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***MEN
IN WAR***

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The time was late in the autumn of the second year of the war; the place, the garden of a war hospital in a small Austrian town, which lay at the base of wooded hills, sequestered as behind a Spanish wall, and still preserving its sleepy contented outlook upon existence.

Day and night the locomotives whistled by. Some of them hauled to the front trains of soldiers singing and hallooing, high-piled bales of hay, bellowing cattle and ammunition in tightly-closed, sinister-looking cars. The others, in the opposite direction, came creeping homeward slowly, marked by the bleeding cross that the war has thrown upon all walls and the people behind them. But the great madness raced through the town like a hurricane, without disturbing its calm, as though the low, brightly colored houses with the old-fashioned ornate façades had tacitly come to the sensible agreement to ignore with aristocratic reserve this arrogant, blustering fellow, War, who turned everything topsy-turvy.

In the parks the children played unmolested with the large russet leaves of the old chestnut trees. Women stood gossiping in front of the shops, and somewhere in every street a girl with a bright kerchief on her head could be seen washing windows. In spite of the hospital flags waving from almost every house, in spite of innumerable bulletin boards, notices and sign-posts that the intruder had thrust upon the defenseless town, peace still seemed to prevail here, scarcely fifty miles away from the butchery, which on clear

nights threw its glow on the horizon like an artificial illumination. When, for a few moments at a time, there was a lull in the stream of heavy, snorting automobile trucks and rattling drays, and no train happened to be rumbling over the railroad bridge and no signal of trumpet or clanking of sabres sounded the strains of war, then the obstinate little place instantly showed up its dull but good-natured provincial face, only to hide it again in resignation behind its ill-fitting soldier's mask, when the next automobile from the general staff came dashing around the corner with a great show of importance.

To be sure the cannons growled in the distance, as if a gigantic dog were crouching way below the ground ready to jump up at the heavens, snarling and snapping. The muffled barking of the big mortars came from over there like a bad fit of coughing from a sickroom, frightening the watchers who sit with eyes red with crying, listening for every sound from the dying man. Even the long, low rows of houses shrank together with a rattle and listened horrorstruck each time the coughing convulsed the earth, as though the stress of war lay on the world's chest like a nightmare.

The streets exchanged astonished glances, blinking sleepily in the reflection of the night-lamps that inside cast their merrily dancing shadows over close rows of beds. The rooms, choke-full of misery, sent piercing shrieks and wails and groans out into the night. Every human sound coming through the windows fell upon the silence like a furious attack. It was a wild denunciation of the war that out there at the front was doing its work, discharging mangled human

bodies like so much offal and filling all the houses with its bloody refuse.

But the beautiful wrought-iron fountains continued to gurgle and murmur complacently, prattling with soothing insistence of the days of their youth, when men still had the time and the care for noble lines and curves, and war was the affair of princes and adventurers. Legend popped out of every corner and every gargoyle, and ran on padded soles through all the narrow little streets, like an invisible gossip whispering of peace and comfort. And the ancient chestnut trees nodded assent, and with the shadows of their outspread fingers stroked the frightened façades to calm them. The past grew so lavishly out of the fissured walls that any one coming within their embrace heard the plashing of the fountains above the thunder of the artillery; and the sick and wounded men felt soothed and listened from their fevered couches to the talkative night outside. Pale men, who had been carried through the town on swinging stretchers, forgot the hell they had come from; and even the heavily laden victims tramping through the place on a forced march by night became softened for a space, as if they had encountered Peace and their own unarmed selves in the shadow of the columns and the flower-filled bay-windows.

The same thing took place with the war in this town as with the stream that came down from out of the mountains in the north, foaming with rage at each pebble it rolled over. At the other end of the town, on passing the last houses, it took a tender leave, quite tamed and subdued, murmuring very gently, as if treading on tiptoe, as if drowsy with all the

dreaminess it had reflected. Between wide banks, it stepped out into the broad meadowland, and circled about the war hospital, making almost an island of the ground it stood on. Thick-stemmed sycamores cast their shadow on the hospital, and from three sides came the murmur of the slothful stream mingled with the rustling of the leaves, as if the garden, when twilight fell, was moved by compassion and sang a slumber song for the lacerated men, who had to suffer in rank and file, regimented up to their very death, up to the grave, into which they—unfortunate cobblers, tinkers, peasants, and clerks—were shoved to the accompaniment of salvos from big-mouthed cannon.

The sound of taps had just died away, and the watchmen were making their rounds, when they discovered three men in the deep shadow of the broad avenue, and drove them into the house.

"Are you officers, eh?" the head-watchman, a stocky corporal of the landsturm, with grey on his temples, growled and blustered good-naturedly. "Privates must be in bed by nine o'clock." To preserve a show of authority he added with poorly simulated bearishness: "Well, are you going or not?"

He was about to give his usual order, "Quick, take to your legs!" but caught himself just in time, and made a face as though he had swallowed something.

The three men now hobbling toward the entrance for inmates, would have been only too glad to carry out such an order. However, they had only two legs and six clattering crutches between them. It was like a living picture posed by a stage manager who has an eye for symmetry. On the right went the one whose right leg had been saved, on the left

went his counterpart, hopping on his left leg, and in the middle the miserable left-over of a human body swung between two high crutches, his empty trousers raised and pinned across his chest, so that the whole man could have gone comfortably into a cradle.

The corporal followed the group with his eyes, his head bent and his fists clenched, as if bowed down beneath the burden of the sight. He muttered a not exactly patriotic oath and spat out a long curve of saliva with a hiss from between his front teeth. As he was about to turn and go on his round again, a burst of laughter came from the direction of the officers' wing. He stood still and drew in his head as if from a blow on the back of his neck, and a gleam of ungovernable hatred flitted over his broad, good-natured peasant face. He spat out again, to soothe his feelings, then took a fresh start and passed the merry company with a stiff salute.

The gentlemen returned the salute carelessly. Infected by the coziness that hung over the whole of the town like a light cloud, they were sitting chatting in front of the hospital on benches moved together to form a square. They spoke of the war and—laughed, laughed like happy schoolboys discussing the miseries of examinations just gone through. Each had done his duty, each had had his ordeal, and now, under the protection of his wound, each sat there in the comfortable expectation of returning home, of seeing his people again, of being fêted, and for at least two whole weeks, of living the life of a man who is not tagged with a number.

The loudest of the laughs was the young lieutenant whom they had nicknamed the Mussulman because of the

Turkish turban he wore as officer of a regiment of Bosnians. A shell had broken his leg, and done its work thoroughly. For weeks already the shattered limb had been tightly encased in a plaster cast, and its owner, who went about on crutches, cherished it carefully, as though it were some precious object that had been confided to his care.

On the bench opposite the Mussulman sat two gentlemen, a cavalry officer, the only one on the active list, and an artillery officer, who in civil life was a professor of philosophy, and so was called "Philosopher" for short. The cavalry captain had received a cut across his right arm, and the Philosopher's upper lip had been ripped by a splinter from a grenade. Two ladies were sitting on the bench that leaned against the wall of the hospital, and these three men were monopolizing the conversation with them, because the fourth man sat on his bench without speaking. He was lost in his own thoughts, his limbs twitched, and his eyes wandered unsteadily. In the war he was a lieutenant of the landsturm, in civil life a well-known composer. He had been brought to the hospital a week before, suffering from severe shock. Horror still gloomed in his eyes, and he kept gazing ahead of him darkly. He always allowed the attendants at the hospital to do whatever they wanted to him without resistance, and he went to bed or sat in the garden, separated from the others as by an invisible wall, at which he stared and stared. Even the unexpected arrival of his pretty, fair wife had not resulted in dispelling for so much as a second the vision of the awful occurrence that had unbalanced his mind. With his chin on his chest he sat without a smile, while she murmured words of endearment;

and whenever she tried to touch his poor twitching hands with the tips of her fingers, full of infinite love, he would jerk away as if seized by a convulsion, or under torture.

Tears rolled down the little woman's cheeks—cheeks hungry for caresses. She had fought her way bravely through the zones barred to civilians until she finally succeeded in reaching this hospital in the war zone. And now, after the great relief and joy of finding her husband alive and un mutilated, she suddenly sensed an enigmatic resistance, an unexpected obstacle, which she could not beg away or cry away, as she had used to do. There was a something there that separated her mercilessly from the man she had so yearned to see.

She sat beside him impatiently, tortured by her powerlessness to find an explanation for the hostility that he shed around him. Her eyes pierced the darkness, and her hands always went the same way, groping forward timidly, then quickly withdrawing as though scorched when his shrinking away in hatred threw her into despair again.

It was hard to have to choke down her grief like this, and not burst out in reproach and tear this secret from her husband, which he in his misery still interposed so stubbornly between himself and his one support. And it was hard to simulate happiness and take part in the airy conversation; hard always to have to force some sort of a reply, and hard not to lose patience with the other woman's perpetual giggling. It was easy enough for *her*. She knew that her husband, a major-general, was safe behind the lines on the staff of a high command. She had fled from the

ennui of a childless home to enter into the eventful life of the war hospital.

The major's wife had been sitting in the garden with the gentlemen ever since seven o'clock, always on the point of leaving, quite ready to go in her hat and jacket, but she let herself be induced again and again to remain a little longer. She kept up her flirtatious conversation in the gayest of spirits, as if she had no knowledge of all the torments she had seen during the day in the very house against which she was leaning her back. The sad little woman breathed a sigh of relief when it grew so dark that she could move away from the frivolous chatterbox unnoticed.

And yet in spite of her titillating conversation and the air of importance with which she spoke of her duties as a nurse, the Frau Major was penetrated by a feeling that, without her being conscious of it, raised her high above herself. The great wave of motherliness that had swept over all the women when the fatal hour struck for the men, had borne her aloft, too. She had seen the three men with whom she was now genially exchanging light nothings come to the hospital—like thousands of others—streaming with blood, helpless, whimpering with pain. And something of the joy of the hen whose brood has safely hatched warmed her coquetry.

Since the men have been going for months, crouching, creeping on all fours, starving, carrying their own death as mothers carry their children; since suffering and waiting and the passive acceptance of danger and pain have reversed the sexes, the women have felt strong, and even in their

sensuality there has been a little glimmer of the new passion for mothering.

The melancholy wife, just arrived from a region in which the war exists in conversation only, and engrossed in the one man to the exclusion of the others, suffered from the sexless familiarity that they so freely indulged in there in the shadow of death and agony. But the others were at home in the war. They spoke its language, which in the men was a mixture of obstinate greed for life and a paradoxical softness born of a surfeit of brutality; while in the woman it was a peculiar, garrulous cold-bloodedness. She had heard so much of blood and dying that her endless curiosity gave the impression of hardness and hysterical cruelty.

The Mussulman and the cavalry officer were chaffing the Philosopher and poking fun at the phrase-mongers, hair-splitters, and other wasters of time. They took a childish delight in his broad smile of embarrassment at being teased in the Frau Major's presence, and she, out of feminine politeness, came to the Philosopher's rescue, while casting amorous looks at the others who could deal such pert blows with their tongues.

"Oh, let the poor man alone," she laughed and cooed. "He's right. War is horrible. These two gentlemen are just trying to get your temper up." She twinkled at the Philosopher to soothe him. His good nature made him so helpless.

The Philosopher grinned phlegmatically and said nothing. The Mussulman, setting his teeth, shifted his leg, which in its white bandage was the only part of him that was visible, and placed it in a more comfortable position on the bench.

"The Philosopher?" he laughed. "As a matter of fact, what does the Philosopher know about war? He's in the artillery. And war is conducted by the infantry. Don't you know that, Mrs. —?"

"I am not Mrs. here. Here I am Sister Engelberta," she cut in, and for a moment the expression on her face became almost serious.

"I beg your pardon, Sister Engelberta. Artillery and infantry, you see, are like husband and wife. We infantrymen must bring the child into the world when a victory is to be born. The artillery has only the pleasure, just like a man's part in love. It is not until after the child has been baptized that he comes strutting out proudly. Am I not right, Captain?" he asked, appealing to the cavalry officer. "You are an equestrian on foot now, too."

The captain boomed his assent. In his summary view, members of the Reichstag who refused to vote enough money for the military, Socialists, pacifists, all men, in brief, who lectured or wrote or spoke superfluous stuff and lived by their brains belonged in the same category as the Philosopher. They were all "bookworms."

"Yes, indeed," he said in his voice hoarse from shouting commands. "A philosopher like our friend here is just the right person for the artillery. Nothing to do but wait around on the top of a hill and look on. If only they don't shoot up our own men! It is easy enough to dispose of the fellows on the other side, in front of us. But I always have a devilish lot of respect for you assassins in the back. But let's stop talking of the war. Else I'll go off to bed. Here we are at last with two charming ladies, when it's been an age since we've

seen a face that isn't covered with stubble, and you still keep talking of that damned shooting. Good Lord, when I was in the hospital train and the first girl came in with a white cap on her curly light hair, I'd have liked to hold her hand and just keep looking and looking at her. Upon my word of honor, Sister Engelberta, after a while the shooting gets to be a nuisance. The lice are worse. But the worst thing of all is the complete absence of the lovely feminine. For five months to see nothing but men—and then all of a sudden to hear a dear clear woman's voice! That's the finest thing of all. It's worth going to war for."

The Mussulman pulled his mobile face flashing with youth into a grimace.

"The finest thing of all! No, sir. To be quite frank, the finest thing of all is to get a bath and a fresh bandage, and be put into a clean white bed, and know that for a few weeks you're going to have a rest. It's a feeling like—well, there's no comparison for it. But, of course, it is very nice, too, to be seeing ladies again."

The Philosopher had tilted his round fleshy Epicurean head to one side, and a moist sheen came into his small crafty eyes. He glanced at the place where a bright spot in the almost palpable darkness suggested the Frau Major's white dress, and began to tell what he thought, very slowly in a slight sing-song.

"The finest thing of all, I think, is the quiet—when you have been lying up there in the mountains where every shot is echoed back and forth five times, and all of a sudden it turns absolutely quiet—no whistling, no howling, no thundering—nothing but a glorious quiet that you can listen