

away their officers like straws on a torrent, the 175th regiment turned their backs on the Russians and bolted.

Johannes' mind was a mere receptacle of terror. He rushed like a frightened animal from the blood drenched ground, oblivious of his companions, his surroundings, of where he was going—panting, nearly bursting with his exertions, his reason shipwrecked on the ghastly visions up to which he had been conducted. The whole world was wrenched in a loathsome alteration. Sounds came thin and remote—muffled in wool. Objects met and merged into each other and separated again in a series of lunatic gambols draped in a veil of dirty red mist. Trembling, with torn clothes, bareheaded in the freezing winds, he found himself standing amidst a group of other men, all unkempt and disordered like himself, all shaken by violent shudders, all staring with unnaturally wide-opened visionless eyes.

Hate had taken possession of the world. Since the moment he left his village Johannes had been told incessantly that he was a fool, a cur, ignorant, blundering and misbegotten. Everyone, for some reason, was furiously angry at him, and he was filled with rage at everyone else. A high querulous irritation had broken out in men like a contagious eruption, events had ceased to follow simple, orderly paths, they now plunged insensately into fierce distortions and maddened tangles of confusion, culminating in this slaughter-house abomination from which he had fled. And now, once more, here were men galloping around the huddled, scared fugitives, shaking fists at them, cursing them, herding them into line—what for? "Form, animals; form, brutes; cowards, to your places," said Johannes aloud.

A voice replied, "everyone has gone mad."

Another voice said, "Lunacy has routed reason, madness is sanity, sane men are now the fools."

The crimson-faced officers did not cease their galloping or shouting for a moment. Long after the remains of the 175th regiment had been thrust into a fresh alignment the officers galloped and shouted. Johannes looked at them with

wondering eyes. He heard the hoarse command to march, and toilsomely stepping through the deep snow, they all marched away. Beside him rode two officers. Said one, "What a frightful thing." The other replied, "This is worse than death."

Johannes heard them. He did not in the least know what they meant. The officers cast furious looks at the men. "March, beasts, forward," one of them shouted in a shrill, cracking, sobbing voice. "This is the ultimate disgrace," said the other. The horses' stamping showered up the powdery snow like dull white dust; the strong columns of breath from their nostrils hung around their heads like a pale gray fleece. The day waned into evening—into night. The moon floated in her tranquil path through immensity, and like a black and shapeless blotch the regiment continued its shadowy journey towards the final shadows which now were its destination.

Johannes did not notice when it became day. The march continued. His memory began to cast up sudden, sharp recollections of his farm, his father, the white horse with the sore shoulder, like bits of wreckage turned up by the tide on a rough shore. He was weary to exhaustion, limping dreadfully, sometimes staggering against the men beside him. When he thought of his old life he no longer saw the snow, the beech forests, or the gaunt men. It was his corn patch he beheld, or his young chickens rushing with flapping wings and extended necks to peck up their supper. These visions vanished at the loud orders of the officers and the degraded regiment filled his bewildered vision, in its turn to fade before the spell of memory—a continuous alternation of phantasy and reality. That day passed, that he halted and then marched again and ate and slept, he did not notice in any definite way. Things ran before him in one stupefying blur; a cloud had descended upon the world.

Suddenly Johannes perceived that a new situation had arrived. He saw everywhere other regiments fully equipped and armed, drawn up in good order and converged like walls upon the 175th. An old general mounted on a bay charger rode slowly towards them. Behind him rode a group of officers. Unlike everyone else the old general was not angry at them. Johannes saw that his face was white; he did not wave his hands. With a fearful pang Johannes observed that tears were flowing unchecked from the eyes of this old general. The mists vanished from his mind, his sight became keen and flashing like a hunted stag's—the ordered human walls of soldiers, the stern, serious faces of the officers, the fearful, haggard, forlorn, tattered men amongst whom he stood—tattered and fearful as they. All noise had vanished. The general and his cortege advanced and halted with soundless motion. Johannes heard a thin old voice, not hoarse like an officer's, but tired and wavering. The old general held up his hand to them and began to speak, but it was all incomprehensible. "Soldiers you have fallen from your place in the army. When you fled in the face of the enemy you deserted your comrades and made their effort fail. They had to retreat. You caused the battle to be lost. You have brought shame on the Empire and dishonor on its arms. By fleeing from the Russians you have not escaped death. Your countrymen must now wipe out the miserable blot with your blood, for the protection of the army the Emperor cannot allow you to live, as a regiment, you are condemned to death."

There was more of it, in the thin wavering voice.

Johannes had known none of those things. Was that, then, a battle? To be butchered when one was more helpless than a roped ox. And this about blots and stains and the Empire, he could make nothing of that at all—"to death as a regiment," What!—did that mean—?

The old general and his staff floated out of vision. Came more of the eternal guttural German orders, and a movement among the files of soldiers grouped around.

A priest in white robes appeared walking down the line in front of the regiment, nervously swinging a black crucifix at the end of a cord.

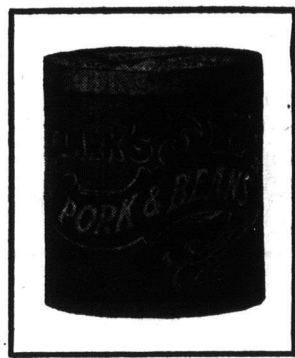
Johannes stared at him with wild anxiety but did not hear a word of the horror-stricken accents that mumbled the words of the last preparation. Groans and terrible, strangled cries were breaking from the men beside Johannes. Some

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