of them as they walked towards the landing stage. They jumped on board with Brandon, and behind them came a plentiful bodyguard of Greek soldiers.

The boat went quietly off, and Brandon looked from one man to another. They took a straight course close under a mountain rising brown and night above them, and as they floated past it, the

[water...

waters hardly stirring, it was rugged and still. The day was hot and muted, it had not yet broken open.

The mayor stood at Brandon's side peering into the mountain, while the old man was at the nose of the boat waiting to jump off, though they were a kilometre from their landing stage.

The mayor looked at Brandon wisely:

"Did you see that?"

"No, I only heard a whistling."

The mayor pointed high up into the mountain. ~~Brandon~~ had heard a long whistle.

"He was warning the others", the mayor told him.

Brandon watched a deer leap down from one rock to another, then he saw a man run, a tiny figure, from behind a boulder to the brow of the mountain and out of sight.

"He may be a shepherd. He may not be a partisan", Brandon said.

The mayor smiled and nodded as if this had been a good-natured joke.

"He is a partisan", he murmured.

They moored the boat at the foot of the mountain and began their climb. The old man did not keep to the foot-path. He was light and young, he was dressed in rubber slippers and he jumped from one round boulder to the next far ahead of everybody else, until he was at the top. Brandon saw him stop for a rest only once. He was proud and wild, he felt himself to be their leader, because this was the place where he had been taken to be murdered, but he had escaped, and he

was the only one to survive. He knew every inch of the way up to the place of his baptism. He leaped from one boulder to the next with long, young strides, and his hips were spare like a boy's.

The well was wide and deep, and before he reached it Brandon could smell dead people. He put a handkerchief up to his nose and looked over the lip of the well into the massacre, then at the gauntlet thrown in the centre of these unburied people.

"What is the glove?" he asked.

The mayor told him that it belonged to the right hand of the man who had done the murder. He had stood the old people on the lip of the well and plunged a long knife into their necks, then pushed them.

"Who saw him do it, then?" Brandon asked.

The mayor pointed to the old man.

"It is so dark down there", Brandon said, "one cannot see how many there are."

The mayor looked at him quickly:

"There are eighty bodies here",

"But it is so dark. I can make out five, or perhaps six."

"The two villages lost eighty people by this massacre."

He took Brandon to a shrub nearby and bent down and lifted one of its branches. He showed him locks of human hair on the ground, and a high-heeled shoe. He said that the murderers had shaved the heads of two girls from

Arakhnaion, then satisfied themselves with them.

Brandon stared at the hair. It was other than what people comb, touch, kiss.

"Did they kill these girls?"

"No. They sent them back to the village."

Brandon was happier.

The mayor said nothing more to him until they were in the boat, going back across the Gulf.

"These men are still in the mountains," he said. "I think they must be captured. Now you have seen it for yourself..."

"It is going to be difficult to find anybody in these mountains, even if we knew they were the murderers."

"Could you send out patrols? My soldiers would act as guides."

The old man and the soldiers were standing near them, watching Brandon and listening.

"I can manage a patrol," Brandon said. "I can manage seven or eight men."

The mayor turned away.

"Seven or eight men..." he murmured. "They burned down twelve houses in Arakhnaion."

"My men are tired," Brandon told him. "They did their fighting in Italy. Where would they begin in these mountains? Can you tell me? Have you more than rumours to go on?"

None of them spoke to him. The mayor was sad. They had put their faith in him. The old man looked at him and turned away, enacting his private vengeance, bloody and quick.

Brandon was alone among them on the deck of a motor-

[-boat...

boat, and he was afraid.

One of the soldiers said, "Look", and pointed to the splash of a dolphin on the waters. They took up their rifles and each of them shot at the great silver fish as it leaped high out of the waves. They shot again and again, growing more and more excited, not troubling to take aim, and their bullets made tiny white momentary flakes on the sides of the waves. But the dolphin went on unharmed, and they put their rifles away.

Brandon touched one of the soldiers on the sleeve and asked him for his rifle. The soldier gave it to him, and they watched him. He put it up to his shoulder and closed his left eye. He lined up the sights and when the dolphin leaped again he pulled the trigger. The fish fell on the arc of its leap, ~~and fell~~ tail-first back into the water, ~~away again from the sting of the evil eye.~~

"You have got him", a soldier said.

And they seemed daunted, looking about them. It had proved something for them.

The following week Brandon took a little expedition with donkeys across the mountain, along the snowy paths, to Arakhnaion. He drew the chief of the village and his own interpreter aside and asked him about the massacre and the burning of twelve of his houses. Brandon could see the charred houses in the flat of the village. But the chief laughed at these questions and told the interpreter that he wanted to have Brandon to dinner that evening. A lamb had been killed and

was being prepared. He was fierce and sudden, with a sharp little beard.

And at dinner in his wooden house the village chief lay back on his couch and sang to them, yelling the Albanian song, his voice rising and rising and breaking with sorrow and manhood, going to the edge of the sky in a terrible shriek, and his wife in black cloth came across from the hearth and pleaded with him to stop, clinging to his knees and banging him with her white fists as he sang, his head back, his eyes wet and amazed, enjoying her pain. This was the song of his dead father.

Brandon returned to Ligourion when it was deserted of troops, and he looked back along the path to see whether the group of whispering men were following him. It was dark and very cold. The path was empty, with the mountain beyond it.

He knocked quietly on the wooden door, and Helenie's maid opened it to him. He went carefully down two stone steps into a room with a stove, and as he passed her she giggled. She was younger than Helenie, and appeared to share all her secrets. She was proud of this secret meeting.

A week before he had gone to their twon-house in Nauplion, soon after dusk. On that occasion the maid had put her finger up to her lips when she opened the door to him. He tiptoed past two lighted rooms from which there came the sound of voices, and she took him by the hand to

lead him up the winding staircase. At the top she pushed open the sky-light and led him out onto the roof, where there were great leaves in the darkness, and a tank, and chimney-pots. She indicated to him that he must stay exactly where he was without making a sound, and he turned to look at the dark city beyond him and at the prison-island in the sea. He waited in the silence until Helenie came. He smelled her Eau de Cologne as she stood by the dark leaves. She took his hand in the fashion of a romantic actress, and for a moment leaned towards him. He thought that they would stay on the roof and make love, but she told him she must go immediately. Her mother and father must not know about his visit, though he had met them both.

"Will you come to Ligourion?" she asked.

She told him to come to her father's other

[... house

house, to be there after night-fall and to make sure that no one saw him.

He had first seen her in the village square of Ligourion. When he sent his interpreter down from the balcony to speak to her, she looked at him with the slightest of smiles and made him a bow. It was a yellow, clear day, and the moment he saw her he loved the village, though it was a mute and sulky place, full of partisans lying low, hating the presence of English troops. Every day his men made a search for arms and ammunition. Every day a man would betray his neighbour, whispering with quick eyes, but nothing would ever be found.

Standing in the square he had dreamed the future. He had dreamed taking a lover in this village, and also working ceaselessly to assuage the bite of his conscience. Without these dreams he would have grown ill with a disease that is sometimes seen in the faces of men, the disease of chronic despair, and he would finally have xxxxx capitulated.

Now he saw Helenie near the stove in the dark room. She smiled at him when he entered and showed him a chair, then she began preparing him coffee. They spoke in French, and the maid watched them in great awe from the other side, dreaming more love than there could be.

Helenie was less lonely, proud and calm than before. She was more like the other Greeks now, nervous, too quick, with strained eyes. After a time they said

nothing to each other and began listening for footsteps outside, in growing fear. The village was silent, and he continually thought of the mountain above them, with great boulders, where people lurked at night.

But he broke the menacing silence, in order to serve his idea, locked in the closed hall of his head, He whispered to her, Was it not time for her maid to sleep? Were they to be watched all evening? She turned to her maid with a smile and repeated his words in Greek, almost mocking him, and after a brief conversation the maid rose politely. She shook him by the hand as Helenie told her, and with a last glance at her mistress, a conniving look, left the room. Brandon was certain now that outside the window there were men, waiting and listening, close to the pane, their feet slippered.

He drew Helenie onto the divan and they kissed. Her kiss was hard and unenchanted, and they stared into each other's eyes, finding only what was foreign. Only their bodies were to be offered up.

He touched her golden hair and lay at her side. That she was beautiful was a matter of no account, for they had shared nothing. He touched her blouse, but her hand gripped his wrist as he tried to open it. He found in himself no whisper of desire. He pressed himself against her very hard, pushing her underneath him, and suddenly, as he began to kiss her neck, she pulled back his head and struck him across both cheeks.

He drew back, ashamed and furious, and he saw that her eyes were shining. He was about to strike her when the need died. They were both lonely.

He asked her, "Why did you do that?" but she made no reply. She only smiled at him very slightly, with her girl's half-deliberate mystery.

The coffee was steaming on the black stove, and a marble clock ticked slowly. The table-cloth was heavy, mauve and rough. The room was soft, warm, enclosed, a very perfect place for lovers, and [illegible] the house lay in a hole among rocks. Midnight had passed, and Brandon began to fear driving back to Nauplion alone, in a country where there were brigands. He had brought no revolver. He thought of this while he lay at Helenie's side.

Sometimes she was tender with him, for a moment. She drew her fingers down the side of his face, she kissed him briefly and gently on the brow, but always she seemed to perform her movements. It was as if a watching public existed close by. He sought a message for himself alone.

He had often become excited during the previous few days, thinking about this visit. His stomach had given a strange little start, and he had wanted to do something boisterous, to celebrate. Now he was lonely, he wanted to leave this house among the rocks, and he wanted to finish his journey across the mountains to Nauplion quickly, driving fast. He wanted to see his

own bed, to turn the pages of his own books, to smoke a little before sleeping, staring up at the ceiling, and to remember his truancy again and again, stirring up each gesture and each gaze, finding again the impossible firwood and the memorial stone at the top of the hill. Only dreams were his friends.

He could not understand this loneliness and fear. So he moved towards Helenie again and again, kissing her neck and cheeks, putting his fingers in the midst of her hair, and speaking to her softly. Her face remained unknown to him.

Next week he might be gone. His regiment moved incessantly. There was neither leisure nor choice for love. Only a local need was granted him, a spasmodic burning lust, the shifty need of a slave. She watched his movements very inquisitively, from a distance. He was her first spectacle. But he filled the room with no dream of his own. He deserted it every second, aching to be away, and at the end he could hardly find words to speak to her.

He jumped up from the divan. She was astonished by this and looked at him with hatred, her lips pursed. He smiled at her and asked her to see him to the door. She did not address another word to him, but simply shook hands with him in the darkness and turned back into the dark room.

When he had closed the door he waited for a moment, then walked up the stone steps to the path. The air was very cold, there was a slight breeze, and moonlight. At the top he turned round again to look at the faint orange light behind Helenie's curtain, wondering whether he should go back. But he began walking swiftly along the path towards the centre of the village, with the great white boulders gleaming at his side.

The stillness and silence were like a great paralysis. He might be cut off here, nameless like any stone, eternally deserted, in a place dark and still, with the terrible mountain behind, might surrender in dumb terror with no possible solace issuing out of the huge domed sky or stony land. All the phantoms of the night loomed up and harried him along the narrow road, paying him back for his act of sex. His loneliness welled up at him from the valley below in great cold gusts, gushing back in fuller volume now, after his doomed and broken journey into love, where he must not go. He was beaten and cowed on his way, like a slave who has dared to raise his voice.

At last he fell back into the seat of his car and closed his eyes, worn out, his head bowed over the wheel. Then slowly, fumbling with his fingers in the darkness, he switched on the head-lights, and they spread a wide yellow light over the pebbles of the square and along the

white road back to Nauplion. He started up the engine and in breathless relief, all surrounded by the quiet throb, he drove smoothly across the pebbles and out onto the white, curving road.

. . . .

Brandon went up to the castle in Salzburg at dusk and looked down across the valley from one of the towers. Behind him there was a parapet and a huge wooden door with a postern in it. The dusk grew as he stood there. Lights came up in the valley, there was the sound from below of someone practising the bugle, and the last illuminated thing was a mountain peak opposite him, high and red, quite alone in the sky. If the Enemy had been there he would have seen no lights, there would have been no people riding bicycles along the lanes, no carts carrying hay, no bugle. It would have been the impossible, and also lovely, this valley, because somewhere in it there would have been a line, and beyond this line would have lain the Enemy in their strange dream-territories, impenetrable like the sky. The battlefield is an animal kingdom; the question of happiness does not interest us there. He looked across the valley and saw that the Enemy was gone. The valley gaped, and the motionless river below was shining in the last light.

Some days before the assault on the River Volturno Brandon sat with five officers in a room of a barracks on the outskirts of Naples, during the evening. They were sitting at table and the senior of them, a major, said, "We have to decide who is going out with the attack", and

during the silence that followed his words Brandon held his breath, his heart-beats were faster, he gazed at the wall before him, he held the leg of the table. It was late autumn, and this evening was a brief return to summer. The barracks were on the edge of Naples, high up, and the sea was silver in the distance. The windows of this room were open, but no sounds came from outside. One of the captains, he who had welcomed Brandon on the beaches of Salerno, said he thought Brandon ought to go, being the freshest. The senior officer was a kindly man and he looked

{at Brandon...

At the southern bank of the river they waited for the boats to take them across. The water was dark and calm, with high rushes on either side. They lay down in the shell-holes near the bank while the German gun wailed and wailed, movking them. A long flame issued from the six barrels of this gun when it fired, and its six shells made a long harmonious chord across the sky before they fell, close together and simultaneously. This was called the Barrel Organ, because of its strange preliminary wail, which seemed to come straight out of the sky and compass the whole of the world.

Brandon lay in one of the craters and the man at his side pushed his elbow against him, grinding and grinding it round in his self-communion as the gun wailed again and the shells made their lovely chord, a cry like the last coitus in the world. Brandon heard the quick shout of the Major who had looked at him with a woman's smile, and he heard stretch-bearers come to the edge of the carter and call down for volunteers to help with the wounded. And neither he nor any man there stirred. He could hear the Major cursing and sighing.

Later he stood at the edge of the water waiting for the boat. A young captain was at his side. He told Brandon that their major had lost his leg but was still alive. In his hand he carried the major's map-case, covered with thick

blood not yet dry. Brandon watched him in the dark. He saw him bend down and quietly smell the blood. He bent down and smelt it secretly, as if Brandon would not be able to see him in the dark.

~~The first sessions~~ He walked in the woods at Hellbrunn, and everything was still and waiting, the air was dumb and heavy before a storm. He walked through the leaves,

[and...

and the trees made a hot, closed dome round him, and the twigs and bracken stirred and bent under his feet. He had walked in other Austrian woods during the autumn of 1945, after rain, when he had been released from the bonds of his crucifixion, though not released unconditionally. (Did the War, fabulous country of memories, end in the middle of 1945? Or is it wherever you are, and alive as long as you are alive?)

During 1946 and 1947 he would blush and his heart would beat faster at the mention in conversation of the word battle, or at the questions: Were you in the army? Where did you serve during the War? He was a mute wanting to make his ghostly revelation, and he went down into the pit, and the sky sang again. What did you do during the War? Show me the place, take me by the hand and lead me there, and, tinker, tailor, soldier, sailor and clever shirker, take off the bandages and let me see what they did to you. You are alone in this, but you are all of us.

The legend grew up among his signallers that wherever he went the battle became worse. They said to each other, He has got a magnet in his pocket. And the day before he chose the men who would go out to the infantry with him they turned their heads away, unable to meet his ~~terrible~~ eyes.

He stood at the edge of an orchard in Salerno on the 8th of September, 1943, at dusk, and ~~he~~ listened to a senior officer talking quietly with four or five of his men. They were standing in the next field, a few yards in front of him, and Brandon was hidden in the shadow under one of the

trees. He heard the officer tell them that, though they were headquarters troops, the time had come for them to fight, that the infantry positions had been overrun and that the Enemy were less than two hundred yards away. He told them to dig themselves in just short of the road and to shoot at anything they saw during the night. None of them must sleep. The entire beach-head could depend on their alertness. But Brandon did not believe it. He did not believe that the officer was in earnest, or that the battle was real. He had not come prepared for the dying of actual men, and he thought this must be an exercise behind the lines. He did not believe that by walking one hundred and fifty yards away from the sea he could get himself captured. The Enemy could not be so close, he was too young.

This was three days before he learned terror and two weeks before his baptism at Cava di Terreni. He stood at the edge of the orchard in the dusk, unseen, with the sea breathing close by, and already preparations were going forward for the death of the child.

. . . .

He left Salzburg by train during the third week of June, travelling eastwards on one of the local lines. It was a hot, calm evening, and he remembered the bitter and grudging spring in Bleitnau. The fields were like England when he looked out of the window of the train. There were meadows, shaded and flat, with trees by fences, and the grass harvest was beginning. He had hated the iron mountains at Bleitnau, but here he was drawing near to the country where had ridden through the firwoods each morning at dawn. The train stopped at a railway station near the lake, which was tiny and silent, with a lawn, trees and an inn close by.

He saw that he was close to the edge of the water, among rushes. And on the other side of the water he saw lights.

His skin was now used to the sun and the following day he took a rowing boat across the lake and rubbed oil into his back. The sun burned quickly because there was a light wind down from the mountains and one did not sweat. He rowed close to the edge of the lake and looked at the huts, at the boating yards, the lawns and flowers in front of the farmhouses, and the steep corn-fields behind them. He heard laughter from the shore, and a few minutes later,

after floating past one of the wooden piers, he saw people bathing. He watched the strong young men at the edge of the lake turning this way and that to catch the sun in the proper places, then staring down at their skins, loving their own darkness. There were also those on the shore whose skins were white and new to the sun, and they were a little ashamed, biding their time quietly on the outer verges. One of the dark young men had very black hair, and Brandon noticed that he had a touch of henna on each side, a touch of it. This young man moved slowly, his head high, celebrating himself as he moved and easy in all his limbs. He loved himself, he cherished his own footsteps and nothing of his grace was lost to him.

Brandon lay along the bottom of the boat and heard the slight waves quietly hitting the sides. He lay with his eyes closed and became browner.

At Cerasola he brought his signallers away from the path and they found a tall boulder behind which they could sleep, protected against the shells. It had been raining since morning, and it was winter. They were frozen, their clothes were sodden to the skin, quite useless, so they stripped naked in the ice-wind and huddled close together, five of them, under two soaking blankets. They lay with the mountain water streaming down their shoulders through the bed, but strangely they became warm, and slept. At dawn they saw that they were

half way up a slope, overlooking a flat ravine. And in this flat ravine there was a Red Cross tent for the wounded.

They wrung out their clothes and put them on again bitterly. They were staring and silly, and they sat down to rest in the sharp, freezing wind.

A bombardment started, but they did not even move or raise their eyes as the mortar-bombs came swinging down from the crest behind them. They simply sat watching the flat ravine below where most of the explosions were. They watched the Red Cross tent. They heard one of the wounded inside cry out. It was the ordinary cry: "Stop, oh, stop, please, stop!" They saw the shells fall close and then close again to the tent. They watched a man run out of the tent and look quickly about, crouched down. He must have left the wounded man. He ran from side of the ravine to the other like a madman, with the wounded man still calling out in the tent. He ran from boulder to boulder, and the shells laughed and splashed and coughed all about him. Brandon and his men watched this in silence, their eyes half-open. They were watching the ravine with pleasure. On the side of a very steep mountain it was always fairly safe. They were safe, and yet at the same time they were only a short distance from the tent, not more than fifty yards, which made their pleasure at being safe all the greater. They listened almost warmly to the wounded man's cry. Their

teeth chattered and they stared, and their bodies were thankful for this bombardment.

Then Brandon beckoned to his ghosts, during the lull, and they took up their packs and their wireless apparatus. But one of them stayed. They saw it. They turned and saw him sitting there. He could not put on his boots.

"I have frost bite," he said. "I shall go back."

Brandon smiled like a fool, thin and pale in his wet clothes, and he pleasded:

"Be good and come."

But the child shook his head and walked in his bare feet down to the ravine, where the path towards the artillery lines began, and Brandon watched him with the others, and they were speechless and silly. Cerasola was white. It had legions of white ghosts. This was because they were starving, and all things real seemed ghostly, and the mountain pebbles shone blinding in the light.

On Sunday a St. John's fire was lit at the lake-side

[to celebrate ...

to celebrate the summer solstice. It was lit at dusk, and other fires burned on the hills on the other side of the water. These fires were for the burning away of sins and winter, and for the blessing of the summer harvest. A procession of boys and girls, led by the town band, came down the avenue of lime-trees, and the bonfire was ready for them at the edge of the lake, and also two effigies stuffed with straw. There was a little praying and singing, then the fire was lit. A young man pushed a brand underneath it and jumped aside. It blazed right up between the sleeping trees and the crowd sighed in the evening and they saw the shooting sparks carry their sins away. Motor-boats floated in from the lake, their engines shut off, to watch the ceremony, and there were also people in row-boats, leaning over their oars on the dark water.

The boys of the choir lit brands and held them up so that the musicians could see their music. And now six young men performed a fighting dance. They formed a circle and slowly menaced each other with their eyes, then they jumped towards each other and began slapping each other loudly on the heads in time to the music. And behind Brandon a man explained to his wife with a chuckle that they were not really slapping each other, they do it by clapping their hands at the right time, and they are so clever, they are so fast, that you do not notice them do this.

Brandon made his bed of pebbles among the legions of

white ghosts, scooping out the stones to make a place like the bottom of a bath for his blanket. Then he took his ground-sheet and laid it down, a thin old man in his folly, his hands trembling and gaunt as they used the heavy stones to stop it flapping, an old fool alone in his burrow piling his silly stones, beyond the serious things of life. And he watched the shivering old man at his side, a year younger than himself, who was now twenty-one.

Shells fell, but then they were not German shells, and someone touched Brandon on the shoulder. Everywhere there were pale ~~Guardsmen~~ infantry. "These are your guns", the man said, and Brandon heard them grumbling behind the wall of his hand-made house, asking if Jerry was not enough without their own fellows... And the splinters hit his wall, and Brandon took up the dead mouthpiece of his wireless and said, "Stop firing. Stop. Stop." And the shells ran their ordained length because the wireless was dead.

At the gun-position where these shells were fired it was different. The shells were long, round, coloured and pointed objects. They did not sing like boys, they did not lodge in flesh. They were inserted into the muzzle and pushed home with a rod. Men worked in shifts of three, unless it was a very busy night, when all six gunners would be at their posts. The gun fired and shook, then the pointed shell went whispering off into the night, climbing.

Brandon had a wide double room with two windows, it

had a couch with scarlet cushions, a double bed with reading lamps on either side, a dark, locked dresser with lace covers and blue china bowls, an immense polished stove reaching to the ceiling, and even during the day it was dark in this room, and it did not belong to the world. He would look out of his windows and below was the cobbled yard and opposite him the dove-cot with the white, modest doves at whom we dare not look, and in the barns were two brewers' lorries and a cart painted green and red. Sometimes horses came into this yard to be shoed, sometimes people with motor-cycles, and on Sundays the tables were taken out and the guests ate there, with the lorries locked away.

At Cerasola he passed a German prisoner coming along one of the mountain paths. He stopped to let him pass, because the path was narrow. The prisoner was young. He was wet and exhausted. Brandon stared rudely into his face as he passed. He gathered the saliva in his mouth ready to spit at him, but swallowed it again. He tried to make his eyes as hard as possible, and he saw the prisoner flinch. He looked and looked into his eyes, drilling into him, blaming him for the shells which hit the boulders, for the pebbles near the peaks which yielded under the feet like beaches, for the lack of food and fires in the English lines, for the decimation of English troops day after day in a battle for ground it was useless to win, and for the absence of cover from the sky. Brandon wished to lay this at his door, and he told him this in his stare. He hated with his gaze. It was the first

time he had looked at a man in this way, and he now knew that the child had been raised up and that he could not turn back. And he was conscious of having committed a foulness, because the boy had flinched and turned away.

You cannot make an abstraction real. Brandon could not realise the Enemy in this fair-haired boy, nor could he get an answer back from the fine, round, frightened eyes.

. . . .

He drove into Cassino during the summer of 1944, two months after the battle had passed beyond it. At the end of the road from the south lay a huge white grotto, open to the sky on the side of a mountain. This was Cassino, and he saw it as he turned the corner, a mile away. He was alone, and the evening was hot and still.

These baptismal places belonged to other men. He should not have come.

He drove the car into the white open light of the grotto, and he became a member of its silence the moment he shut the engine off. He climbed down from his seat, and the only other being in the town was an Italian girl filling her hand-cart with belongings, throwing them down bitterly and coldly. She glanced at him once, very quickly, out of dumb, black curiosity. And she did not forgive him.

He stood in the midst of this winding sheet, and no tree was in sight, no bird sang, there was only white stone, and green pools, and the eyes of the dead in every corner.

He looked ahead at the Monastery Hill, then he turned and saw the brown Monte Cairo watching him. And all things watched him there in the evening, watched his mocking visit. He turned and nothing was there. But he walked on and their silent eyes followed him, and he turned again, and again there was nothing there.

He looked in at the dark entrances to the cellars under the rubble, and the chairs were still there, and bayonet-scabbards. Aeroplanes had bombed this town into ruins and

then had bombed the ruins and repeated this again. And soldiers from both sides had patrolled along the lanes of rubble by night from cellar to cellar, and they had touched each other in the dark.

He saw two wooden crosses in a green pool, then a chalked notice hanging from a broken column, Hotel Continental. He smelled the quicklime sprinkled everywhere, rendering dust to dust.

Alone in the grotto he was a child, naked and frightened. There were things here he could not grasp, because he was alive. His fingers were warm and he could walk, so that he was a foreigner in this silent ruin. He looked about him, at this masterpiece of the embalmers, their perfect grotto, the lovely end of men.

On his way back he saw torn blankets in the fields, among pebbles, and ammunition crates, and also little stone homes which gaunt and trembling old men had made.

Cassino looks so clean and shining, he thought. Our murders, like our private habits, are nowadays cleaher than they used to be. We fly aeroplanes, we pull levers, we compute figures. It is good to have tea on our night-shifts. The ruin that is done is a mere abstract consequence, not seen. Brutality is a mere attendant evil of the abstract war, it is not necessary to it. The murder cane be done by compassionate poeple, even by ladies. It is clean. Or rather, it is hygienic, and when it is over there is an air of the hospital or the laboratory about theworld, a slight smell of ether. We are not brutalised by our

abstract wars. They breed in us more mercy and more pity. Only those who have not suffered these wars continue to pull martial faces at the world.

. . . .

He walked across the lighted square of Leoben, happy to be in a place where people stood about in groups outside the warm cafes and where no war seemed ever to have come. It was a town in her truancy.

His windows overlooked the river, and he listened to its washing. Below him under the wall lay a cobbled alley-way, and sometimes a man or dog went by, and the clock-bell tapped the arches.

There were pink curtains in his room, and a pink coverlet over the bed, laid with truant fingers. Hanging on the black beams downstairs in the dining room he saw cutlasses, swords, helmets, pistols, shields, daggers and cracked black ammunition-belts. He looked at the thick, embroidered cloth on the tables and at the great curtains over the doors hanging from wooden hoops, at the potted plants.

No ruins. A ruin is a presence in a town. There need only be one, and the truancy is over. The bad suggestion has been made.

A week before he had decided not to go back to Eiglenz, forty miles to the south, or beyond it to the Yugoslav border where he had taken his rides at dawn. He jumped up at dawn the next morning and prepared to leave for Vienna instead. He was happy. The dawn hummed, the river below him rolled and leapt across its pebbly bottom, and at last a hot sun came from behind the mists.

He and the girl sat in the hot room together during the last days of September, 1945. This was in a village on the outskirts of Eiglenz, and they used to talk until midnight, with the heavy and long curtains drawn across the window. There would be no noise from the rest of the house. The room was soft and dark, and most of it was taken up by a grand piano, and they sat at the table together in the hot half-darkness talking in whispers.

He had a room on the second floor, with a lonely window and a tree breathing against it at night and the gravel path close by where footsteps were never heard.

He had come north from Udine into Austria, and he had come to Eiglenz tired from suffering the bite and the bite again, quiet and continual, not seen, of the abstract conscience. In Udine he had been hot, wakeful and noisy. Now it was late summer, and in the afternoons he rode in the woods above the village and in the evenings he sometimes talked with her. She was tall and dark-haired, a girl who dreamed and watched and smiled to herself. In love she was always the sufferer, and she bore this with a bowed head, smiling a little to herself, her face blunt and heavy.

He had chosen this house himself. The Red Army had moved north out of Eiglenz only the day before, and the main body of English troops had not arrived. He found the narrow gravel path with humble railings and trees on either side,

and at once he went to the house and asked for a room. The owner was a small, clean woman with ginger hair, and she told him that it would be impossible, there were too many people already there. He frowned at her in the doorway, the conqueror by three months, and hetold her that if this were the case he would take two rooms, not one. He walked past her into the house and went up the stairs, stamping on them with his big boots, happy in his freedom from the bonds, and threw his pack down on the divan. She bustled about him, and secretly she was quite excited to have him in the house. She told her child to go and play in the gravel path, then she showed him photographs of her husband in an officer's uniform, and as she did so she giggled and blushed like a young girl, because no man had entered her house for eighteen months.

He sat at the table in the shaded room with the girl and asked her suddenly: "Would you have been my lover in peacetime? I mean, are you just my lover because we happen to be in the same house and my side happens to have won the War?" He asked this calmly, but really it was a most urgent question. He stared into her eyes, leaning forward, waiting for the reply. Her words made him wonderfully happy, for she said: "No, I think we would have been lovers anyway." He leaned back in his chair, nodding and

helplessly smiling, but he was safely out of the War again, safe and free, in his chair. For she had acquitted him of his uniform.

Always when he was alone he tried to eliminate his uniform. Now he had a yellow silk shirt on, with riding breeches and leather boots he had bought in Eiglenz. The curtains were drawn against abstraction, and he never went out after dark.

In this room he was an excited child daring to speak. She behaved in an older way, watchful, silent and always prepared for the worst, and she it was who ~~one~~ evening got up from her chair and took his head in her hands and kissed him full on the mouth, with her eyes open. He spent a spring-night, hardly sleeping, the first since his spring-nights in Hampshire, full of leaves and the moon. An imitation. An Indian summer.

The autumn became colder. Once or twice each week they went walking in the woods above the village. Sometimes they sat on the logs in a clearing between the trees where men had been working, and sometimes they walked to the top of a hill to watch the sunset. It was a season ~~with blood on the grass, it was~~ full of rain, and all along the gravel path there were leaves.

One Sunday they drove together to a wide, black valley twenty or thirty kilometres beyond the village. It was very cold, and there was a slight sleet. They wrapped scarves round their heads and laid two blankets across their

knees. The road was bare of traffic and horses all the way, and soon after noon they turned onto a narrow, difficult path which led to an inn. They left the car in one of the fields and went into the hot beer-room.

The only other people there were four youths, two boys and two girls, sitting by the stove. Brandon and the girl sat down near the window overlooking the valley. The youths sang and laughed, and one of them played an accordion. They kept looking across at them as they sat drinking their beer, and they smiled in mockery to each other. They asked each other ostentatious questions in colloquial German, such as, "Do you love me?" "Do you think I look nice in my English uniform?" "Where shall we spend the night together?" Brandon and the girl sat in silence, eating their sandwiches and drinking their beer. The girl looked sad. Her head was bowed. She looked at her fingers and ate slowly, brooding, listening to the laughter from the other side of the room. And Brandon ceased to be free again, he fell under the evil eye again, he frowned and lowered his head, shorn of his singleness, chained and bound again, a miserable inmate of the world again, perfectly and wholly known in the words An English Artillery-man, a ghost in a khaki jacket. And the youths were unclassified and free in their sweaters, they sang and mimicked and roared.

Brandon and the girl left very soon, dizzy and burning from the persecution, and they walked in silence across the little field to their car, huddled together in the cold.

His own voice joined theirs in mockery. He mocked himself, a ghost in a khaki jacket.

They drove across the black valley and stopped at one of the farms. The girl had the blanket round her shoulders and her teeth were chattering. He wanted to ask the farm-people for hot milk. He knocked at the door, a dog began barking, and a middle-aged woman, small and very suspicious, came to the door. She seemed a little intimidated by Brandon's height and broken German, and she stepped back without saying a word and let them pass into her kitchen. The girl sat down, bowing diffidently to the woman, who stared at her closely. Brandon was cheerful. He warmed his hands at the fire and began singing to himself. He told the woman that they had come a long way simply to visit her farm and they would like some hot milk, for which he would pay her. She answered him politely and fetched a saucepan but she still looked up at him strangely. The girl remained silent, not wanting her to know that she was Austrian.

The woman turned suddenly from the hearth and asked him whether the young lady was English, and he nodded. She seemed happier with this news and kindled the fire. Brandon did a little dance, accompanied by hideous faces, as he had done during his truancy. He talked and laughed, taking no notice whatever of the girl's embarrassment.

They left the farm just before dusk and drove back through heavy sleet. He sang all the way and drove very fast round the sharp, hilly corners.

In his room he pulled back her hair with his right hand, holding it in a bunch behind her neck, so that her ears were bare, and he was astonished when he saw her flat nose and high cheek-bones, a face so different from what it appeared under long hair. He watched her face for a moment and said with a laugh:

"You have a Mongolian face."

He kissed her on the forehead and he knew that she was not of his animal kind.

But there had been a month in this village without her, when he had first come. In his misery one day he had walked up the steep hill to an inn by the church where his own soldiers were drinking. He sat at a table by the window looking out into the darkness, alone. The inn-keeper's wife came and sat at his side and looked at him sideways, sadly. She was a fair-haired, middle-aged woman, and her lips were moist, a little abandoned. She told him that her husband had contracted gonorrhea, that he was always with other women, that he was perverted and cruel, that she refused to have anything to do with him since he became ill. She leaned against Brandon.

"I like your face", she said. "I shall come with you one night if you like."

The other soldiers were singing and banging the tables. Brandon affected not to hear what she had said. But she repeated the sentence slowly in his ear. She leaned her elbows on the table and watched her hands, then asked:

"When?" He told her quietly to meet him outside the church-door at seven o'clock the ~~following evening~~ next day. She nodded and got up without a word more.

The following evening he walked along the narrow-gauge railway above the village with her, trembling. They met no one on their way, and the night was black. His trembling was such that he could hardly speak. He was forced to throw his voice out like an actor in order to speak properly. Once or twice he stumbled against her on the pebbles of the railway track and she caught him to her, laughing. He took her to the little house at the edge of the humble gravel path, and they went quietly up to his room.

There, sitting in his chair, he composed himself a little better and smiled at her. She sat on the pretty divan bed and drank the red wine he had given her. He gazed at her for a moment with his mouth open. He was not paying for her, she had not asked for money, and he was stupefied.

They lay in bed together, and he looked down at her pale, soft, pink, silk night-dress. He was limp and frail. She was unknown to him. ~~He did not know her.~~ She was an idea he had pursued. She asked him: "What is the matter? Do you think I caught his disease?" She took him by the shoulders and looked up at him. "I never went with him after he caught it", she said. But he shook his head. He was limp at her side. He took his hands away and tried to sleep. His bed was more lonely now than last night, when he had been alone. He lay awake at her side until five o'clock, and a

little before dawn she dressed, and he saw her down to the door. He watched her in her clothes again, he saw her again as the idea he had had the evening before. He looked into her eyes for signs of recognition in the early dusk, but she was unknown to him. His murderer's hands were limp at his side. For his nurse had not yet come, she who would give him his freedom.

In November of that year, 1945, he returned to England. He said good-bye to the girl on the edge of Eiglenz. It was raining and close on midnight. She stood a little away from him and looked at him for a long time, in silence. And it seemed to him that she was half smiling.

They agreed to meet in Eiglenz after his leave, in twenty-nine days time. They would meet in the same place, and they arranged an exact time in the evening."I shall see you," he said. "I shall certainly be back."

He had never returned. Now, at Leoben, he had decided he would not go south, to Eiglenz, but to Vienna. For [illegible] still he believed she had loved him as a soldier.

In 1945 he returned to England nervous and sick. He lived like a monk, fearing people's visits, and he nervously fumbled towards freedom again, putting out his hand first to see if it would be whipped.

. . . .

He climbed up the hill with the forward platoon between the sunlit trees, through the long, sun-flecked grasses, in the very cradle of sleepy summer, when he did not fear to die. They went crouching from tree to tree, stooping when one of the rifles or the machine-guns spoke from out of the Enemy at the top. They climbed sideways, and at last they saw the shell-proof monster with a pout, Castel Poggiolo.

Once across the open grasses, they began running for the farmhouse through the orchard, in the last, foolish heat of summer. Everything was swelling and rich, in bounty and bright, - the fruit stored in the loft, the grain over the floor downstairs, the sacks of barley, the maize, the huge onions, the gaudy aubergines, the donkey-panniers of potatoes, the shrivelled grapes, the stained prodigal wooden wine-press, and the neglected urns of milk. They crowded through the door, through the hot, thick autumn smells, unseen by the Enemy, and they took up positions in the dark places behind the windows, treading quietly.

Brandon went up the narrow wooden steps to the loft with the Major. A man with a machine-gun came behind them. They stood together in the shadows behind the window, excited and waiting for a sign. The man laid the machine-gun on the table in front of them, and placed it on its tripod. He then fixed on the magazine of ammunition.

The Major went to the other side of the window and crouched down. Very slowly, as the other men watched him in silence, he moved his hand along the ledge until it touched

[the wooden...

the wooden frame of the window. He then began pulling the window open, but very slowly, a half-inch at a time. Brandon pushed the mauzzle of the machine-gun forward and sighted it onto the farmhouse further up.

He and the Major stood leaning on the table in the darkness, anxious for their fleshy victims. In front of them there rose a field of thick, tall grass, and at the crest of the hill lay the farmhouse, quiet among trees, with the ~~xxxx~~ pouting castle behind it, on a separate, higher hill.

The Major told the corporal behind him to take out a small patrol.

"We will give you covering fire from here," he said.

The men assembled downstairs. They left the house by the back, throughthe orchard. Brandon heard them step swiftly across the gravel path, then come round to the front, intending to take the Enemy in one rush straight uphill.

At once the Enemy spoke. There was machine-gun fire from above. The Major jumped towards the gun on the table. The Enemy's bullets were tracer bullets, like swift, straight, floating red flames. Brandon shouted at the Major through the din. The red flames were coming from a trench at the top of the hill. It would be sand-bagged and difficult to winkle out. The Major crouched down behindthe gun, trembling with joy and excitement, and pulled the trigger, spraying his bullets wildly over the rising field in front of them.

Brandon danced up and down. He was passionate to have hold of the trigger, tp pull it over to the right spot.

"No, no, no!" he cried. "Use tracer."

The disadvantage of tracer bullets was that their point of origin could be seen; but the advantage was that their point of arrival could be seen.

All they could see from the Major's ordinary bullets was a brief and tiny ~~xxxxx~~ fountain of earth, now and then. The Major nodded and kept his finger firm on the trigger, shaking with the rhythms of his gun, staring before him, hardly following the direction of his bullets, for his eyes were so glazed.

"Yes!" he shouted. "Get me the tracer! I'm going to have this bastard."

But the trench continued to fire back. The bullets hit the front of the farmhouse and smashed the glass of the window at Brandon's side. They were all jumping up and down with excitement, crying out to the Major like merry children.

"No, more to the left! Down a bit! That's where they are. Give them a nice burst now."

Men rushed up the steps ~~xx~~ to the loft with the new magazines of tracer bullets. The Major tore out the old magazine and threw it to the floor, but he took several seconds to fix the new one in because his hands were shaking, and the more he pushed it down the harder it wedged.

When it was home he crouched down to his work again. This time there came from his muzzle a long dotted line of red flames. Brandon tried to push him aside when

he saw how wide of the target these bullets were going. The red bullets swerved and pulled back and then rushed forward absurdly as the Major lurched over the table in his excitement, swearing and heaving, the sweat pouring down his face.

"Let me have it!" Brandon cried.

The Major flung his foot out backwards to get Brandon in the shins, and grasped another magazine to feed his gun.

They all saw a man's hand, then an arm, briefly, at the edge of the trench, proably taking more ammunition from the side. It was now quite clear where the trench lay, and the Major sighted his barrel precisely on the spot and fired again. [illegible] Brandon wanted to send line after line of red bullet over the field in a great beneficent shower.

The Major threw down the last magazine that could be spared and shrugged his shoulders with a smile, moving away from the window.

"I can't get him," he said.

They went downstairs and smoked, waiting for the tank to come up from the road below and with only two or three canon shells dispose of the trench.

When it came it fired only one cannon shell into the field, shooting up the earth in a great black fountain,

and instantly two men jumped out, covered with soil, their hands up, alive and surrendering. The Major shrugged and told his men to get ready to occupy the farmhouse at the top of the hill, now that the German rearguard had been taken.

They went up to this house a section at a time, running swiftly from tree to tree, knowing that they were now being observed from the huge, grey castle on the crest. This was built on a crest so fine that it appeared to be surrounded by a deep, impregnable moat. Behind the black slits in the castle's side would be men watching. The farmhouse at the top was easy game for them.

The tank-commander insisted on bringing up his tank as well, which would probably draw a bombardment of very heavy shells onto them. People argued with him, telling him to keep the thing further back, down the hill, but he was a swaggering, facile young man, trying to cut a fine figure. He smiled and kept his jaw square, flaunting his calm. Until now no heavy shells had fallen, and this farmhouse had lain in its quiet garden undisturbed.

Inside it was very dark, the windows being small. The entire company crowded into this house. Every room was full of men, and also the stairs and cellars.

The Major walked from room to room, worried.

"We are going to pay forthis," he said.

For it was one of the rules of defence in battle that men should not be allowed to crowd together under one small roof, but disperse into sections, digging their trenches outside at intervals from each other so that if a shell did fall on the house it would involve casualties. But men loved to crowd together under a farmhouse roof, however illusory its saftely, and the Major did not have the heart to stop them. Also, if one had to die, it was easier to await it in a room than outside under the fathomless sky.

So the Major put his headquarters in the dark kitchen and stationed his machine-gunner behind the narrow window with iron bars, pointing his muzzle towards the castle. He did not even have the heart to put out sentries. They would have no time to dig deep trenches, and without these they would not stand a chance against the shells. All the men knew that this house was easy game, and they were waiting in the shadows, pale and silent, caught together like beasts, watching the Major and hoping for their reprieve, for a withdrawal to the autmnnal farmhouse with the kind smells. The tank commander was leaning

Cont...

out of the window at the top of the stairs, staring at the castle-wall saucily. The men on the stairs were grumbling at him, but he took this for a sort of slovenly cowardice. He would bring in the more courageous machine-spirit, and his tank would answer for everything.

The men in the upper rooms had laid out their beds. Brandon stepped across their silent bodies and told his signaller to put his wireless by the window. It was astonishing how quite the men in the room were, tired, no doubt, but also waiting for the battle to begin, dully. They could have no part in this battle, only receive it. Brandon heard them breathing, they were so quiet. It was as if they grown cynical, with one single thought: as if they now believed in nothing but the coming of accurate shells. They watched everything dimly from their beds, taking no notice of the excited voices below.

Brandon sat down at the radio and, once the tuning signals were over, passed a message through giving his position on the map. He had the great rubber earphones clasped over his ears, so that he could not hear the

[bombardment...

bombardment when it began. The men lying to one side of him did not stir. Suddenly he was thrown from his chair by a swift oven-blast from outside the window, from below. He fell to the floor, still attached to the radio by the earphones. He quickly tore them off and looked out of the window. He saw that the shell had landed just to one side of the tank immediately below.

"This is the first of many," he said.

None of the men on the floor answered him. He began to hate their passive cynicism, so certain in their knowledge of death, like cautious old ladies. He pushed across their bodies roughly and kicked one of them who did not move fast enough. They all knew that this first shell was a registration-shell: it would be observed, another would probably follow, perhaps another, then, the target having been fixed, the bombardment would begin in earnest.

Brandon ran into the dark kitchen, where the men were grumbling round the windows, waiting with their rifles cocked, in case the Enemy suddenly popped over the crest in front of them.

There was a yellow hay-stack in front of the house, and at its side a great barn, which meant that any patrol coming from the Enemy lines would be well hidden, especially as there were no sentries outside to give warning. Just

as Brandon looked at the Major the shells began to fall. The men in the corridor above came scrambling down the stairs, making a great, blind clatter, crowding into the dark kitchen. But the Major shouted: "Get out, you bastards!"

Two shells fell in terrible crashes behind them, and the men in the other rooms began shouting. They wanted to get out. They wanted to know why they were being cooped up here. They wanted to get at the bastards with their hands.

"Where's that tank commander?" asked Brandon. "I just want to see his face."

The fatal, pungent smell of cordite came through the open windows. He began running up the stairs, into the other room, and down again, asking everybody where the tank commander was.

The men at the window of the kitchen wanted to use their rifles, they wanted to shoot at anything. They were jumping up and down, itching to pull their triggers. But they would have to wait until night-fall before they could attack the castle.

Brnadon found the young man near one of the wireless sets downstairs, and it gave him great relief to see this young man's face now subdued and very pale, and the thoughtful look of the war-scholar on it at last. Had his

own face been like his at first, when he had arrived at Salerno? Had he swaggered in this city-fashion, and squared his coddled jaw?

It was a house crawling with resentful men, like a thing black and vital with maggots. They pushed past each other on the stairs and jostled about in the rooms, as if continually moving round would save them from the evil eye. The Major kept coming to the door of the kitchen amid the deafening bursts and shrieking out: "What the bloody hell's going on here? What's the matter?" The men took no notice of him, but went on with their frantic ~~xxxxxx~~ and sightless peregrinations, stumbling away from the great phantom of death which loomed closer over the house. During the pauses between the shells it was possible to hear a heavy, creaking noise from the stairs and the wooden floor above as they moved about.

The tall haystack in front of the house caught fire. Brandon had turned to look at the men who were crowding together at the foot of the stairs, and just at that moment the room became lit up with a great yellow light, and a sharp crackling noise sounded from outside. He fell back against the wall, pushed by the men who were drawing back from the blinding heat at the window.

"Shoot, for Christ's sake! Go on, fire into the flames!"

"Jerry's there! Shoot!"

The Bren gunner suddenly fired a burst into the flames. The Major ran forward from the back of the room, pushing the othermen aside.

"What's there?" he cried. "What have you seen? What are you shooting at?"

~~The Bren gunner turned, squinting in the great heat, shaking his head. The Major shook him by the arm and asked again. "What have you seen?"~~

"Look!"

One of the riflemen pointed, and at once the Bren gunner, fierce with the trigger under his hand, lowered his back and fired another quick burst. There had been movement, so somebody said. Then a figure ran out of the very midst of the flames. The gunner was just about to fire again when everybody saw that this was a girl with long black hair. She came from out of the flames screaming, and stood between the house and the haystack, unable to go forward or back for terror.

"Come in! Come in!" the men shouted at her, and licence began to mingle a little with death.

But she stood near the haystack, holding her head with her hands, aghast and shrieking. When the centre of the haystack began slowly to tumble in two more figures dashed out from beneath, and old man and a small boy, then came the rest of the family, frantic,

dancing about in the same spot, hearing the queer English cries from inside the house, like cries for blood, "Come in, you fools! Come in! Venite qui, venite qui!" And at last the old man took the lead and ran like a swift beast down the hill to the left and out of sight, further into the English lines, and, as the shells began to fall again, with the same quick screech, for probably the German observor could see this confused movement amid the flames and was playing his game of smoke-puffs, the rest of the family followed, the children calling out for their parents as they ran.

Everybody was talking about it nervously while the flames continued to burn. The word went round upstairs, and no one could keep still. One or two tried to laugh. The Major was trembling, while he examined his map. The Bren gunner had left the muzzle of his weapon at an angle, pointing up at the sky, ~~and they were talking and~~ at the window ~~at the window~~. It was almost dark outside now, and faces were lighted by the flames.

Two hours later the main patrol went out stealthily, in slippers, with their faces blacked and scarves wound round their heads. They said nothing to each other at the foot of the stairs. They skirted the smouldering haystack and went down into the moat-valley under the castle. Then they crept through the grass to the vast wooden door, which was the only way out of the castle. They crawled up from

the moat and lay down, with a few yards between each man, at the edge of the gravel clearing in front of the door. They formed a rough semi-circle. They waited in the hush. The door was tight closed. It remained closed for the next three hours, until almost midnight.

Then one of the Germans came out and strolled towards the bushes, to pass water. He had left the great door ajar behind him. Five men of the section rose and crept towards this door. They stood up close together under the shdow of the wall, the first one with his hand on the door-chain, so that it could not be pulled back. Two other men, nearer the bushes, went silently up behind the German, one in front of him and the other behind. They waited until he finished passing water and began buttoning himself up. Just as he turned they leapt forward. One of them struck him a blow over the back of the head. He gasped with astonishment and stood for a moment erect, his eyes staring before him, appearing to turn as if he were looking for someone, then he collapsed onto the gravel path. The five men behind the door went into the the drak, cavenous entrance. They tiptoed along the stone corridor until they reached the first lighted room. There were several of the Enemy playing cards. Two of the Englishmen ran forward and pointed the muzzles of their Tommy guns into their faces,

and after ten minutes the great castle was taken. One or two more Germans were surprised in the upper rooms, but otherwise the castle was empty. The prisoners were put into one of the dungeon-like rooms near the gate, robbed of their money and valuables, then left to await the departure of the ration party, who would take them to the rear.

. . . .

Opposite his hotel window in Vienna there were yellow warehouses. It was very hot. A Sunday morning. When he woke up he heard music. It was jazz from below, from the cinema under the hotel. He woke up suddenly. There had been hot Sundays in the London street where he was born. There had been the long, bare street, silent and empty, a corridor into nothing. It had been a treeless world.

On Sunday mornings they would get up later and breakfast would be bigger than usual. There would be men in the street with silver scarves tucked into their shirts, and sometimes cloth caps. They would close their little doors and walk down the street for a drink of beer, and sometimes they would knock at another door to bring out a friend. The pub at the bottom of the long street gathered and gathered people until at one o'clock it clamoured and the garden was full.

In summer the windows of this prison were open at the bottom. It was part of the meaning of summer, that the windows overlooking the back gardens should be open at the bottom. The ice-cream man would pass and call out, pedalling slowly, alone in the street. How did one so much as breathe? Brandon looked and saw bricks, slate and iron railings, and all about him there would be these things, and beyond this corridor into nothing there were only other corridors into nothing. Half a mile from his childhood bed

there was the dark railway station, then a cemetery, a huge white grotto under a hill stretching as far as a child could see. The station was nick-named The Boneyard for this reason.

Voices echoed in the street. Shoes tapped as they passed. A piano would play out of tune from across the road, an idiot's jangle. The sparrows played along the gables. A motor cycle would start up two streets away. A train would slow down at the nearby station, train after train throughout the day. The loudspeakers would echo across the back gardens. And on Sunday afternoon, when the street slept, there was a silence which could not be borne, and a heavy sense of desertion and loneliness came slowly upon him, like a madness. And he waited for it alone, and suffered it.

Nothing grew. There was no peace, only the quiet of the burial-ground. He would never go back to England, he would never go back.

If he went close to the window of his bedroom he would see evergreen hedges below, daunted and covered with dust, and the railings. On the other side of the street there were the same houses, a long line of them under the same roof, endlessly repeated. When it was hot and the sun shone and there were no clouds the street was like a corridor under glass, something indoors and made by men, smaller than life, a heavy, brute monument in memory of nothing. Once

when he was ten or eleven he looked out of his window on sucha day and had a moment of ridiculous love for it, because it was like an enclosed and luxuriant hot-house, though nothing could grow there.

In the back gardens trees grew and had leaves, but they were dead, and the growing of the plants was a folly.

He would hear the front door close and the footsteps of his mother and father die away, then he would be alone, and would wait for his doom. He would read a book, trying to become lost in it, or he would potter about the room. But all the time he waited for the loneliness to work under his skin and into his veins, he waited in terror for the giddy fit to begin. The clock on the mantelpiece in the back room ticked, and the gardens were silent. The child would wait for it to come down on him. He would go up the passage to one of the other rooms and look out into the street, and then there would be this slipping within him and he would stand still, white, bodiless, with nothing familiar left in his world, panic-stricken and trembling. He could not get back to the world, he could not get back.

He did not lose the sense of touch or sight, and he could have spoken sanely to anyone. It was simply that he seemed to float, he was no longer part of the world, everything had disowned him and <u>he must get back</u>. He closed

his eyes and struck his forehead quickly with the palm of his hand, he banged on the floor of the back room with his fists, crying out to the woman underneath, "Mrs Jacob! Mrs Jacob!" He ran out into the street just to grasp someone, white and panting. He would run up to them and take them by the coat, and slowly he would come back to the world, tugged back by their watching eyes, he would stand there and slowly return, happy to be able to get back xxxx again. And people took the child's arm and shouted at him:

"What is the matter? What is the matter?"

These little seizures continued until his fifteenth or sixteenth year, when he achieved his freedom from this prison world.

Sometimes, on Saturday evenings, he was taken to the fun-fair at Battersea, but all the warm gas-jets, the deafening music as the roundabouts turned, the perilous swings, the masks, hardly brought a smile to his face. He would stand between his mother and father gaping, like a child who pressed his face against the steaming cafe window but was destined never to go inside.

He visited the Prater in Vienna and walked across the chipped roadway to the fairground. The lanes between the stalls were empty. A few people were sitting in one of the cafes. The music from the loutspeakers was ruthless and sad, it went in and out of the lonely stalls across the dying air. There were great flat spaces from which the ruins had

been cleared away, for here and there had been battle after battle between the Red Army and the last SS troops. The ghost-train was empty, there were no children crying out inside. He saw a solitary child on the dipper, and above the fairground the Big Wheel turned slowly again and again.

Each time Brandon passed one of the shooting galleries the owner tried to attract his attention. He called over to Brandon intimately, like a man with something dirty to sell, offering him the rifle. He smiled and called out to him quietly, singling him out from the other strolling people: "Bitte, bitte, mein Herr."

Brandon went to the switch-back and paid his money. The plump woman in the office leaned forward and asked him whether he would go round once or twice, and he told her once. There was no one else nearby. The cars were in a little siding, one behind the other. They were silver cars on a track which looped and turned sharply, and there was a rail Brandon could hold on by. He glanced at the entrance and there were three young men watching him in the lane. An attendant wheeled one of the cars out of the siding and politely took his ticket.

Brandon clung to the rail in front of him and the car went slowly up the steep track. At the top it would suddenly be flung forward, and he waited. It went

slowly up, rattling and swaying. It seemed to stay for a moment at the top, Brandon waited, his knuckles were white with clinging to the rail, then it fell and fell sheer into the dip, he was pushed back, he uttered a cry, he laughed, his mouth was wide open, he clung and clung to the rail, the world yielded beneath him, he fell and fell without foothold, and the car rose again, grinding cruelly, mad and owning him, his will was dead, he was flung back and forth, the car ripped and flew along the track round and round, he cried out again and again, a kidd of happy appeal, and the world ceased and there was nothing in all the world save Brandon in his falling sky. And he stepped out of the car, walked quickly to the exit and jumped down the steps to the lane. He looked about him and walked fast, all his body light, so that he was new and able, he was hungry and hurried towards the frankfurter stall near the tram stop, he was brisk and light and all the world had tumbled off his shoulders in the silver car, and no longer did he feel alone.

He flew over Damascus on a sunlit morning, and the pilot in the front cock-pit had talked back to him over the radio apparatus. Brandon had taken over the control of the joy-stick from the pilot and he heard the voice in the earphones telling him to tip the wings gradually over to the left as they lost height, not to touch the pedals with his feet.

He had held on to the sides of the cock-pit, not believing in the security of the straps, he had gripped the sides as the silver brittle giant rushed across the sky and dived and turned over and over, the earth falling under his head. He was rocked and pushed and swung about in the cock-pit and he held the sides until his knuckles were white. The machine fell and fell towards the earth, then it leapt upwards again and the voice in the earphones told him to take the joy-stick.

Now it was different. He ceased holding the sides of the cock-pit. He put away his earth-self, and he was no longer cautious or afraid. He ceased to care, sitting easily in his seat; it became his armchair, and he ceased to make any effort, he became cold and at once he was harmonious with the silver brittle giant. He took the joy-stick and gently tipped the wings down to the left, very gradually, as the 'plane lost height. The lightest of his touches he could see in the gentle fall of the wing on his left, and the pilot said, "Very professional." It was a light gradual floating movement, and he was no longer afraid of this monster with its eyes put out. He was only technically concerned with the falling movement of the wing, only his brain and fingers were working: he was like a man at his desk dreaming power.

When they had taken off he had watched an Arab ploughing his field near the air port. He looked down

as the 'plane rose higher and the field lost its furrows, the Arab at his plough became an interesting mark, the field became a yellow square, and the earth no longer had any meaning for him except as an interesting target, quite abstract now.

The machine was an ideal instrument for abstract murder, for he was cold, and he remembered the white grotto under the mountain, the ancient monastery of which they had bombed again and again.

When they landed the pilot jumped down from his cock-pit and came across to him.

"I could teach you to fly in a week, no, really I could," he said with a laugh. Brandon turned away and began unstrapping his parachute harness, for quite unaccountably he had begun to feel ashamed.

Many of his nightmares as a child were about silver mechanical monsters which moved slowly across the sky. The stars frightened him. At night he kept his eyes on the ground. Once he ran out into the street to look at the airship R 101. People had called him out but when he was there in the street he dared hardly look up into the sky. Then he saw it, silver and slow, like his dreams.

. . . .

At the end of the street where he was born one could see, far away, the trees of Wimbledon Common. His eyes were often turned towards this green opening at the end of the corridor, towards the one place in all his world which breathed, breathing grass and trees. It was the free ground outside the prison.

But inside the prison black hearses came every now and then to take away the new dead. He watched them breathlessly from behind the curtain upstairs. Or sometimes cream ambulances came and a little crowd gathered near the open door. The children would gather there first, then the women, with bare arms folded.

And rumours would be whispered in the street. "Mrs Thompson has been taken bad again..." (malignant cancer). "I see young Sid took a turn for the worse..." (tuberculosis of the lung). "Poor little chap, he is only nine, they wheel him about in a chair, his head is the size of a football..." (cerebral meningitis). "Victor came off his bike again round the Bend last night. I said to his mother, do you think it is right when he shakes like that?" (congenital paralysis of the right leg and arm). "It happens every month, she brings everything up." (neglected apsis of the womb). "I don't know how she got him to hospital, he was sick all the way..." (burst duodenal ulcer).

His father left the house each week day morning at five o'clock and returned home at eight o'clock in the

evening. Each day he travelled for five or six hours, to and from his work. This he did for twenty-seven years, between 1913 and 1940, when the warehouses at the London docks were destroyed by German bombs.

The pavements were flat and dead, there were no messages for Brandon alone. He was anybody, any child in this prison of streets. He was one of too many people, abstract, in a world of ghosts. They lived in the same rooms in the same houses, they worked the same hours and travelled the same routes, they walked the streets under somebody else's orders, and the whip of the invisible warders was behind them, and nothing was warm in this world, nothing grew, it was somebody else's idea. So he became giddy, being detached from everything about him, like a pure brain; for his world consisted of huge, empty, mute objects, and nothing answered his touch. He lived in the lap of sterility. He became quite used to these "giddy fits" and thought of them simply as one of his own private abnormalities, little knowing that they would disppaar when he had been released from the prison of streets.

Once he almost gave in, almost bared his back to be whipped. This was when he told his mother:

"I think I want to work in a factory."

He was eleven years old at this time, an age of choice, for a man had to choose now whether he wanted to

spend most of his youth at a school, by winning a scholarship, or go three years later into a factory. If he delayed his choice he would become a prisoner for life, and despair would grow on him, slowly, over the years.

His mother seemed pleased when he told her this. She smiled at him from the other side of the table in the back room, but she watched him closely, and silently she began to will him out of the prison, seeing in him the truant child. Silently she dreamed him out, divining the future in her chair, like the animal-mother who sends her young out of danger, away from the place where they can be hurt and degraded.

The wind did not speak in the trees at night, there were no witches in the black sky, nothing was small enough for fools andchildren. What do slaves tell their children? There were no processions in the street. The past was dead The old were not wise, for the past was dead in this world; it could not be seen in people's faces. But there were men whose small eyes turned carefully in their heads, and of these Brandon was afraid. They always advised his family to send him into a factory when he was fourteen, for they were on the side of the warders, bending down and baring their backs in order to be whipped.

The streets whispered into the ears of children, and this was their only teaching, that there was nothing in

all the world but ugliness, in all the stars but a sickness increasing. There was not even God to open the door into the sky. One must not look up into the sky.

The fools and children knew this to be the truth because it was proved by everything that happened before their eyes, by the trams scraping in the street, the trudging slaves, the inglorious shop-fronts and the smell from the canal where no man walked. It was a truth very adequate to their world.

Music first showed him the way out of the gates, and when he was alone in the house he went to the little dead box and switched it on to one of the London stations. And he was taken by music beyond words and stars, and he knew what there was in the beginning, and in the beginning there was music putting forth out of the silence, and it was with God, and he defied the warders wherever they were, in their counting houses or superb apartments, as he always supposed them to be, and they were his first enemy, and he feared their condescending voices and also, like a slave, he secretly loved them. They were always disdaining to come near, disdaining to touch, withdrawing their white nakedness from the hairy fingers, never allowing themselves warmth, lest it betray a heart...

During his prison-service as a child he was listless, his body was only a kind of moving vehicle for his terror and dreams. But the War made him run, climb mountains and stay out in the cold, and gradually he watched his body grow, he

saw himself grow out of the death-kingdom. Only after he was twenty-one did he learn to swim, to ride horseback, to bear the hot sun on his skin and to dance. That is to say, only after he was twenty-one did he truly recover from the conspiracy to sterilise him.

The sound of the noon-hooter brought a chill into him. There were white-faced men hurrying home, a dry, hot smell of fish-and-chips in the streets, people scuttling out of the factory yards, for there was only an hour to spare, and the trams stopped to draw them in and stopped to spill them out. As for him, he was alone, helpless in his room.

The clever dark young man said to him when he was fifteen:

"You are choosing to go to the opera instead of dining out with me? But who are you to choose? You are a gutter-snipe. And therefore everywhere you go you are on sufferance."

The young man looked at Brandon fiercely, but it was only a mock fierceness and the unbaptised child worshipped him. The apartment was furnished in the modern style, at the top if a block of flats. Brandon was a kind of whore to these men. He lay on the bed and learned like a woman how to simulate passion. It was a price that must be paid (he loved their talk and the carpetted restaurants where they met) if he was to become free.

Some people are frightened by the poor. They pass quickly on the other side. The poor seem so real to them, and tougher than themselves. But it is not true. The poor are dreamers. They are all dreamers. It is a wonder they are fit for any practical work at all.

Brandon's mother had a great money-dream. She would sit and dream in her chair. Heaven is money. If only we had the money. Life in the prison of streets was simply a daily quest for money. There would be endless, bitter quarrels about a shilling, sounding out across the back gardens.

He would lie on his bed in the tiny room, reading hour by hour three or four sentences from a solemn book, sentences which were meaningless to him. He forced himself to read the same dry, ghostly sentences, about Xenophon, about the foreign policy of Castlereagh, about oil deposits in a foreign country, hour by hour, trying to divine the secret of the world outside the prison, trying to become educated, believing that these ghostly words might lead him by the hand into the fabulous places beyond.

He would yawn, he would look out of the window, he would go down the dark, narrow corridor to the kitchen to make tea, he would drink cup after cup in the starving silence, then he would go back to his ghostly book, learning the ways and motions of ghosts so that examinations might

be passed. For examinations had to be passed, otherwise they would get you, they would even keep you in this room all your life, looking out of the window at the street of the dead, listening to the trains stopping every few minutes atthe Boneyard, with nothing real to do and nowhere real to go. Perhaps he should have taken a job as an apprentice, just to avoid these wasted, sick hours over books; perhaps he should have beeged in the streets; perhaps he should have stolen money; perhaps he should have made more ruthless use of his good looks as a child. But he chose the way with most money attached to it, the way of education.

He was rarely interested in any book he was told to read. He did not touch a subject at his school or university which was not a cruel boredom for him. Whenever he showed a warm interest to one of his teachers that warmth was always simulated. These teachers really held the purse-strings, because they had the power of recommending him for grants and bursaries. For years he played the role of the devoted scholar, purely for the money it would bring, and without a moment of remorse. He had no gift for learning, and no respect for it in others. He passed examinations by deciding to write in a certain insincere style.

The ~~xxx~~ clever, dark young man asked him suddenly:

"And your mother and father?"

"They are well."

The young man would begin a formal kind of speech. He would not hesitate in his choice of words, and he would pace the room with his head bowed. He would be furious, driving himself. And the child would listen, silent, hurt and amazed. The words were whips he almost loved.

The young man looked at him closely, under his fine brows, and said:

"Where do they begin to figure? In all this talk about what you are going to do with your life, and the places you are going, and the people you are going to befriend, where do they begin to figure?

~~The young man waited, his hands in his pockets, slender, and the child did not move to reply.~~

"They have stomached your lofty devotion to thought, they have stomached all your middle-class friends with their dirty habits and their dirty sex-lives, they have accepted the idea that perhaps you might never earn a man's wage because you are useless for everything except making love and reading books and talking your head off and lolling all over the furniture like a pig, they have resigned themselves to the sneers of their own friends and relatives who have been pointing out since you were ten years old that you would never be any good to them for all your book-learning and your talk, they have

refused to treat you like a marketable commodity as most working people treat their sons: and for all this they do not even begin to figure in your calculations for the future. Your father works on the docks from eight in the morning until six at night to keep you in artistic attitudes, your mother goes round the house clearing up your messes after you and cooking you huge meals, only to be treated to your indifference and contempt. And all this time you have been moving further away from them, further from their understanding, into a new world towards which they feel only fear and humiliated horror: namely, the world made by people of middle-class birth. They see you enter places where their accents and manners do not fit, where they are treated with the pained condescension that only middle-class people can give to those whom they consider their social inferiors. And they suffer all this because of their combined will that you should not inherit the ignominy of their own lives. Your mother went out to service at the age of twelve: she worked twelve hours a day for a couple of flatulent nobodies who paid her two shillings and sixpence a week. And naturally she ~~on~~ would ~~xxxxxxx~~ not will that fate on any child of her own. But the point really is not that they were determined to protect you against the refined tortures your social superiors had in store for you, but that <u>they saw the light</u>: they saw the future

shining before them; they are two people of remarkable imagination, and they are seeking their freedom through their child, they are noble enough to let your life become greater than theirs, they are dreamers like you, and they alone of all the tamed, miserable people around them, are not slaves.

In the prison of stfeets dreaming was proper, for it was safe. Only the deed must be denied. To everything it said, 'Impossible', and advised a further dream.

Only in war did he find at last a use for his hands. And a million others made their Odyssey into the splendid provinces of murder, from just such a place. The first time he raised his voice, it was to shout "Fire!"

One day in Italy when he was undressing he noticed long bulging varicose veins along his legs. He was twenty-two at this time. They were the marks of his education. For at seventeen he had led the life of a sick old man in order to pass his examinations.

Between the ages of twenty-two and twenty-eight he stripped himself one by one of these senile marks of education. He heard that one could have a surgical operation in the area of one's groin to [illegible] cure these varicose veins, so he went to his doctor and had the operation arranged.

As he sat at his hotel window in Vienna something sank inside him, unaccountably. Suddenly he was spiritless and trapped. Then he realised the cause: it was a wireless set which had been switched on in the distance, and its ghost-voice was now echoing down the long, narrow, deserted road under his window. He remembered how the same ghosts had gone across the back-gardens in the prison of streets by night, especially in summer, coming from the lighted windows still open at the bottom. Like all things spoken to the prisoners in these streets, it was spoken to no one in particular. Every day the great embalming agents of our world, the films, the newspapers, the radio, sent their consoling messages, and each inmate of the prison possessed his little dead box, his daily newspapers, telling him of the places from which he would always be barred. Each inmate of the prison could be multiplied again and again, for he in himself was all the inmates, they whistled the same tunes, they could be talked to with one voice, they could be expected to answer with one voice, like an abstract unit of humanity.

The sound of church bells from St. Rupprecht's came to his hotel window as the radio died away. Is this the absence in your world, that God is no longer looking on? In Salzburg he had dipped his fingers in the holy font and made the sign of the cross and knelt before the

altar when he had entered the Benedictine church. These actions were sincere, but only as acting on a stage is called sincere.

There is no longer anyone to punish us, but also there is no one to forgive us.

Later that day he went to one of the bathing places on the other side of the Bridge of the Red Army. The changing-rooms were long, flat-roofed buildings of concrete standing amid trees, and beyond them were lawns and still, shaded woods where people in their bathing costumes walked. He took a blanket down to the edge of the Danube and lay down with his feet near the water, with the lawns and trees behind him.

The water made him quicker and lighter. He wanted to throw himself about, so much better did he feel after the dirt and sweat of the city. He swam a ridiculous breast-stroke, splashing about a great deal, and he was still not safe out of his depth. He had learned this awkward stroke during 1945, that is to say, when he was twenty-three. He did it by going to a silent pool amid trees every day, behind one of the valleys near the Yugoslav border. When at last he had learned to float it was as if he had achieved a further manhood, another freedom from the prison of streets.

The water was dark, and children laughed in the

distance.

He remembered how he had stood quite alone at this silent pool when four people on horseback had ridden by. It was summer and very warm. The pool had wooden sides, with a few black huts nearby, and it could only be reached by a long rough path leading up from the village. He had been swimming for some time and had just climbed out to dry himself when they came galloping along the path from the hills, two of them women. He was standing on the damp lawn.

The moment they saw him they stopped and drew in their horses, which were sweating badly. They were Austrians, and Brandon nodded to them. One ofthe young men was flushed and had very quick eyes: he kept shouting at his horse, which was jerking its head fiercely up and down, trying to get more slack on the rein, and shifting about in a kind of light dance.

The woman whose horse was nearest to Brandon gazed down at him: first she looked into his eyes, very calmly, with the trace of a smile, then at his chest. He explained that he was an Englishman, and at once she began talking English which the others did not appear to understood. They nodded and smiled to each other, hearing her use a strange tongue.

She told him that they were all from a nearby schloss.

She had long, narrow eyes and a face that was both pretty and yet, in a masculine way, determined. The young men were anxious to be getting on, but in deference to her they stayed a few yards away, while she continued to talk in a quiet voice with Brandon. Her calm gaze made him feel shy and his words did not come at all easily. He was not used to women, after two years of exile, and he barked his replies, his eyes starting out of his head. Suddenly she turned to her friend as her horse shifted a little and murmured in German, "He looks fine, doesn't he?" Brandon heard her remark and knew, as he caught her gaze once more, that she had meant him to hear. But he did not move or speak. He stood there like a child, half-naked, staring up at her, dripping with water, while they were all above him on the most beautifully groomed horses, sitting them elegantly, powerful and sophisticated people. He seemed quite abashed by their presence. The flushed young man was smiling ironically, his eyes fixed on the sky, as if he thought Brandon a poor idiot for not at once taking advantage of the woman's suggestions. They all had faces which were accustomed to govern, and at last they pulled their horses round and with "Auf wiedersehen" trotted off towards the shaded path. He stood alone again, watching them disappear in the valley of trees. Yet he was their conqueror.

. . . .

Brandon sat by a top window of the house listening to the shouts in the darkness outside. The cries broke through the silence. There was no firing.

"Come out, you bastards!"

An English platoon lay under the window, among the furrows, waiting behind their rifles, and on the other side of the field sat the Germans, in another house, behind machine guns, also waiting. The night was cold and very dark. The shouting of the Englishmen was drawn out long in the silence, high-pitched, wild, a weird cry for warm blood.

"Come out! Come out!"

It was a terrible, half dejected shriek, and the silence followed it, with nothing stirring from the house on the other side.

Now there was a quicker shriek, a hoarse rush of words, less heavy and sad with desire than the other cries:

"Let's have you, Jerry, I want a knife in you tonight!"

The man who shouted this was small, thin and a little bent; he had a sharp nose and quick, restless eyes behind spectacles, and a flushed face. He was a Londoner, from the back streets. Not long before he had taken six prisoners single-handed. It was said that he had lined them up

against the wall and told them to lay out their watches, bank-notes and fountain-pens on the floor. And when they had finished he fixed his Tommy gun in his arm and shot them all dead, in a single burst. For five days blood was in his nostrils. The others said he was now a rich man, he had taken so much money and merchandise from those he captured. There were many legends about him.

Suddenly he jumped up, daring the Enemy to fire at him as he stood in the darkness among the furrows. And at last there was a sharp, clattering burst of fire from the house, and a scuffle, and a groan. The platoon began running towards the other house, but the machine gun bided its time again. It waited, then once more the great metal clatter sounded out across the night, long and continuous, only pausing briefly, a metal monster pausing to swallow.

Their blood-mad evening ended an hour later. The Londoner led them back, with a red bullet-wound in the calf of his right leg. He was excited and resentful, with bright eyes. It was as if the other soldiers in the hot room were also the Enemy, whose blood he needed, for they were human, soft and killable. He at first refused to have his leg dressed. He kept saying:

"No, f- the dressing."

Brandon and the Major arranged an attack for early next morning, to smother the machine gun. Brandon would lay down a small concentration, and then a tank would be sent forward. The Londoner was ashamed of this. He was ashamed to invoke the abstract laws: to call up a tank by radio, to rely on distant guns. He shook his head and swore that he would go out again that night. It could all be done with a knife, quietly. He could do it in slippers, stealing up behind the house, his face blackened. He spent all night moaning in his sleep, robbed of his blood.

. . . .

It was all chaos under the sunlight, and the hill-side was marked and cut with trenches and men. From the black shell-holes smoke was drifting away, and the noise was deafening. Brandon stood in the leaf-surrounded pathway like a prisoner, longing to run back. For into this metal clashing world he had to penetrate further.

Men were throwing hand-grenades over the crest. They would tear out the pin, run crouched to within a few yards of the crest, then throw. Sometimes a grenade would come from the other side and make a tiny explosion among the furrows, a muffled thud. All over the hill-side there were men, staring about them apathetically amid the explosions and the sudden rifle shots.

He had come forward in an armoured carrier. This he hated, because he feared that its loud grating tracks and whining engine would make them conspicuous,

[a landmark...

a landmark for enemy shells, like a tank. With him were his driver and two signallers. He told them to go to the cover of a church nearby and climbed further up the broken hill-side to the place where he saw a group of officers.

These officers had cheerful, begrimed faces. For they were so much in the company of death on this last golden autumnal day that they no longer cared. They chatted to each other among the bodies, and only for Brandon, arriving suddenly from the rear, were these bodies not normal and accepted furniture. He ducked whenever a whisper came through the sky, but the others knew by now the language of this battle and stood about in their shirt-sleeves smoking, in a kind of cheerful lechery of death. He told them that he had lost his infantry-company.

"Where are they?" he asked, unable to keep his cheeks from trembling. One of them described to him the route he should take. He would have to be quick, for they were just going into the attack. Their task was to cross the river.

Brandon was alone. His terror was for this reason the greater. He wished to prove that he was a sound and dependable scholar by now, and he was determined to get forward into the thick of the battle and to lay down mostexciting coneentrations of shells amid the Enemy positions; but at the same time he **read** his death

in all the craters, the drifting clouds of smoke, and the stripped black branches. Moreover, there was the terrible opportunity before him of failing to find the Company.

He turned away and ran down towards the path again. His face was screwed up against the sunlight, and also with ~~pain~~ anxiety, for the longer he was without his Company the more anxious he became, fearing rebuke later on, lest he should be found an unworthy scholar. Constantly his signaller had looked up from the wireless and said, "They want to know our position, sir"; "They want to know how the battle is going"; "They want to know whether you wish to register any targets".

He turned the corner, round a hillock of burnt brown tufts of grass, and, bending his head forward to avoid the splinters, almost toppled over a grinning boy who lay dead across the path, his arms outstretched and his eyes fixed on Brandon. He ran past the body, his head turned away, past the German on an upturned cart with his head near the gravel path, to the shelter of the front porch of a broken church, without a blessing to give. Reprieve after reprieve, - but how many could he survive? He panted, and smiled at his men. They were waiting for him under the porch, with the armoured carrier close by. They followed his calmness. This was the

source of their tenacity, his calmness. He held their terror in check with his counterfeit exterior.

He told them that "A" Company was about to cross the river, and that they must join up with the main column. They got back into the carrier, crouching down behind the armoured sides, and swung out from the gravel path of the church, skirting the staring boy. The carrier whined and grated, then began screaming fast along the path between trees, rising and falling like a speedboat, hurting the knees and elbows as it swung and bounced and jerked towards the river.

At the top of the hill they suddenly saw before them, horribly naked and open to the sky, the long uncaptured valley, and the great dried-up, pebbly river-bed. The first tanks were beginning to cross this river-bed, and it appeared that no shells were yet falling.

Brandon knew that behind these tanks were the vehicles of "A" Company, and he could see the men of "A" Company walking in two single files. They were walking on either side of the great tanks, which crawled very slowly, making a deep thunder in the distance. He turned to his driver, panic-stricken, and shouted to him to pull in at one of the farmhouses on the side of the road. It had occurred to him that the Enemy might at any moment begin shelling the river-bed, that they might bring out their bazookas and anti-tank weapons, and swarm down from the silent hills on the other side.

He was certain that these hills were full of Enemy.

"I want to do some observing from here," he said.

His driver nodded, joining gladly in the deception.

They left the carrier out of sight behind the farmhouse and Brandon went through the empty ritual of bringing out his binoculars, his map-case and his compass. He wanted to delay things until he had lost the Company again, but this desire was known to him only very vaguely. As for the Enemy positions which he was trying to observe: even if they had existed he could have seen nothing of them at this distance. The sun was beginning to grow misty, and in a last, spent sutumnal fury, making everything glow, and the smell of death, going straight to the stomach, lay in the air of the valley. He could not imagine, as he calmly prevented his hands from trembling over the binoculars, how he would ever be able to cross this doomed yellow riverbed alive.

Soon all the tanks and vehicales had crossed to the other side, and the riverbed was once more deserted and silent. There had been no shells. He had lost his chance. The road onto which the tanks had disappeared could not be seen. There were too many trees and bushes, enchanted in the dying sun, for the roads to be seen. He focussed and unfocussed his binoculars on these motionless trees and bushes. Suddenly he jumped up and told his men to get back into the carrier. He simply pointed to the riverbed below as the driver started the engine,

and shouted: "Drive as fast as you can. Don't stop for a second."

The driver was expert with the carrier and he flung it, bouncing and screaming, down the hill towards the pebbles, with the other signallers mute and watchful in the back, sitting amid the wireless-equipment, slaves to Brandon's wayward oracle. The snout of the carrier plunged towards the pebbles from the steep bank and they began their journey across the river-bottom, with the stones flying away from the tracks underneath them and hitting against the undercarriage with sharp, dry cracks. Half way across Brandon's fear eased, and he looked from one side to the other, down the most bountiful river between trees, with the water only in slight, still pools, and everything specially hallowed in the quiet close between these banks.

On the other side the bushes were torn away, and he did not know which of the track-marked paths to take. He shouted to his driver to go straight ahead. The driver put the carrier into low gear and accelerated hard to take the steep bank and hill beyond. At the top, when they had cleared the bank, all the silence and desolation of the leaf-muffled wood closed over them and they entered into the mystery, with the tracks quieter now that there was only soft earth, not pebbles, under them. Brnadon had not the faintest notion where to go.

He could see no vehicles, no white guiding tape, no discarded equipment, and even the great wide tank-tracks in the soil of the path had died away. All his panic was renewed as he realised that they might be pushing forward into silent and waiting Enemy lines.

They came to a tall brown barn under trees, an island in the wood, where the earth was soft and very black, under piles of straw. It{s sudden appearance was a shock, and the driver instantly put his foot down on the brake and switched the engine off. The vehicle rocked perilously forwards and back with the violence of his braking. They looked at the tall barn in silence, and no sound issued from within. Brandon whispered to them to cock their Tommy-guns, then, as he pulled open his revolver-holster, he told the driver to start his engine again and drive forward into the barn. Slowly they whined and trembled into the yellow dying light of the silent barn, and no one was there. They put their guns away and climbed down, in happy reprieve.

"We'll try out the radio," he said," and I'll pass down a map reference."

But nothing could be seen from this barn except trees, and it was impossible to do any map-reading. Neverthless he took out his compass and tried to discover by which paths they had come from the river, though his panic had been too great for him to notice. The dusk was growing. There was no longer any firing. The

hour of dumb, stealthy patrols was about to begin.

The signaller had no sooner taken the hood off the wireless-set and fixed up the aerial than Brandon turned round quickly and said: "Pack up again. We're going." The men looked at him for a moment, but like slaves they always believed that he had made some important, if silent, discovery.

The noise of the carrier was even more terrible in the dead of the autumn evening, and they peered forward in the growing darkness, feeling forward slowly in the whining car. They were now hungry and tired, their eyes were strained.

Three weeks before, every man had been told quietly that a hole was to be broken into the Enemy line, that it was to be a surprise attack, that an immense amount of armour would then be pushed through this hole, that the remaining ~~forces~~ Enemy forces in Italy would be surrounded, that the Alps would then be crossed and that those responsible for the surprise break-through would spend the rest of the War in peacefully occupation of Austria. Everything had gone forward very quietly and secretly, behind Tuscan hills, in orchards and vineyards, under camouflage nets. Staff officers had held whispered conferences in caravans. There were mock-concentrations on fronts to the west. Young officers walked out of Headquarters with their eyes shining, and with a more important air.

The hole had been pushed deeper and more quickly than anyone had expected, with few casualties. After three weeks the objective had been reached. It was a line not far beyond the dried-up river-bed, along the crest close to Brandon's armoured carrier. Beyond this crest lay a great valley, and plains. Tomorrow, or at the latest the day after, a division of armour would be poured into this valley, and the campaign in Italy would be over.

The hole in the Enemy's line was long and narrow, and a battalion could hold its front line. It was thus possible for Brandon to fear that by his absence from "A" Company he could render entirely fruitless a three-weeks campaign, and perhaps protract the fighting in Italy for another year. He did not believe in this possibility, but he accused himself of it. As a dependable scholar, he should be in at the kill. Staring before him in the growing darkness, he sweated with his panic, seeing himself as the criminal of this campaign.

At last they came to a dark, stone house where there were lights. Here there were English troops. In the yard there were long, heavy belts of German ammunition, and Schmeizers in perfect condition, immense binoculars, discarded wireless-sets and tripods for the machine-guns. He stood turning over these strange articles, aware that he had missed the battle. There

were no signs of fighting. The walls were not crumbled, the fields were flat and green, the trees were intact, with gold and reddening leaves, the sky was entirely quiet. In an hour the last remaining Enemy must have fled and lodged themselves on the other side of the valley beyond.

The path to "A" Company was described to him, and the armoured carrier moved down from the crest.

When Brandon walked into the long room where "A" Company were, the commander simply looked up at him for a moment, drowsily, and smiled. It was a smile full of uneasiness. It said: "For God's sake do not judge me." Brandon was astonished.

"I've been looking for you everywhere," he said, standing over him in the growing darkness. The commander made his excuse in a tired, anxious, tender way: "We were dog-tired, so I decided to kip down here. But it's all clear further up. And I shall be sending out a patrol."

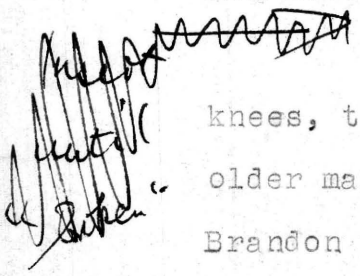
The other men in the room seemed to be nodding, watching Brandon, as if to say: "Excuse our commander. He was once brave. We adore him."

"Did you need me?" Brandon asked. The commander shook his head. There had been no battle. They had simply crossed the river behind the tanks, and the Enemy had fled.

Brandon ceased to look pugnacious now that criminality had slipped from his shoulders. He smiled,

with his hands in his pockets: "You look as though you need a long sleep." He added professionally, with a calmness which the commander may have envied: "I've only one thing to worry you with: the SOS targets. What do you suggest?"

The commander did not understand. He shook his head, blinking up at Brandon. He looked pale, frozen, but above all suspicious, as if nothing could any more be trusted in this metal clashing world: anything might carry in it the deadly sting. He was a handsome, robust man in his middle age, and his hair was greying at the sides. He had been awarded honours for heroism three times. He was a legend: if he took a Company forward it would always get there; he never withdrew. But his past grey battles had mounted up, he had been granted too many reprieves, and now he went into battle glancing about him secretly, trembling, his face white and marked, his shoulders bent forward ready to suffer the last bombardment of all, wrapped in the silence of his island of grief. He rarely issued an order now. His men moved with him by instinct, like adoring animals.



Brandon bent down and laid his map on the commander's knees, then shone his torch, prolonging the pain of this older man. The commander stared at the map, but emptily. Brandon pointed out to him several places near the house which would serve as SOS targets for the night, and the commander nodded each time he spoke, though he understood

nothing. His relief was extraordinary when Brandon rose and left the room.

Brandon stood at the door looking out at the cobbled yard and the trees beyond, aware of his victory.

His driver and signallers had found a small hollow in the outside wall, probably an oven for bread-baking, and here they were making dinner over a spirit-fire. He sat down with them, quite happy and unafraid, for the crest had been achieved, the armour would tomorrow pass over the hills, and his worth as a scholar had been questioned by no one. He sat inside the oven, curling himself up, and ate ravenously.

When Brandon had entered the dark room he had seen the commander's pleading eyes, and had instantly felt too young. They were eyes wiser by a thousand deaths. Having seen too much, they were broken from within. All day this man walked in utter silence, and at night, when the battle was over, he sat alone, disbelieving his survival.

Once he had entered the competition for gallantry and always had won it, he had been wild and alert, but now it no longer interested him, he was stiff and old, believing in nothing. His eyes seemed to tell

[Brandon...

Brandon: Oh, yes, you are one of the others, the unbroken ones for whom it is a game.

The next day it was cold and sunny, with a long white frost spread over the hills to the south. Soon after dawn Brandon crawled out of the oven and looked at the road leading to the valley behind him, at the hundreds upon hundreds of tanks and vehicles, nose to tail. He watched them for a long time, then sat with his men and ate breakfast. For the next three hours these tanks and vehicles hardly moved . Behind him, across the echoing valley, there was incessant firing. He was light, healthy, yearning to move about, to leave this house.

He suddenly realised that he was free to go. He wanted to see the battle of the tanks. His heroism welled up, after a day becalmed. He shouted to his driver. Then he asked the commander, standing at his side in the doorway, whether he also would like to come. It would mean going to one of the forward posts. The commander gave him a quick, unwilling, dark look, and shook his head.

But when, later on, Brandon asked for a lighter car to replace his own noisy, unwieldy carrier, the commander said he would be coming after all. He walked quickly back into the long room and fetched his cap, then went with Brandon to the car under trees nearby. He wore heavy fur gloves, and constantly made a hissing noise

through his teeth, as if he were frozen.

He sat in utter silence at Brandon's side as they drove between the trees. The ruts in the path were frozen hard, and in a day it had become winter. Brandon was always about to turn his head and say something to him, but this silence was so terrible, he was so wise and alone in his jolting seat, that he did not dare.

They drove swiftly uphill through the woods, then they came out into the open where a great doomed silence and stillness began to fall, denoting, with no signs that could be seen or touched, the presence of battle. The car slowed down and now above its slight throbbing they heard cannon-shells fly across the valley with a quick, awful whirring, then the satisfying thud of something finding its home.

At the top of the hill, on the edge of a maize-field, lay a cottage, and they went towards this. On either side of them were rising fields, their furrows dry and cracked, already harvested. Over them all lay this silent desolation. The chilld morning sunlight made no difference. But Brandon was hilarious. He was hitting the steering-wheel with the palms of his gloved hands as he drove, and humming. He was muffled up to his chin, and he felt an immeasurable prowess, in which he could achieve anything.

They arrived at the back-entrance of the cottage

and jumped down quickly, out of sight to the Enemy in the valley beyond. They went into the dark rooms, and at every window there was a cluster of infantrymen watching the battle of the tanks.

This valley was huge and pale-green. It spread out long and flat before the windows, and from its centre Brandon saw black smoke gushing up, , then, on the flat of the frosty lawn, several English tanks, one of them quite black and gutted, the others broken and awry. Near them was a German tank, still punching them to death, like a great proud staring beetle shooting its random stings.

He did not understand what he saw. In battle everybody plunged about blindly, and only in the quiet, moaning aftermath did they begin to know the meaning.

He talked a great deal at the window, stamping his feet with the cold, and once or twice the commander glanced up at him as if he thought he was mad. Brandon wanted to risk everything. He wanted to make this house part of the battle. He saw the padre near him, a small, fat-cheeked man with an utterly idiotic look of bonhomie in his eyes, and he began talking to him in a false, rather mocking way. He began to impress everybody as a reckless young buck. It was the first time he had openly played this role in battle.

A few hours later his warmth died. Only the commander, alone on his terrible island, knew the truth

from the beginning. The valley had the look of an aftermath. No further tanks came out into this valley from the English lines. When the darkness grew like a whisper under the huge red clamouring sky, stretching out and out from the low hills, only these burning tanks remained, glowing quietly on the darkened lawns.

To the south clouds gathered, threatening the first of the long winter-rains. The tanks and vehicles which Brandon had seen at dawn still lay choking the roads, motionless and nose-to-tail. The "peaceful occupation of Austria" became something to smile at, before one spat. The rain came, and the tanks slipped and roared in the mud on their way back from the forward lines. Men in high places had made certain last-minute errors, - so it was said.

When the news had slowly taken hold, everyone fell into a kind of tired, sneering misery. When, a few weeks later, amid rain, they fended off one German counter-attack after another, they did so with a bitter spite, casually and slothfully. It was during these counter-attacks north of Rimini that Brandon decided to attempt the role of a hero.

There was an officer in his regiment who had received several honours for heroism; he was well-known as something of an idiot who needed at any cost to make an exhibition of himself. He was big and muscle-bound, with a thick neck and the manners of a pleasant child. Brandon decided to try

and join the ranks of such prize bulls, with their pieces of ribbon. Had his regiment not been sent to Greece less than a month later he might have done something very rash and spectacular, and gone almost deliberately to his death. Slowly the War was claiming him. His only concern now was to prove himself one of its worthy scholars.

. . . .

The streets of Vienna were empty and still under the hot sun. He avoided a pile of rubble at the end of the Rotenturmstrasse, and instantly he remembered the woman who had stood under a ruined stairway.

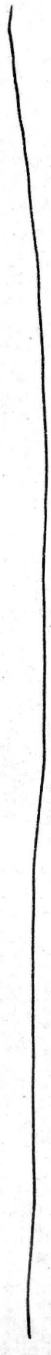
They had climbed the hill and captured the great Castel Polggiolo. This operation had taken six days, and of these the last three had been more or less sleepless. He was now over-tired, his brain was numb with working over the maps, and he rested in the quiet farmhouse, feeling a blessed relief to know that he was alive, for the battle had stalked on, leaving charred fields, broken fences and the smell of newly-exploded shells. It was that feeling of papadise which followed so often a stiff operation.

He knew that his regiment could not ask him to do more now: he knew that he would be allowed to remain here, in the dark farm-room where twigs were burning in the hearth, behind the lines. There would be no doubt of that.

He sat by the table and smoked, and occasionally he ordered up a glass of Marsala from the cellar, where the family still kept themselves, sceptical ofthe silence. The order had been given that "B" Company would pass through this place: "B" Company was fresh and would occupy positions well forward, to prepare for Enemy counter-attacks.

Brandon nodded. He was cheerful at the prospect

of "B" Company passing through. He would continue to rest in the house, he would read, he would sleep a great deal in a kind of cot upstairs, and after two days he would be recalled to his own lines.



[Yet...

Yet a doubt did begin in him. He could not quiet it. The fields were in silence. The Londoner who had cried out for blood in the night had been taken to the First Aid post. The Enemy were using their shells for more important targets further forward, in the next valley, where people said everything was grey and still, bristling with Enemy, who were waiting behind machine-guns, bazookas and Schmeizers, waiting in camouflaged tanks and lying low in the houses. The Major did not envy "B" company.

"They are taking over a house slap in the middle of Jerry," he said. [illegible]

They talked together until their lunch came in mess-tins. "B" company would be passed through the lines in an hour's time, and Brandon became stiffer in his chair, more and more doubtful as the minutes went by, dreading each movement his wireless signaller made, lest he should be about to deliver the fatal news. Nothing occurred for fifty minutes. There was not a sound from outside, and even the infantry headquarters did not call the Major by telephone.

Outside, all the trees were charred and broken. The breeze stirred nothing, and the sky was dismal, heavy and low. The fences were all crushed down, and the hill rose to a long bleak crest. Everywhere there was black mud, and the two farmhouses nearby were in ruins,

smoking.

A voice spoke in the earphones, and the signaller started. He answered the call and turned his eyes towards Brandon, knowing what this must be:

"Officer to speak, sir," he said.

Brandon went shaking to the mouth-piece and spoke, looking calm and ready. The officer at Headquarters told him to join "B" company when they passed through "A" company lines, and to learn all tactical information from "B" company commander. He must prepare to move now.

"Any questions?"

"No questions."

He would die. He must die. He moved away from the mouth-piece, throwing it down into the signaller's lap. The hidden oracle could not possibly last another hour. It had been awake too long. The surrender would have to come soon. He was not more than human. He could not depend on this divine help for much longer. He was tired and numb, he was no use for battle, and he knew now that he must die. He had played away all his chances. He had got away with a reprieve, against heavily loaded dice, too many times. He threw the mouth-piece into the signaller's lap and told him calmly, rather ironically, as if this was a joke they had once shared:

"Close the wireless down. We are moving up with "B" company. Tell the others. Prepare to move now."

He went to the door of the kitchen, his eyes blind with the certainty that now he must die. The future had suddenly ended. While he had been sitting at the table an hour before, smoking and drinking wine, he had dreamed the future, the future had been feeding his flesh. But now the dark curtain fell, cutting the future off. He was stifled. He could not get forward. There was no movement into the open. He must run somewhere. He must get out of it. He could not go to his death so helplessly. He should get back on the wireless to infantry headquarters, and he should explain to his senior officer that the hidden oracle was failing him, that his divine powers were for the moment at an end, that he must, but must, must, be excused this once, just for two or three days, until he had rested and collected himself and his hidden oracle was at work again and he could see things clearly again and get himself into trim for another battle. But he moved towards the door, blind and hot, and he heard the Major call out behind him:

"Christ, are you off again?"

There was a horrible, rolling sickness in his stomach. He could already feel his body as a corpse. He could already feel it lying in the open, and gradually people deserting it, and night falling. He would give anything for warmth, between himself and another human beast, a touch, a glance; it need only be a momentary

thing. But he yearned for this simple touch before he must die. He closed the door and saw the woman standing before him. It was a small corridor full of rubble, and behind her were the stairs and the great hole in the wall which had been torn by an Enemy tank.

She was standing still, as if she had been waiting for him. The ruined corridor was empty save for her. She stood with her strong denied body in the corner, facing him. She was pale, with having been too long in the cellar. They stared at each other. Their eyes went deep into each other, losing themselves. ~~[illegible]~~ He swayed, his legs were weak under him. He walked slowly towards the steps, and she drew against the wall. He came level with her, and she stood flat against the wall, open to him, her eyes still lost in his. He almost clasped her. He almost fell towards her. She seemed to utter a gasp. The ruined corridor was vague, it seemed to move, the rubble under their feet and the chipped wall. Her mouth was open. They were helpless, reeling in the corridor. It must be, before he died. It must be, behind the stairs, at the entrance to the cellar, dark and hidden. It would be so quick and full as to be <u>one</u> beast.

"Mr. Brandon!"

He turned violently, ~~and~~ slipped in the dust, and looked up, to the top of the ruined stairs, where he saw His most faithful signaller, ~~was there,~~ the ~~small~~ man with the

whom he had once betrayed so gladly along the path marked MINEN. The woman was now behind him, watching him from behind. He stared up at the signaller, panting and hollow. He went up to the sixth or seventh step.

"What do youwwant?" he asked.

"Do you want your bed put down up here, or will you stay in the kitchen for tonight?"

"We are moving. Prepare to move. Prepare to move now. Tell the others. Go back and prepare to move."

He went to the top of the stairs, to hear the moans and growls of the signallers, then rushed back towards the great hole in the wall, helpless and slipping. He must, he must, before he died. He pulled himself round the corner and looked, hoping and hoping, praying in a single second of time that it would be so, but nothing was there now save the rubble and the chipped wall. He ran towards the cellar door and pushed it open, but here also there was nothing in the deep well of shadows. He could hear only hear the sound of whispering voices far below.

He went from corner to corner searching, almost calling out. But everything was as before. For the last time he slipped down the loose rubble and pushed open the cellar door, but now he knew, more fatally, that it

was at an end. There was the sound of raised voices from the room where the Major sat.

He went out to meet the commander of "B" Company shattered and frail. There was now only a sharp, gripping pain at the base of his stomach. His sex had died, in a ghastly, dumb surrender. He stood watching the new company come in single file through the gate of the field towards the house. He stood with his shouldersbowed, not troubling to conceal his pain. The sky was full of low, grey clouds, and there was no avenue of escape for him. So he became calmer, a helpless prisoner walking to his sentence. If only he could have been granted that moment of blood. So many touches had been denied him in all these months.

It did not matter which beast gave him warmth. Any beast in all the world. Such refinements belong to those who have a future, living in cities. But to one who belonged to the earth, who might soon be claimed by the desiring earth, this beast with the pale face and the open mouth, and her body in supplication, was any and all beasts, the last in all the world, his maker and receiver.

. . . .

The tall signaller said to him, "I can't go along that path." In the early afternoon it had begun to rain, and the Guardsmen stood about in the white hollow under the mountain buckling on their belts and ammunition pouches. When they all moved forward in single file shells began to fall.

Brandon stood with his four signallers, then joined the crouching men along the narrow path, a long file of silent Guardsmen stretching as far into the rain-mist as they could see. Two shells fell close by, lower down the slope, the Guardsmen drew back, crouching and hunched together, and the tall signaller at Brandon's side suddenly ran off the path to a tree nearby and lay there, terrified.

Brandon went down to him and shook his shoulders. The signaller looked at him and said, "I can't go along that path." He was pale, the skin of his face was loose, and his terror was an astonishing discovery to him.

Brandon stood under the tree and pulled the man to his feet brutally. He was frowning, frightened by the shells falling closer and closer. He pulled the man up and took him by the belt, drawing him nearer. The signaller's head was bent forward. His body was without will,

and Brandon could pull it about as he wished. He unbuttoned his revolver-case and took out his charged revolver and showed it to him at the end of the white lanyard, with his chin up, looking as though he despised the man. He laid it in the palm of his hand and looked into the signaller's eyes, showing him the revolver very privately, his back turned against the other soldiers on the path. He kept hold of him and murmured at last, "You're going to follow me. Do you understand that?"

The Guardsmen went on in single file along the path and crouched down whenever the shells fell near. Brandon was terrified and he calmly looked his signaller in the eye, his chin up, and told him to come away from the tree. The hiddenloracle was failing to speak to him, giving him no signs, and he wanted to delay joining the silent Guardsmen in their slow walk towards the peak called Cerasola for as long as possible. He wanted the signaller to refuse, he wanted to stay under the tree, pale and trembling, because he himself was useless without the signaller: it gave him an excuse to stay behind. He could point to this man and say, "He is my wireless signaller. I am no use without him. His cowardice held me up."

When the shelling stopped the man moved away from the tree and they went up on to the path again. As they walked in single file among the Guardsmen the signaller marvelled at Brandon's calmness. He kept turning round

and looking him in the eyes, wondering at him.

It was a year later, at Faenza, that Brandon adopted the role of the hero. All the men ofthe infantry Company were lying about the floor, the sentries at the windows would not fire

[on...

on the Enemy, the spirit had gone out of them and the dusk was growing all round the ploughed field where the Germans would put in their attack. There were forty or more men in this room, lying on their backs and huddled together in silence.

During the afternoon there had been a ~~xxxxx~~ sudden shout from the cow-shed, the windows of which gave out over Enemy territory. Brandon ran to the machine-gunner's side and looked through the window. At the edge of the field before them he saw a terrifying spectacle. It was the realisation of nameless fears. The other men were looking at him helplessly, as if only he would know how to rescue them. For at the edge of the ploughed field there was a German tank, not more than a hundred yards away, and slowly its gun-turret was turning, in the direction of this house. It was too late to order gun-fire! They were without trenches. If they ran out of the house they would be machine-gunned. And the cannon of this tank could pierce two thick walls. The slow turning of the gun-turret was their sentence of death, and they all watched it in breathless silence, ~~xxxx~~ wide-eyed like children.

To their left there was another farm-house, also occupied by English troops. It was close by. Only a small valley with bushes divided them.

The tank was now quite still. Just to the right

of it, at the end of the field among the furrows, Brandon saw a section of German infantry. They threw themselves down. One of them was carrying a boazooka, which also fired wall-piercing shells.

The gun-turret continued to turn slowly, then stopped. Its muzzle was trained onto the other farm-house. They waited, to make sure. It did not move. It remained fixed on the house to their left, undergoing final adjustments for range.

Brandon asked quietly, "Can you see the Germans?" and the machine-gunner nodded. One of the infantry-officers said, "I don't think we ought to fire. They don't know we're here. Why should we give the game away?" He and Brandon discussed this, then agreed to keep the machine-guns silent, though it would have been easy to kill every German in the field. They were lying in the furrows quite conspicuously, making signs to each other, waiting for the tank to send out its first deadly sting.

It fired once, then there was a pause. It sent forth a great puff of white smoke, while the long barrel recoiled. It fired again. Both shells hit the farm-house, smashing the front wall and bringing down a great yellow shower of rubble. The Germans in the field ran forward, leaping over the furrows. Then, quite suddenly, the back door of the farm-house burst open and the Englishmen there came running out, towards the cover

of the trees and bushes further uphill. Some of them were hatless. There were some covered with the yellow dust from the debris. Everything was left behind them: their armoured carrier in the back yard, the maps, and the wireless-equipment. All this could be clearly seen from where Brandon stood in the cow-shed.

The Germans ran to within a few yards of the house. Gradually, man by man, the one giving covering fire to the other, they surrounded it and found it empty. The attack was swift and expert. One or two of them began examining the armoured carrier in the back yard, turningover all its equipment with rapt curiosity. They seemed to have forgotten this other farm-house, so close and silent.

Brandon and the others kept their eyes on the tank. They waited for its gun-turret to turn a few inches further, onto themselves. From this farm-house, built on a hillock, there was no avenue of escape to the rear. One of the men murmured, "Now it's our turn." But to their astonishment the gun-turret began to move slowly in the other direction. Then the tank's great motor started up and it began to move slowly along the path again, away from the field, and finally was out of sight.

No one had any explanation for this. It seemed so easy for the Germans to capture both farm-houses. <u>They would come again, after dusk</u>. This was the terrible possibility which occurred to every man. So, as the dusk

grew, every man waited, cowed down for the final blow. There was no worse monster to the infantryman than the Enemy tank, with its huge grinding tracks and relentless gun.

Evryone spoke in a low voice, lest the Germans in the other house should hear them. When the farmer went out to draw water a machine-gun instantly spoke from the other side, and he lostsome flesh off a finger. Then the blue tracer bullets came spraying all over the side-wall, shattering the windows. So they <u>would</u> come after dusk. Again it was silent.

The men were quiet and still, sunk in a fathomless gloom, their eyes dull. The captain in charge of them had capitualetd to his terror. He no longer knew what he was doing. His orders were absurd, and he delivered them in a trembling voice which hid nothing from the others. He had long since ceased to be obeyed. He sat with a swollen, wan face under the chimney, his eyes moving about, while the sergeant-major, hitherto legendary for his courage, lay straight out under the stairs, everything in him sunk down to a doomed torpor. Brandon stepped over his body and said something to him. The sergeant-major hardly opened his eyes to reply. Brandon felt a quick flame of anger, but he prevented himself from making a scene: he wished to bide his time.

As the dusk grew ~~therexcamexthe~~ the sound of tanks, grating and whining, came weirdly from the German lines, so

loud and ominous. A machine-gunner was crouching down underneath the window, holding communion with his fear, while the muzzle of his gun pointed uselessly to the sky. In the barn a wounded man lay grieving, and people tried to quiet his persistent moans, lest the Enemy should hear. Men sat with their heads bowed, or lay on the stone floor, or watched with quiet, unimpassioned curiosity the face of their captain in the hour of his capitualtion. They watched the haunted shifting of his eyes as they might watch an experiment, with their sympathy disengaged, and their hatred also.

It was now that Brandon decided to become an actor. He chose for his role the hero. For in this room heroism had become an eccentricity.

His cue was given to him quite unexpectedly. It came from one of his own men, who entered the room from the barn, where he had been nursing his fear all afternoon. He came murmuring to Brandon in the dusk, trying to hide his voice from the others. It was as if he were deliberately cooperating with Brandon's wish. Brandon was sitting on a great black sofa next to the wireless-set, waiting to speak to his headquarters, and the man knelt down at his side, gripping his leg. He was trying to hold back his tears, and Brandon heard him say:

"Please let me go back. It's no use. I can't go on."

The man said this in quite a matter-of-fact way,

as if he were asking Brandon to be sensible. At first Brandon did not understand, because it happened so suddenly. He kept asking, "What? What?" Then he saw how the man was kneeling, half-cringing at the edge of the sofa, speaking with his head bowed, as the tanks grated and whined outside and the wounded man in the barn made a cry. The other men in the room were all aware of what was going on. They were waiting for Brandon's verdict, to discover how far it was permissible to capitulate. Brandon saw his opportunity. He spoke to the man loudly, no longer caring for the cautious silence everyone was preserving.

His feelings were quite cold, but he answered the man warmly, in the manner of one who feels an unbearable contempt. He shouted, "Look at you grovelling and snivelling on the floor! You're less than a worm. Do you dare to talk to me in that condition? You're disgusting to me. I don't want you near me. You're not human any more, you're something low..." He spoke in a terrible castigating tone, like the most fearful of fathers, he shouted in the silence of the room, with all the other capitulators listening, and undergoing the same rebuke. As he turned back to the wireless his other men took the signaller by the shoulders and drew him away, whispering to him. For now everybody knew that it was not permissible. His last words to the man were: "Come back when you're human again."

The recovery was quick. When it was almost dark

the man came back to him and said in a very clear voice, "I'm sorry, sir. I'M all right now." And Brandon looked up at him grudgingly and replied; "Very well. You may go back to your post."

Then Brandon jumped up and walked among the infantrymen. He began pointing at them and ridiculing them, laughing at the way they were all lying down. He mimicked their terrified faces. He made little prancing steps across the room between their bodies. He did a mock trembling. All his body shook, and they turned away because he made them ashamed, they had ceased to be men. Then he began to behave more seriously.

He told them, "I can save you. I can save this position. I can do it by bringing dozens of shells down so near this house that you will all be in danger. Some of you may even be killed by my shells. But it is your only chance. Do you agree to that? I must have every man's agreement before I will do it. Are you willing to take the risk? You are good men, you are worth saving, for God's sake don't give up yet. I know I can save this position." He walked among them and even chucked one of them under the chin. They were suddenly children before him, men of forty looked back at him like embarrassed sons, and he stirred them to go back to their posts at the windows and to fight again. He was utterly taken aback at the thought of his power over them. He had acted his speech and his antics with no effort what-

-soever. He had used his words to master even his own terror, and he was humbly grateful for the spirit that had entered him.

They became heroes under his eyes, and they answered him, "Yes", agreeing to be bombarded; he had given them the chance to make an heroic decision, he had renewed their characters for them. As for his plan, he would have followed his plan in any case.

They believed that only he did not feel terror. But he had become a hero for one reason alone: that he wished to come outof this battle alive.

He looked about the room and saw that they were all resolved and calm. But he himself did not believe in his success. He knew that the bazookas would blow holes in the walls, that the Germans outside, lying among the furrows, would brave his shells and throw grenades in at the windows and surround the house and take them prisoner or shoot them in the dark. He was terrified as the night fell and the silence outside in the ploughed field pointed forward to the attack, it was always the same silence before an attack; but he knew that the men at the windows would fight.

He gave his orders quickly over the wireless, and the voice in the earphones asked him whether he would take responsibility for such a close target. He said, "Yes, I will take responsibility for the closeness of this target," announcing it not only to the rubber mouth-piece

of the radio but to the infantrymen in the room, as they elected themselves heroes in the dusky silence. There would be hundreds upon hundreds of shells falling, and Brandon hoped that they would catch the Enemy in the furrows. He waited for the guns of the Division to report Ready, then he gave the order, Fire; it was almost night-fall.

The men stood about the dark room, and the sentries at the windows waited. They passed the word to each other, speaking in whispers, The shells are coming over now, then listened in silence.

There was a first whisper, then another whisper, a light singing in the sky, then suddenly the first shell dived down and crashed close to the house. The second shell fell, and then they flew over in choirs, the noise immense now, the house shaking, the men all shouting at each other, and a thick pungent shell-smoke drifting through the windows and the open barn-door. The sentries were lying low to avoid the splinters which came whirring in.

A shell exploded near the mouth of the barn, then another inside the door, and the wounded man lying out there with the dead Germans for company cried out again and again, but there was so much noise and so much moving about that his was only the faintest of cries, buried in thunder.

Brandon was still sitting on the black sofa,

crouched down so that he would have as much protection as possible from the window behind him. The shells hit the wall, but being light did not break them down. The dust and shell-smoke was making everybody cough, and there was the sound of rubble falling down from the walls outside and the slated roof.

[A machine-gunner...

A machine-gunner at one of the windows suddenly shouted:

"They're outside!"

Brandon heard another man shout:

"Fire, you silly bastard!"

At once the machine-guns sounded out, filling the room with a deafening metal clatter as they sprayed the black field from side to side. In answer to them, only a second or two later, came a long jet of blue tracer bullets from the Enemy house, lighting up the room.

Someone called out for the artillery officer, and Brandon jumped up, feeling his way across the floor.

"Who wants me?" he shouted.

A man caught hold of him in the darkness and told him that a German had just looked in at the window, had stared right down the muzzle of one of the machine-guns. There was at least a section of German infantry just outside.

The shell-fire was beinning to abate. The moment Brandon realised this he rushed back towards his wireless, pushing over the men who stood in his way, and felt for the black sofa, then snatched the mouth-piece of the radio away from his signaller's lap and shouted into it: "Repeat. Repeat."

The machine-guns paused, there was almost silence for a space, then gradually the sky began to fill again with

the whirring of hand-fulls of shells, and again the explosions echoed across the field: one, two, three fell together, then a pause, then a rain of dozens upon dozens. Splinters were hitting the ceiling and dropping to the stone floor, as the machine-guns began to fight out another long clattering battle.

At last, during one of the pauses, they heard the muffled cry from the field outside, quite close to the window:

"Kamarad! Kamarad!"

A sentry called out:

"They've got their hands up."

Somebody else shouted back: "Keep them covered. Make them stay there", as Brandon took up the mouth-piece of the radio again. With a feeling of most blessed ease he spoke to the artillery lines: "Stop firing. Stop. Gun-fire successful."

When the field was silent again, the last spasmodic shells finished, one of the English sentries called to the men outside: "Kummen zee here!" Eight Germans got up out of the furrows, probably the first section of an attacking company, and walked round the house to the door of the barn. They came into the room in single file, still murmuring, "Kamarad, Kamarad," while the wounded man in the barn seemed to weep now rather than moan, in an aftermath of

the deepest, most horrible misery.

. . . .

Brandon walked up the narrow staircase into the lending library near his hotel in Vienna, and sat down by one of the shelves. He leaned forward and put out his hand absently, taking down a book without looking at its title. He opened it near the middle and began reading at once.

It was a report written by one of the prisoners at the concentration camp in Dachau. He raed about the cells which were so confined that the prisoner could not sit down or even turn more than his head. There were cells where one had to bark for one's food like a dog. Men were frozen almost to the point of death in experiments and it was found that they were most likely to survive if they were laid down with naked women who had coitus with them. Jews were segragated from Christians and the two parties set facing each other; they were them each given a shovel and ordered to strike the man opposite him, and those who did not strike hard enough would be hung.

He had picked the book out at random and sat over it for an hour, reading very fast. He had wanted to put it back, he had promised himself every minute that he would put it back. But he could not stop.

Then he began to feel the customary abstract anger.

He remembered an SS man on a train with whom he had once talked. He flushed with shame instantly, he could feel the sweat on his upper lip, because he had smiled at the man and shaken hands with him. He regretted this, but he no longer regretted wanting to spit at the fair-haired boy along the white mountain path. In a moment of angry spite, he felt that every German should have been wiped out.

But his abstract anger was a further instrument of fate by means of which these murders might continue, fulfilling our destiny. That is to say, even his compassion was a further instrument of murder because it was abstract. To avenge Dachau he yearned to do away with an entire people, and from such an abstract passion Dachau itself came. He looked up from his book suddenly, and a thought occurred to him: Hitler was the greatest perpetrator of democracy in our epoch, for together with mass benefits he gave them mass graves.

We are always being asked to imagine something, there is always some suffering in another part of the world for which we could make atonement. There is always a fashionable abstraction for which we could lay down our lives. We yearn for privacy again, to go alone. Beware of compassion, It fore-runs insentience.

In the summer of 1945 Brandon drove through Udine

with his interpreter to the southern edge of the city. When they came to the first Yugoslav sentry he stopped and asked the way to Headquarters. Then he drove on through the strange, deserted back streets, where there were small houses among trees, all of them identical, and yellow rubble in the gutters.

His interpreter was a student from one of the SS battalions. He wore spectacles and had clever, watchful eyes. He spoke English perfectly, and was most obsequious in his manner to Brandon. At once he divined a kind of credulity in Brandon, and perhaps thought to advance himself by means of it. He took long strides at Brandon's side, and almost took his arm, though the War had not been over more than a week.

They went into one of the small houses, and the Yugoslav officer there showed his anger the moment he saw that Brandon had brought an SS man with him. He did not invite him to sit down; this task fell to the interpreter, who politely pulled out one of the wooden seats for him. The officer was short and plump, very quick, with small, grey, shining eyes. He moved his legs about restlessly as the interpreter put his first question.

"Ask him," Brandon said, "whether he will deliver back to us the battalion of Germans prisoners which his troops diverted from the main road yesterday. His troops have taken prisoners which belong to us."

The Yugoslav could not bear having this German in the room on equal terms with himself, especially an SS man. He snapped out his reply, staring at Brandon rudely, and told the interpreter that he had no intention of giving up any prisoners, and that his country had every right to take them, since they also had fought against the German armies. His lips were thin, almost invisible, and his fury made him white in the face.

The interpreter turned back to Brandon and said:

"The officer is rude in his reply. These are uncivilised people, sir."

But Brandon was no longer interested, despite the orders he had received from his headquarters. He realised his own idiocy in bringing an SS man to this post and expecting it to be taken as anything other than a most studied insult. He did not care about the prisoners, and he could see that the Yugoslav officer would in any case never give in.

Brandon had fought the same War as this Yugoslav officer, but he was only a scholar of war. He only did a job of murder thoroughly, and afterwards his thoughts were free. He had only lost his temper once, when the fair-haired boy had passed him on the white mountain-path, but later he looked on this as unscholarly conduct, and shameful. He stared at the Yugoslav, then at the SS man, and he realised

that between them there was a kind of blood-quarrel to which he was only a calm spectator.

The Yugoslav was deliberately fingering his revolver-holster, making a show of it, as he asked the interpreter with great sarcasm whether or not Hitler had won the War. Then he walked straight across to the door, trembling with fury, and waited to show them out.

Brandon got up slowly and gave him a friendly smile as he passed him. Smiles were easy, because he did not care.

On the way back across Udine, while he drove fast and recklessly, the German told him: "I am ashamed that you should be treated like this by such people, sir. We understand each other. We have been university students. They do not understand polite requests." Brandon was affable,

[ast..

as to a fellow-undergraduate.

The barracks were four sombre buildings round a huge, dusty quadrangle. SS battalions arrived from Austria continuously, during both day and night. The capitulating troops drove quickly, hoping to get to a British camp before Russians or Yugoslavs waylaid them. Usually the officers arrived at the head of the columns in open Mercedes-Benz cars, and often they were dressed in black shining macintoshes.

The nights were full of rumour. Thousands of Germans asked each other questions in the long, dark, stone corridors. They were to be sent to Canada. They were to be released quickly. They were to be imprisoned on an island for twelve years. The worst of them were to be shot. They came into the camp like conspirators. Only the boys of the Hitler Youth were frightened, with wide eyes, watching the English soldiers cautiously.

Brandon's room had tall windows and bare, cold walls. Yet he achieved here a murderer's happiness such as he had known only in Greece, where he had worked so hard. For here in the camp by summer there were long, wonderful, hot, sleepless nights, with the flashing of lights against his window, and the barking of a wild, leashed-up blood-hound, and a constant murmuring from outside, and the starting of motors. His task was to search the officers as they came in, and he

was constantly called out of his bed. There were endless messages for him to come immediately, on account of a quarrel over food, or a suicide from one of the barrack windows, or the arrival of fresh booty. He would sit in his room with other officers turning over the watches and cameras and potrable radio-sets, in a summer-glut of victory.

An open car came through the gates after midnight, and a thick-set officer with dangerous, truculent eyes stpped down as Brandon approached. In the back of the car were women.

"What about the women?" Brandon asked.

Lights were shining onto the courtyard from a great shed behind them, where two ranks of prisoners were being searched.

"What about them?" the thick-set officer asked.

"Are they to stay with you?"

The German smiled, mocking Brandon: "What use are women now? Shall we need them where we are going?"

He turned to the other officers and laughed, translating for them what he had just said.

One of the girls stood near the shed weeping, abandoned now by the battalion with which she had travelled. She was an Hungarian, with black hair and a pale, child's face. A young soldier who was with her smiled when he saw her tears. Brandon left the officers and went up to him.

"Who is she?" he asked.

"Who is she?" The boy tugged at her skirt and giggled. "She is a whore."

Brandon decided to take her away. He led her into the guardroom and opened the door of one of the private rooms. He showed her a mattress on the floor and indicated that she should sleep there. He looked back at his own soldiers and told them sternly that no one was to go itno this room during the night. He closed the door, fascinated by the presence of this woman.

[illegible]

At dawn one morning he met the colonel of one of the SS battalions in the quadrangle. He was a tall, elderly, handsome mand, with white hair. He bowed with great elegance when Brandon asked him about the troops under his command. Brandon suddenly looked into his eyes, and they were blue, still and frightening. They remained absolutely still, and shyness had never visited them.

The sun had just come up, and it was a clear, biting, yellow dawn, [illegible] the workaday world.

"May I invite you to breakfast in my quarters?" the colonel asked him, with an impeccable pronunication.

Brandon was young and helpless under this light-blue gaze, and he nodded with a smile. Together they went into one of the dark corridors, past the saluting prisoners, to a small room which had been fitted with old boxes and chairs to make an imitation drawing-room.

The colonel showed him to a chair with solemn, aristocratic grace. His back was very straight, and he moved his neck stiffly when he turned his head. They waited while his servant, treading softly on the stone floor, brought them coffee and biscuits.

"I have an English wife," the colonel said. He spoke about his visits to England before the War, and told Brandon how unwilling the Germans had been to fight the English. "The Germans and the English should have come together against Russia. We are similar peoples."

Brandon consulted his conscience: why did I fight the Germans? Because of the concentration camps. He never chose any reason but this, when he sought a reason. He mentioned the concentration camps to the colonel.

"Ah, there were mistakes," the colonel replied. "I am a soldier of the old type. Hitler made many mistakes. He should not have gone to war with England."

He eyed Brandon calmly. Brandon sought for words, but the task of murder was done, there was no longer any formula, and he knew nothing about right or wrong. He had chosen for himself alone. Should he speak, in the brisk air of this lovely dawn, sipping coffee in a quiet room, of a crucifixion, of a signing of ~~this~~ bonds, of a truant time? It took him five years after this very dawn to learn how to answer such a man, and how to answer ~~these~~ such calm eyes with calm eyes. He left the

colonel after the second cup of coffee, and no doubt the colonel believed that he had just entertained a young man of few words.

On a calm, very black night a soldier ran into the guardroom and told him to come. Brandon walked swiftly into the dark, stone corridor and up the stairs, until he heard a woman screaming. He pushed open the door and saw before him a long hall with pillars. Just to the left of the door were a German officer and a middle-aged woman, sitting quietly over a table, with an oil-lamp between them. The screaming had ceased, and there was only gentle sobbing now, in the darkness far beyond the table.

"What is the matter with her?" Brandon asked

them...

them.

The SS officer shrugged, and Brandon turned to the middle-aged woman: "Are you German?" She nodded and told him that the other woman was frightened.

"Why frightened?"

He was suspicious. He glanced about the great empty hall and stood still, listening for the voices of other men who might be there.

"She is Italian," the woman at the table told him. "She is very excitable, and she has been calling out for her husband."

Brandon walked towards the darkness and spoke to the woman in Italian. She was lying on a camp-bed. He told her to get up and bring her blankets. He went back to the table and looked sternyl from the officer to the German woman while he waited. He was aware of being mocked, but of this he could not be sure.

"I believe some one has been trying to interfere with her," he said. But the officer at the table shook his head, pouting with too much solemnity. Then the Italian woman came out of the darkness towards the table, shaking and sobbing, her hair falling in shining, wet strands about her cheeks. She whimpered that she was all alone, that she was not one of the enemy, that she was Italian and therefore free, that she was frightened by so many soldiers.

"My husband is a doctor," she told him.

"Where is he?"

"In the south, I believe."

"Then why are you here?"

"I was in Austria."

Brandon looked into her eyes and at her wet, rather sallow face, and he thought: An officer's whore. But this may not have been the case. It may have been that her husband was a military doctor attached to one of the SS battalions, and that he had managed to escape during the first days of the capitulation.

The German couple watched them go out of the door in silence. They simply leaned on the table, watching them, and it seemed to Brandon that there was a slight smile on the officer's face.

He took her to the guardroom and showed her the closet which had been occupied the week before by the Hungarian girl. He turned back to his own soldiers, unable to smile, and told them that they were not to touch her, that they were not to go near the room. He was aware of conspiracies in the dark places of this prison-camp, of murder in the promiscuous silence. His eyes accused his soldiers: rapists. But only he stood wrapt in doubt. They were simply sentries on night-duty at a prison-camp, and that was how they returned his accusing gaze.

He left the guardroom heavy with suspicion. The War had fallen apart. He was meaningless. There must be logs to float by. Everything was lost. In this

camp he realised his freedom. He was under no further obligation. Everything was before him to choose freely. Have you honour? But nothing is encumbent upon you. Do you talk of duty, honour, obligation? Do you dress yourselves with these elegant fancies from the past? Nurse your honour, if you will. But only if you will.

He went stumbling from the guardroom with the quiet eyes of his men upon him, and he knew now that he was alone. It came like the word of God. The War was over. I am virtuous, if I will it. I am clean, if I will it. So much confusion thrust upon him a will.

All around the search-shed the ground was covered with bank-notes. A small quadrangle was covered from end to end with them, in some places a foot deep. There were millions upon millions of Mark notes, and sometimes a wind caught them and whirled them up. One kicked one's way through them as through profuse autumn leaves. The first news was that these German notes were now valueless, and all prisoners were stripped of them. There were packs of new notes which amounted to fortunes, still in their rubber bands.

Late one morning Brandon passed this quadrangle and saw a German soldier bending down and turning the notes over, alone, dreaming the fortunes he might have had. Brandon shouted at him furiously. But the soldier only turned and growled something back at him. He could not leave these notes, and he continued to bend down, with

an extraordinary determined look. Brandon ran up to him and brought his stick down over his shoulders, and only then did the man begin to move away. Brandon was exhausted and sick. Every gesture he made was empty of meaning. He was not fit to be a creature of peace.

He would stand before the SS officers in the guard-room and again and again, as each new battalion came in, he would turn to the interpreter at his side and say: "Tell them I am about to address them as gentlemen. We do not wish to search them personally, but they are bound by their honour to give up their binoculars, their fire-arms, their ammunition, their maps, their compasses, and any military documents they may have. Any ommission will be discovered sooner or later." They would look at him with agreeing smiles. Soem of them were tall, flushed, healthy, blonde young men, like keen animals. Brandon spoke his speech with a fathomless apathy, knowing that they recognised in him a fellow-Aryan. He listened to his own word 'honour' as if he were a foreigner to it, mocking himself gladly.

One or two of the officers came into the camp bleeding and bandaged. They complained to him like outraged gentlemen that they had been stoned by members of the Jewish Brigade on the way down from Austria, and feared for their fellow-officers. They claimed that this was illegal conduct. Brandon gazed at their wounds with sympathy, than changed, withdrawing his

sympathy by an intellectual decision. Standing in front of them, he underwent a kind of hot giddiness. He turned to the interpreter and said: "Tell them I hope it won't happen again, but that they are lucky not to be massacred for what they have meted out ~~forxk~~ to the Jews." But these were only the words of a scholar, and he turned his back, disgusted that he should be robbed of his freedom.

He called aside one of the younger officers, and took him to the table, out of earshot to the rest. He looked about him to see whether his own soldiers were listening. The German had blue eyes, and he looked into Brandon's face closely, with an intimacy which was almost sexual.

"You have a good camera there," Brandon told him. It was hanging round the German's neck in a leather case. "I am going to be honest with you. I could take that camera from you by force, and it would be confiscated like all the others. But first I do not like to take things by force, and secondly I would like to have that camera myself. Therefore I am going to ask you to make me a gift of it. If you refuse, I shall see that it remains in your possession."

The officer smiled. The look he gave Brandon was full of encouragement. Slowly he lifted the camera-strap over his head and then, making of it a little ceremony of blessing, hung it round Brandon's neck.

"This is because I like your manner," he said.

"Have you given up everything else?"

"Of course," the German replied, then walked back to where the others stood.

Yes, honour appealed to Brandon. The word itself had an infallible music for him. He wished always to be honourable. For himself, alone. There could be no other honour. Honour of your country, of your church, of your family, of your class, - these are for the weak. Even God is for one man alone. We are all in a great solitude.

The following day, standing near the table where all the surrendered articles were laid, he heard some one click his heels behind him. He turned and saw a private of one of the SS battalions standing to attention, hatless. He had a thick map-case under his arm. Brandon raised his eyebrows at him truculently, and the soldier told him in broken English that he was the officer's servant.

"Which officer?"

The soldier mentioned the word 'camera', and Brandon realised at once. He watched the soldier open the map-case and take out a pile of intelligence-maps for Italy and Austria.

"He forgets these."

Brandon looked into the boy's eyes, pouting: "Forgets them?"

Then he smiled and said, "Thank you." He laid the maps down with the others. Perhaps it was true: that the officer had found these maps by accident, in a trunk which had not been opened in the hurry of the first search. Brandon was restless with suspicions.

Only in battle, unshaven, his boots muddy and his clothes soiled, did he find in himself a soldier. Only then was he at ease. Only then were his orders direct, like a sudden irresistible prohphesy. For only then was the brain laid asleep.

During one of the hot afternoons a crowd gathered round two women in a corner of the huge quadrangle. These women were Russian, and had been screaming hysterically. Brandon stood watching them from a distance, at the back of the crowd. He looked about him and then recognised one of the German women standing close by. He called her over. She was the middle-aged woman who had been sitting over a table with the SS officer, when he had come to fetch the Italian. There was a lechery in her eyes which appealed to him. She seemed calm, and quite unafraid of him.

"What is the matter with these women?" he asked. He suspected her of doing quiet mischief in this area of the prison-camp, for no reason that he knew. She told him that the women had been told they would be sent back to Russia. They had come away from Russia with German troops, and they were terrified

because they were traitors and might be shot. Brandon looked at the woman as she spoke, at her hard and lined skin, and cracked lips. He listened to her words suspiciously, for this was the second time he had found her close to hysterical women. The camp was strange. There was dust everywhere. They were standing in the hot sunlight. Troops were jumping out of the lorries behind them, in hundreds. There were cries of anger, orders and whistling. The Russian women were looking about them, still in tears, talking very quickly to any one, though not a person there understood them. Brandon saw mockery and conspiracy in everything.

"What was your work?" he asked her.

She replied to him clearly and slowly, staring into his eyes and yet beyond them. Brandon caught most of the German words and understood her to say that she had been a secretary of the Gestapo. But he was not sure about this. He thought of her as a cruel person and liked to look into her face, though she was not handsome. She leaned against the wall with her hands in the pockets of her jacket, very much at ease. It was he who prolonged the conversation, while she was calm and negligent, looking about her. Suddenly she would break off and shout something to one of the passing soldiers or officers. It was as if Brandon was a visitor among them, a polite visitor on sufferance. He felt his good manners to be ridiculous here.

Brandon never saw her after this. She must have

left the camp the following day. Rarely did the prisoners stay more than two days. Sometimes people seemed to disappear, swallowed up in the out-going convoys. He had told both the Hungarian girl and the Italian woman not to leave the camp, but both of them had gone by dawn the following day. Brandon would have taken them away to the civilian camp on theother side of the city. Perhaps they could not bear to leave the soldiers. He had jumped up quickly one morning, soon after five o'clock, happy to be taking the Hungarian girl to the other camp, but when he pushed open the door in the gaurd-room he found only the mattress and folded blankets. He turned to his own soldiers to ask them where she had gone, but they were the new day-guard and so would know nothing. He searched the women's quarters, but they were empty. Perhaps she had walked into the city during the night, and become Italian.

One day he drove to a civilian camp on the north side of the city where there were people of every race, both middle-class people and peasants. In one of the rooms there were great piles of clothing which had been sent from England and ~~Austria~~ America. An idea had occurred to him. He decided to give some of the clothing to the Russian children in his own camp; these children had arrived in the baggage trains of the SS battalions. Brandon drove them to the civilian camp and chose several pairs of shoes for them. He did this in order to see the look of gratitude in the eyes of the mothers.

The children stared at him in terror as he went through the antics of compassion. They stood close together, never daring to open their mouths, watching Brandon's smiles as if they were a performance. Their faces made no reply; they were wrapt in contemplation. They knew the truth.

Children go quickly to the truth because they are without possessions. They discard everything in the fullness of time. The girls standing before him were in rags, and they were pale. They were destitute. But yet they were bereft of nothing.

He went into one of the offices to consult the Canadian in charge of the clothing. This man was short, plump and jovial. He greeted Brandon as if he were an old friend, and his ideal was clearly to be a personality. Brandon asked him whether some of the clothing could not be sent to the prison-camp, since there were so many women and children arriving in the baggage-trains.

"Take just what you like," the Canadian said, and Brandon agreed to send a lorry the following day. The Canadian advised him to take something for himself. He told him that some of the clothing was too good for displaced people, and that he had already sent his own wife a beautiful pair of shoes and a handbag. Brandon at once became furious, but said nothing. The plan formed itself in his mind of betraying this jovial fellow.

He drove back to the prison-camp very fast, so that the children behind him gasped. The next day they had disappeared from the camp, and Brandon forgot about the clothing. Instead, he went to a shop in Udine and bought some film, and began to interest himself in photography. He would sit on his bed in the camp opening and shutting his camera, and touching its tiny silver levers.

He remembered the drive leading up to a house with broken steps which stood dead and still amid long grass. It had been a kind of lovely home-coming after the terrible desertion of the arterial road where all the houses had stood empty and silent, and where they had lain in a ditch under a heavy bombardment.

The house was behind trees, stately and tall. It received them gracefully, like an ancient house. It was mutilated but it put out an old gentleman's hand to the brown-faced murderers. The mosaic floor was cracked, there were chipped urns on either side of the stone steps, there was a torn garden and hanging shutters.

He went up to one of the top attic rooms and looked carefully out of the small window, keeping to the shadows. There was a white cottage only about one hundred yards forward where the Enemy were still thought to be. It was at the end of wonderful soft green parkland.

Downstairs he saw the Major with a young soldier, a boy of nineteen or so. They were standing by one of the shuttered windows. Brandon remained in the doorway and he saw that the boy was weeping. His head was bowed and he was crying to the Major that he could not go up in this attack.

The Major told him that it was a simple attack. He laughed and asked him what he was afraid of. The boy said, "I am not used to it, sir," for the other fighting earlier that morning had frightened him.

The Major put his arm round his neck, chucked him under the chin, hugged him close and said, "Come on, son, come on." But the child wept in the Major's arms, and replied that he would be killed, he knew he would. He looked up and asked quietly: "Can I stay behind with Company Headquarters until I feel better?" But the Major shook his head. Suppose all my boys asked to stay behind with Headquarters, he said, who would there be to do the fighting for me? Look at the corporal there, - is he afraid?

The child reluctantly glanced sideways at the corporal through his tears. The corporal was all the time standing close by him, a Londoner, holding himself stiffly as he watched the child with calm eyes, seeming to congratulate himself.

The Major talked into the boy's ear like a man with his wife, and told him that the corporal would stay with him.

"Won't you, corporal?"

The corporal nodded. You'll be all right when you are out there with the others, the Major told him. My boys never let me down. I am not going to let them say that anybody in "A" Company let them down.

And at last, wiping his eyes, the child went out with the corporal into the naked open air, and the white cottage was waiting.

The child was killed. Someone told Brandon that he had been found by a hedge without a mark on his body. It was said that two patrolling Germans had suddenly looked over this hedge, they had shouted and run away, and then the child was found dead. They believed he died of terror.

The vision was too great for this child.
