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JOURNEY'S END

A Play in Three Acts

by
R. C. SHERRIFF

SAMUEL



FRENCH

LONDON

NEW YORK TORONTO SYDNEY HOLLYWOOD

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JOURNEY'S END

First produced by the Incorporated Stage Society at the Apollo Theatre, London, W.C., December 9th, 1928, and subsequently at the Savoy Theatre, Strand, London, W.C., January 21st, 1929, with the following cast of characters—

(In the order of their appearance)

CAPTAIN HARDY	<i>Reginald Smith</i>
LIEUTENANT OSBORNE	<i>George Zucco</i>
PRIVATE MASON	<i>Alexander Field</i>
LANCE-CORPORAL BROUGHTON	<i>Richard Caldico</i>
2ND LIEUTENANT RALEIGH	<i>Maurice Evans</i>
CAPTAIN STANHOPE	<i>Colin Clive</i>
2ND LIEUTENANT TROTTER	<i>Melville Cooper</i>
2ND LIEUTENANT HIBBERT	<i>Robert Speaight</i>
THE COMPANY SERGEANT-MAJOR	<i>Tristan Rawson</i>
THE COLONEL	<i>H. G. Stoker</i>
A GERMAN SOLDIER	<i>Geoffrey Wincott</i>

The Play produced by JAMES WHALE

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

The Scene is laid in a Dug-out in the British trenches before St Quentin, March, 1918

The Curtain is lowered once during Act II and twice during Act III, to denote lapse of time.

ACT I

Evening on Monday, the 18th March, 1918

ACT II

SCENE I Tuesday morning

SCENE II Tuesday afternoon

ACT III

SCENE I Wednesday afternoon

SCENE II Wednesday night

SCENE III Thursday, towards dawn

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(See also page ii)

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JOURNEY'S END

ACT I

SCENE—*A Dug-out in the British trenches before St Quentin.*

A few rough steps lead into the trench above, through a low doorway. A table LC occupies a good space of the dug-out floor. A wooden frame, covered with wire netting, stands against the left wall and serves the double purpose of a bed and a seat for the table. A wooden bench against the back wall makes another seat, and two boxes serve for the other sides.

Another wire-covered bed is fixed in the right corner beyond the doorway.

Gloomy tunnels lead out of the dug-out to up L and down R.

Except for the table, beds, and seats, there is no furniture save the bottles holding the candles, and a few tattered magazine pictures pinned to the wall of girls in flimsy costumes.

The earth walls deaden the sounds of war, making them faint and far away, although the front line is only fifty yards ahead. The flames of the candles that burn day and night are steady in the still, damp air.

(See the Ground Plan of the Scene.)

The evening of a March day. A pale glimmer of moonlight shines down the narrow steps into one corner of the dug-out. Warm yellow candle-flames light the other corner from the necks of two bottles on the table. Through the doorway can be seen the misty grey parapet of a trench and a narrow strip of starlit sky. A bottle of whiskey, a jar of water, and a mug stand on the table amongst a litter of papers and magazines. An officer's equipment hangs in a jumbled mass from a nail in the wall.

During the Act the 'Verey' light comes on and off every minute. At the rise of the CURTAIN there is a distant rumble of guns.

CAPTAIN HARDY, a red-faced, cheerful-looking man, with gas mask on, but no belt, is sitting on a box by the R of the table, intently drying a sock over a candle-flame. He wears a heavy trench-boot on his left leg, and his right foot, which is naked, is held above the damp floor by resting it on his left knee. His right boot stands on the floor beside him. As he carefully turns the sock this way and that—feeling it against his face to see if it is dry—he half sings, half hums a song—humming when he is not quite sure of the words, and marking time with the toes of his right foot.

HARDY. 'One and Two, it's with Maud and Lou;
Three and Four, two girls more;
Five and Six, it's with—hm—hm—hm—
Seven, Eight, Clara and Caroline——'

(He lapses into an indefinite humming, and finishes with a lively burst)

'Tick! Tock!—wind up the clock,
And we'll start the day over again.'

(*Machine-gun effect off R*)

LIEUTENANT OSBORNE's legs appear in the moonlit trench above, and a tall, thin man comes slowly down the dug-out steps, stooping low to avoid the roof. He takes his helmet off and reveals a fine head, with close-cropped, iron-grey hair. He looks about 45—physically as hard as nails)

HARDY (*looking round*) Hullo, Osborne! Your fellows arriving?
(*Rubbing his foot*)

OSBORNE (*entering and hitching off his pack and dropping it in a corner down RC by bed*) Yes. They're just coming in.

HARDY. Splendid! Have a drink.

(*Machine-gun effect*)

OSBORNE. Thanks. (*He crosses, passes behind the table and sits on the bed L*)

HARDY (*passing the whiskey and a mug*) Use my mug if you like. Don't have too much water. It's rather strong today.

OSBORNE (*slowly mixing a drink*) I wonder what it is they put in the water.

HARDY. Some sort of disinfectant, I suppose.

OSBORNE. I'd rather have the microbes, wouldn't you?

HARDY. I would—yes——

OSBORNE. Well, cheero.

HARDY. Cheero. Excuse my sock, won't you?

OSBORNE. Certainly. It's a nice-looking sock.

HARDY. It is rather, isn't it? Guaranteed to keep the feet dry. Trouble is, it gets so wet doing it.

OSBORNE. Stanhope asked me to come and take over. He's looking after the relief coming in.

HARDY. Splendid! You know, I'm awfully glad you've come.

OSBORNE. I heard it was a quiet bit of line up here.

HARDY. Well, yes—in a way. But you never know. Sometimes nothing happens for hours on end; then—all of a sudden—'over she comes!'—rifle grenades—Minnies—and those bloody little things like pineapples—you know.

OSBORNE. I know.

HARDY. Swish—swish—swish—swish—BANG!

OSBORNE. All right—all right—I know.

HARDY. They simply blew us to bits yesterday. Minnies—enormous ones; about twenty. Three bang in the trench. I really am glad you've come; I'm not simply being polite.

OSBORNE. Do much damage?

HARDY. Awful. A dug-out got blown up and came down in the men's tea. Damned annoying.

OSBORNE (*lighting his pipe and smoking*) I know. There's nothing worse than dirt in your tea.

HARDY. By the way, you know the big German attack's expected any day now?

OSBORNE. It's been expected for the last month.

HARDY. Yes, but it's very near now; there's funny things happening over in the Boche country. I've been out listening at night when it's quiet. There's more transport than usual coming up—you can hear it rattling over the *pavé* all night; more trains in the distance—puffing up and going away again, one after another bringing up loads and loads of men—

OSBORNE. Yes. It's coming—pretty soon now.

HARDY. Are you here for six days?

OSBORNE. Yes.

HARDY. Then I should think you'll get it—right in the neck. (*He puts on his sock*)

OSBORNE. Well, you won't be far away. Come along, let's do this handing over. Where's the map?

HARDY. Here we are. (*He gropes among the papers on the table and finds a tattered map which is on the C box behind the table*) We hold about two hundred yards of front line. We've got a Lewis gun just here—and one here, in this little sap. Sentry posts where the crosses are—

OSBORNE. Where do the men sleep?

HARDY. I don't know. The sergeant-major sees to that. (*He points off to the L*) The servants and signallers sleep in there. Two officers in here, and three in there. (*He points to the R hand tunnel*) That is, if you've got five officers. (*He puts on his trench boot*)

OSBORNE. We've only got four at present, but a new man's coming up tonight. He arrived at transport lines a day or two ago.

HARDY. I hope you get better luck than I did with my last officer. He got lumbago the first night and went home. Now he's got a job lecturing young officers on 'Life in the Front Line'.

OSBORNE. Yes. They do send some funny people over here nowadays. I hope we're lucky and get a youngster straight from school. They're the kind that do best.

HARDY. I suppose they are, really. (*He sits up and lights a cigarette*)

OSBORNE. Five beds, you say? (*He examines the one he is sitting on*) Is this the best one?

HARDY. Oh, no. (*He points to the bed in the R corner*) That's mine over there. The ones in the other dug-out (*pointing to R*) haven't got any bottoms to them. You keep yourself in by hanging your arms and legs over the sides. Mustn't hang your legs too low, or the rats gnaw your boots.

OSBORNE. You got many rats here?

HARDY. I should say—roughly—about two million; but then, of course, I don't see them all. (*He begins to put on his sock and draw on his boot*) Well, there's nothing else you want to know, is there?

OSBORNE. You haven't told me anything yet.

HARDY. What else do you *want* to know?

OSBORNE. Well, what about trench stores?

HARDY. You *are* a fussy old man. Anybody'd think you were in the Army. (*He rises and goes behind the table, finds a tattered piece of paper, and shows it to Osborne*) Here you are: hundred and fifteen rifle grenades—I shouldn't use them if I were you; they upset Jerry and make him offensive. Besides, they are rusty, in any case. Then there's five hundred Mills bombs, thirty-four gum boots—

OSBORNE. That's seventeen pairs—

HARDY. Oh, no; twenty-five right leg and nine left leg. But everything's down here. (*He hands the list to Osborne and moves L of the table*)

OSBORNE. Did you check it when you took over?

HARDY. No. I think the Sergeant-Major did. It's quite all right.

OSBORNE. I expect Stanhope would like to see you before you go. He always likes a word with the company commander he's relieving.

HARDY. How is the dear young boy? Drinking like a fish, as usual? (*He sits at the table*)

OSBORNE. Why do you say that?

HARDY. Well, damn it, it's just the natural thing to ask about Stanhope. (*He pauses, and looks curiously at Osborne*) Poor old man. It must be pretty rotten for you, being his second in command, and you such a quiet, sober old thing.

OSBORNE. He's a long way the best company commander we've got.

HARDY. Oh, he's a good chap, I know. But I never *did* see a youngster put away the whiskey he does. D'you know, the last time we were out resting at Valennes he came to supper with us and drank a whole bottle in one hour fourteen minutes—we timed him.

OSBORNE. I suppose it amused everybody; I suppose everybody cheered him on, and said what a splendid achievement it was.

HARDY. He didn't want any 'cheering' on—

OSBORNE. No, but everybody thought it was a big thing to do. (*There is a pause*) Didn't they?

HARDY. Well, you can't help, somehow, *admiring* a fellow who can do that—and then pick out his own hat all by himself and walk home—

OSBORNE. When a boy like Stanhope gets a reputation out here for drinking, he turns into a kind of freak show exhibit. People pay with a bottle of whiskey for the morbid curiosity of seeing him drink it.

HARDY. Well, naturally, you're biased. You have to put him to bed when he gets home.

OSBORNE. It rather reminds you of bear-baiting—or cock-fighting—to sit and watch a boy drink himself unconscious.

HARDY. Well, damn it, it's pretty dull without *something* to liven people up. I mean, after all—Stanhope really *is* a sort of freak; I mean it *is* jolly fascinating to see a fellow drink like he does—glass after glass. He didn't go home on his last leave, did he?

OSBORNE. No.

HARDY. I suppose he didn't think he was fit to meet papa. (*A pause*) You know his father's vicar of a country village?

OSBORNE. I know.

HARDY (*laughing*). Imagine Stanhope spending his leave in a country vicarage sipping tea! He spent his last leave in Paris, didn't he? (*He rises, moves R and looks at the picture on the wall*)

OSBORNE. Yes.

HARDY. I bet it was *some* leave! (*He sits again*)

OSBORNE. Do you know how long he's been out here?

HARDY. A good time, I know.

OSBORNE. Nearly three years. He came out straight from school—when he was eighteen. He's commanded this company for a year—in and out of the front line. He's never had a rest. Other men come over here and go home again ill, and young Stanhope goes on sticking it, month in, month out.

HARDY. Oh, I know he's a jolly good fellow—

OSBORNE. I've seen him on his back all day with trench fever—then on duty all night—

HARDY. Oh, I know; he's a splendid chap!

OSBORNE. And because he's stuck it till his nerves have got battered to bits, he's called a drunkard.

HARDY. Not a drunkard; just a—just a hard drinker; but you're quite right about his nerves. They *are* all to blazes. (*He leans his elbow on the table to enjoy the story*) Last time out resting we were playing bridge and something happened—I don't remember what it was; some silly little argument—and all of a sudden he jumped up and knocked all the glasses off the table! Lost control of himself; and then he—sort of—came to—and cried—

OSBORNE. Yes, I know.

HARDY. You heard about it?

OSBORNE. He told me.

HARDY. Did he? We tried to hush it up. It just shows the state he's in. (*He rises, goes up R, and puts on his pack. Glasses first, webbing equipment next. There is a pause*) You know, Osborne, you ought to be commanding this company.

OSBORNE. Rats!

HARDY. Of course you ought. It sticks out a mile. I know he's got pluck and all that, but, damn it, man, you're twice his age—and think what a dear, level-headed old thing you are.

OSBORNE. He was out here before I joined up. His experience alone makes him worth a dozen people like me.

HARDY. You know as well as I do, you ought to be in command.

OSBORNE. There isn't a man to touch him as a commander of men. He'll command the battalion one day if——

HARDY. Yes, if! *(He laughs)*

OSBORNE. You don't know him as I do; I love that fellow. I'd go to hell with him.

HARDY. Oh, you sweet, sentimental old darling!

OSBORNE. Come along. Finish handing over and stop blithering.

HARDY. There's nothing else to do.

OSBORNE. What about the log-book?

HARDY. God! you are a worker. Oh, well. Here we are. *(He crosses to L, finds a tattered little book and throws it on the table above Osborne)* Written right up to date in my own fairy handwriting: '5 p.m. to 8 p.m. All quiet. German airman flew over trenches. Shot a rat.'

OSBORNE. Did he?

HARDY. No, I shot the rat, you ass. Well, finish up your whiskey. I want to pack my mug. I'll leave you that drop in the bottle.

OSBORNE. Thanks. *(He drinks up his whiskey and hands Hardy the mug)*

HARDY *(crossing R of the table)* I'll be off. *(He wipes the mug with a dirty rag and hooks it on his belt, then gets the stick and tin hat off the bed R)*

OSBORNE. Aren't you going to wait and see Stanhope?

HARDY. Well, no, I don't specially want to see him. He's so fussy about the trenches. I expect they are rather dirty. He'll talk for hours if he catches me. *(He hitches his pack over his shoulders, hangs on his gas satchel, map-case, binoculars, compass-case, until he looks like a travelling pedlar. As he dresses)* Well, I hope you have a nice six days. Don't forget to change your clothes if you get wet.

OSBORNE. No, papa.

HARDY. And don't forget about the big attack.

OSBORNE. Oh, Lord, no, I mustn't miss that; I'll make a note in my diary.

HARDY *(fully dressed)* There we are! Do I look every inch a soldier? *(He poses as Greek)*

OSBORNE. Yes. I should get quite a fright if I were a German and met you coming round a corner.

HARDY. I should bloody well hope you would. *(He goes up to the door of the dug-out)*

OSBORNE. Shouldn't be able to run away for laughing.

HARDY. Now don't be rude.

(Machine-gun fires)

(He comes back to the table and leans over to light a cigarette from a candle, and looks down on the table) Well, I'm damned. Still at it!

OSBORNE. What is?

HARDY. Why, that earwig. It's been running round and round that candle since tea-time; must have done a mile.

OSBORNE. I shouldn't hang about here if I were an earwig.

HARDY. Nor should I. I'd go home. Ever had earwig races?

OSBORNE. No.

HARDY. Great fun. We've had 'em every evening.

OSBORNE. What are the rules?

HARDY. Oh, you each have an earwig, and start 'em in a line. On the word 'Go' you dig your earwig in the ribs and steer him with a match across the table. I won ten francs last night—had a *splendid* earwig. You'll find him about here somewhere. I'll give you a tip.

OSBORNE. Yes?

HARDY. Promise not to let it go any further?

OSBORNE. Yes.

HARDY. Well, if you want to get the best pace out of an earwig, dip it in whiskey—makes 'em go like hell!

OSBORNE. Right. Thanks awfully.

HARDY. Well, I must be off. Cheero!

OSBORNE. Cheero!

(HARDY goes up the narrow steps into the trench above, singing softly and happily to himself)

'One and Two, it's with Maud and Lou;
Three and Four, two girls more—'

(The words trail away into the night.)

OSBORNE rises and gets his pack, which he had put down on entrance, and puts it on the bed R. While he undoes it MASON, a Soldier Servant, enters out of the tunnel from up L with two newspapers under his arm and lays the table for supper)

MASON. Excuse me, sir. Can I lay supper?

OSBORNE. Yes, do. *(He crosses, shuffles up the papers from the table and puts them on the bed)*

MASON. Thank you, sir. *(He lays the table)*

OSBORNE *(moving back to RC)* What are you going to tempt us with tonight, Mason?

MASON. Soup, sir—cutlets—and pineapple.

OSBORNE *(suspiciously)* Cutlets?

MASON. Well, sir—well, yes, sir—cutlets.

OSBORNE. What sort of cutlets?

MASON. Now, sir, you've got me. I shouldn't like to commit meself too deep, sir.

OSBORNE. Ordinary ration meat? *(He sits on a box behind the table)*

MASON *(on his L)* Yes, sir. Ordinary ration meat, but a noo shape, sir. Smells like liver, sir, but it 'asn't got that smooth, wet look what liver's got.

(MASON exits L.)

OSBORNE *sits up to the table and examines the map; after a slight pause, voices come from the trench above; LANCE-CORPORAL BROUGHTON appears at the top of the dug-out, and in a gruff voice says: 'This is "C" Company 'Headquarters, sir.'*

A boyish voice replies: 'Oh, thanks.'

There is a pause, then the gruff voice says: 'Better go down, sir.'

The boyish voice replies: 'Right—thanks')

(When RALEIGH enters, BROUGHTON exits.

RALEIGH *comes groping down the steps and moves to c. Watching Osborne and standing to attention in the candle-light. He looks round, a little bewildered. He is a well-built, healthy-looking boy of about 18 with the very new uniform of a 2nd lieutenant.*

OSBORNE *looks up from the trench map, surprised and interested to see a stranger)*

OSBORNE. Hullo!

RALEIGH. Good evening (*he notices Osborne's grey hair and adds*), sir. (*He takes off his tin hat*)

OSBORNE. You the new officer?

RALEIGH. Er—yes, I've been to Battalion Headquarters. They told me to report here.

OSBORNE. Good. We've been expecting you. Sit down, won't you?

RALEIGH (*nervously*) Thanks. (*He sits gingerly on the box at the table opposite Osborne, with his pack on*)

OSBORNE. I should take your pack off.

RALEIGH. Oh, right. (*He rises and slips his pack from his shoulders, putting his tin hat and stick on the bed R. He has a belt on, no strap, then sits again*)

OSBORNE. Will you have a drink?

RALEIGH. Er—well——

OSBORNE. You don't drink whiskey?

RALEIGH (*hastily*) Oh, yes—er—just a small one, sir.

OSBORNE (*pouring out a small whiskey and adding water*) Whiskey takes away the taste of the water——

RALEIGH. Oh, yes? (*He pauses, and laughs nervously*)

OSBORNE. And the water takes away the taste of the whiskey. (*He hands Raleigh the drink. There is a pause*) Just out from England?

RALEIGH. Yes, I landed a week ago.

OSBORNE. Boulogne?

RALEIGH. Yes. (*A pause, then he self-consciously holds up his drink*) Well, here's luck, sir.

(A Soldier walks across the back of the trench at this moment)

OSBORNE (*taking a drink himself*) Good luck. (*He takes up a tin of cigarettes*) Cigarette? (*He hands Raleigh the tin*)

RALEIGH. Thanks.

OSBORNE (*holding a bottle across so that Raleigh can light his cigarette from the candle in it*) Ever been up in the line before? (*He helps himself*)

RALEIGH. Oh, no. You see, I only left school at the end of last summer term.

OSBORNE. I expect you find it a bit strange.

RALEIGH (*laughing*) Yes—I do—a bit——

OSBORNE. My name's Osborne. I'm second in command of the company. You only call me 'sir' in front of the men.

RALEIGH. I see. Thanks.

OSBORNE. You'll find the other officers call me 'Uncle'.

RALEIGH. Oh, yes? (*He smiles*)

OSBORNE. What's *your* name?

RALEIGH. Raleigh.

OSBORNE. I knew a Raleigh. A master at Rugby.

RALEIGH. Oh? He may be a relation. I don't know. I've got lots of uncles and—and things like that.

OSBORNE. We've only just moved into these trenches. Captain Stanhope commands the company.

RALEIGH (*suddenly brightening up*) I know. It's a frightful bit of luck.

OSBORNE. Why? D'you know him?

RALEIGH. Yes, rather! We were at school together—at least—of course—I was only a kid and he was one of the big fellows; he's three years older than I am.

(*There is a pause; Osborne seems to be waiting for Raleigh to go on, then suddenly he says:*)

OSBORNE. He's up in the front line at present, looking after the relief. (*Another pause*) He's a splendid chap.

RALEIGH. *Isn't* he? He was skipper of Rugger at Barford, and kept wicket for the eleven. A jolly good bat, too.

OSBORNE. Did you play Rugger—and cricket?

RALEIGH. Oh, yes. Of course, I wasn't in the same class as Dennis—I say, I suppose I ought to call him Captain Stanhope?

OSBORNE. Just 'Stanhope'.

RALEIGH. I see. Thanks.

OSBORNE. Did you get your colours?

RALEIGH. I did for Rugger. Not cricket.

OSBORNE. Rugger and cricket seem a long way from here.

RALEIGH (*laughing*) They do, rather.

OSBORNE. We play a bit of soccer when we're out of the line.

RALEIGH. Good!

OSBORNE (*thoughtfully*) So you were at school with Stanhope. (*Pause*) I wonder if he'll remember you? I expect you've grown in the last three years.

RALEIGH. Oh, I think he'll remember me. (*He stops, and goes on rather awkwardly*) You see, it wasn't only that we were just at school together; our fathers were friends, and Dennis used to come

and stay with us in the holidays. Of course, at school I didn't see much of him, but in the holidays we were terrific pals.

OSBORNE. He's a fine company commander.

RALEIGH. I bet he is. Last time he was on leave he came down to the school; he'd just got his M.C. and been made a captain. It—sort of—made me feel—

OSBORNE. —keen?

RALEIGH. Yes. Keen to get out here. I was frightfully keen to get into Dennis's regiment. I thought, perhaps, with a bit of luck I might get to the same battalion.

OSBORNE. It's a big fluke to have got to the same company.

RALEIGH. I know. It's an amazing bit of luck. When I was at the base I did an awful thing. You see, my uncle's at the base—he has to detail officers to regiments—

OSBORNE. General Raleigh?

RALEIGH. Yes. I went to see him on the quiet and asked him if he could get me into this battalion. He bit my head off, and said I'd got to be treated like everybody else—

OSBORNE. Yes?

RALEIGH. —and next day I was told I *was* coming to this battalion. Funny, wasn't it?

OSBORNE. Extraordinary coincidence!

RALEIGH. And when I got to Battalion Headquarters, and the Colonel told me to report to 'C' Company, I could have cheered. I expect Dennis'll be frightfully surprised to see me. I've got a message for him.

OSBORNE. From the Colonel?

RALEIGH. No. From my sister.

OSBORNE. Your sister?

RALEIGH. Yes. You see, Dennis used to stay with us, and naturally my sister (*he hesitates*)—well—perhaps I ought not—

OSBORNE. That's all right. I didn't actually know that Stanhope—

RALEIGH. They're not—er—officially engaged—

OSBORNE. No?

RALEIGH. She'll be awfully glad I'm with him here; I can write and tell her all about him. He doesn't say much in his letters; can we write often?

OSBORNE. Oh, yes. Letters are collected every day.

(There is a pause. The rumble of guns is more distinct)

RALEIGH. I see, thanks! (*He takes a drink*) You don't think Dennis'll mind my—sort of—forcing myself into his company? I never thought of that; I was so keen.

OSBORNE. No, of course he won't. (*Pause*) You say it's—it's a good time since you last saw him?

RALEIGH. Let's see. It was in the summer last year—nearly a year ago.

OSBORNE. You know, Raleigh, you mustn't expect to find him—quite the same.

RALEIGH. Oh?

OSBORNE. You see, he's been out here a long time. It—it tells on a man—rather badly——

RALEIGH (*thinking*) Yes, of course, I suppose it does.

OSBORNE. You may find he's—he's a little bit quick-tempered.

RALEIGH (*laughing*) Oh, I know old Dennis's temper! I remember once at school he caught some chaps in a study with a bottle of whiskey. Lord! the roof nearly blew off. He gave them a dozen each with a cricket-stump.

(OSBORNE *laughs*)

He was so keen on the fellows in the house keeping fit. He was frightfully down on smoking—and that sort of thing.

OSBORNE. You must remember he's commanded this company for a long time—through all sorts of rotten times. It's—it's a big strain on a man.

RALEIGH. Oh, it must be.

OSBORNE. If you notice a—difference in Stanhope—you'll know it's only the strain——

RALEIGH. Oh, yes.

(OSBORNE *rouses himself and speaks briskly*)

OSBORNE. Now, let's see. (*He rises at the table and points to them*) We've got five beds here—one each. Two in here and three in that dug-out there. I'm afraid you'll have to wait until the others come and pick the beds they want.

RALEIGH. Righto!

OSBORNE. Have you got a blanket?

RALEIGH. Yes, in my pack. (*He rises to get it*)

OSBORNE. Better wait and unpack when you know where you are sleeping.

RALEIGH. Righto! (*He sits down again R of the table*)

OSBORNE. We never undress when we're in the line. You can take your boots off now and then in the daytime, but it's better to keep pretty well dressed always.

RALEIGH. I see. Thanks.

OSBORNE. I expect we shall each do about three hours on duty at a time and then six off. We all go on duty at stand-to. That's at dawn and dusk.

RALEIGH. Yes.

(*The rumble of guns dies away*)

OSBORNE. I expect Stanhope'll send you on duty with one of us at first—till you get used to it.

(*There is a pause. RALEIGH turns on his seat and looks curiously up the steps to outside and listens*)

RALEIGH. Are we in the front line here?

OSBORNE. No. That's the support line outside. The front line's about fifty yards farther on.

RALEIGH. How frightfully quiet it is!

OSBORNE. It's often quiet—like this.

RALEIGH. I thought there would be an awful row here—all the time.

OSBORNE. Most people think that.

(Pause)

RALEIGH. I've never known anything so quiet as those trenches we came by; just now and then I heard rifle firing, like the range at Bisley, and a sort of rumble in the distance.

(The guns are heard rumbling again)

OSBORNE. Those are the guns up north—up Wipers way. The guns are always going up there; it's never quiet like this. *(Pause)* I expect it's all very strange to you?

RALEIGH. It's—it's not exactly what I thought. It's just this—this quiet that seems so funny.

OSBORNE. A hundred yards from here the Germans are sitting in their dug-outs, thinking how quiet it is.

RALEIGH. Are they as near as that?

OSBORNE. About a hundred yards.

RALEIGH. It seems—uncanny. It makes me feel we're—we're all just waiting for something.

OSBORNE. We are, generally, just waiting for something. When anything happens, it happens quickly. Then we just start waiting again.

RALEIGH. I never thought it was like that.

OSBORNE. You thought it was fighting all the time?

RALEIGH *(laughing)* Well, yes, in a way.

OSBORNE *(after puffing at his pipe in silence for a while)* Did you come up by trench tonight—or over the top?

RALEIGH. By trench. An amazing trench—turning and twisting for miles, over a sort of plain.

OSBORNE. Lancer's Alley, it's called.

RALEIGH. Is it? It's funny the way it begins—in that ruined village, a few steps down into the cellar of a house—then right under the house and through a little garden—and then under the garden wall—then alongside an enormous ruined factory place—then miles and miles of plains, with those green lights bobbing up and down ahead—all along the front as far as you can see.

OSBORNE. Those are the 'Verey' lights. Both sides fire them over No-Man's Land—to watch for raids and patrols.

RALEIGH. I knew they fired lights. *(Pause)* I didn't expect so many—and to see them so far away.

OSBORNE. I know. (*He puffs at his pipe*) There's something rather romantic about it all.

RALEIGH (*eagerly*) Yes. I thought that, too.

OSBORNE. You must always think of it like that if you can. Think of it all as—as romantic. It helps.

(*MASON comes in with more dinner utensils*)

MASON. D'you expect the captain soon, sir? the soup's 'ot.

OSBORNE. He ought to be here very soon now. This is Mr Raleigh, Mason.

MASON. Good evening, sir.

RALEIGH. Good evening.

MASON (*to Osborne on his L., behind the table*) I've 'ad rather a unpleasant surprise, sir.

OSBORNE. What's happened?

MASON. You know that tin o' pineapple chunks I got, sir?

OSBORNE. Yes?

MASON. Well, sir, I'm sorry to say it's apricots.

OSBORNE. Good heavens! It must have given you a turn.

MASON. I distinctly said 'Pineapple chunks' at the canteen.

OSBORNE. Wasn't there a label on the tin?

MASON. No, sir. I pointed that out to the man. I said was 'e *certain* it was pineapple chunks?

OSBORNE. I suppose he said he was.

MASON. Yes, sir. 'E said a leopard can't change its spots, sir.

OSBORNE. What have leopards got to do with pineapple?

MASON. That's just what *I* thought, sir. Made me *think* there was something fishy about it. You see, sir, I know the Captain can't stand the sight of apricots. 'E said next time we 'ad them 'e'd wring my neck.

OSBORNE. Haven't you anything else?

MASON. There's a pink blancmange I've made, sir. But it ain't anywhere near stiff yet.

OSBORNE. Never mind. We must have the apricots and chance it.

MASON. Only I thought I'd tell *you*, sir, so as the captain wouldn't blame me.

OSBORNE (*looking at him*) All right, Mason.

(*Voices are heard in the trench above*)

That sounds like the captain coming now.

(*They both rise*)

MASON (*hastening away*) I'll go and dish out the soup, sir.

(*The voices grow nearer; two figures appear in the trench above and grope down the steps—the leading figure tall and thin, the other short and fat. The tall figure is CAPTAIN STANHOPE, who enters with trench*

coat, gas mask, tin hat and pack. At the bottom of the steps he straightens himself, pulls off his pack, and drops it on the floor up C. RALEIGH has risen and stands to attention over R. TROTTER puts his kit down on the up stage end of the R bed. OSBORNE is standing C by the table. Then STANHOPE takes off his helmet and throws it on the R hand bed. Despite his stars of rank he is no more than a boy; tall, slimly built, but broad-shouldered. His dark hair is carefully brushed; his uniform, though old and war-stained, is well cut and cared for. He is good-looking, rather from attractive features than the healthy good looks of Raleigh. Although tanned by months in the open air, there is a pallor under his skin and dark shadows under his eyes. His short and fat companion—2nd Lieutenant Trotter—is middle-aged and homely looking. His face is red, fat, and round; apparently he has put on weight during his war service, for his tunic appears to be on the verge of bursting at the waist. He carries an extra pack belonging to the officer left on duty in the line)

STANHOPE (as he takes off his pack, gas satchel, and belt) Has Hardy gone?

OSBORNE. Yes. He cleared off a few minutes ago.

STANHOPE. Lucky for him he did. I had a few words to say to Master Hardy. You never saw the blasted mess those fellows left the trenches in. Dug-outs smell like cess-pits; rusty bombs; damp rifle grenades; it's perfectly foul. Where are the servants?

OSBORNE. In there.

STANHOPE (calling into Mason's dug-out) Hi! Mason!

MASON (outside up L) Coming, sir! Just bringing the soup, sir.

STANHOPE (taking a cigarette from his case as he crosses and lighting it by the candle L of the table) Damn the soup! Bring some whiskey!

OSBORNE. Here's a new officer, Stanhope—just arrived.

(RALEIGH comes forward with outstretched hand. STANHOPE times his turn to meet Raleigh face to face)

STANHOPE. Oh, sorry. (He turns. Raleigh stands smiling awkwardly) I didn't see you in this miserable light. (He stops short at the sight of Raleigh. There is silence)

RALEIGH. Hullo, Stanhope!

(STANHOPE stares at Raleigh as though dazed. RALEIGH takes a step forward, half raises his hand, then lets it drop to his side)

STANHOPE (in a low voice) How did you—get here?

RALEIGH. I was told to report to your company, Stanhope.

STANHOPE. Oh, I see. Rather a coincidence.

RALEIGH (with a nervous laugh) Yes.

(There is a silence for a moment, broken by OSBORNE in a matter-of-fact voice)

OSBORNE. I say, Stanhope, it's a terrible business. We thought we'd got a tin of pineapple chunks; it turns out to be apricots.

TROTTER. Ha! Give me apricots every time! I 'ate pineapple chunks; too bloomin' sickly for me!

RALEIGH. I'm awfully glad I got to your company, Stanhope.

STANHOPE. When did you get here?

RALEIGH. Well, I've only just come.

OSBORNE. He came up with the transport while you were taking over.

STANHOPE. I see.

(MASON brings in a bottle of whiskey, a mug, and two plates of soup —so precariously that OSBORNE has to help with the soup plates on to the table)

STANHOPE (with sudden forced gaiety) Come along, Uncle! Come and sit here. (Then waving his hand towards the box on the R of the table) You better sit there, Raleigh.

RALEIGH. Right!

(RALEIGH sits awkwardly R of the table. TROTTER comes forward to Raleigh. STANHOPE sits at C of the table facing audience. OSBORNE over L, using bed as seat)

TROTTER (taking a pair of pince-nez from his tunic pocket, putting them on, and looking curiously at Raleigh) You Raleigh?

RALEIGH. Yes.

(Pause)

TROTTER. I'm Trotter.

RALEIGH. Oh, yes?

(Pause)

TROTTER. How are you?

(He shakes hands with Raleigh)

RALEIGH. Oh, all right, thanks.

TROTTER. Been out 'ere before?

RALEIGH. No.

TROTTER. Feel a bit odd, I s'pose?

RALEIGH. Yes. A bit.

TROTTER (getting a box to sit on) Oh, well, you'll soon get used to it; you'll feel you've been 'ere a year in about an hour's time. (He puts the box on its side and sits on it. It is too low for the table, and he puts it on its end. It is then too high. He tries the other side, which is too low; he finally contrives to make himself comfortable by sitting on his pack, placed on the side of the box)

(MASON's entrance with two more plates of soup is when TROTTER goes to get pack from bed)

OSBORNE. What kind of soup is this, Mason?

MASON. It's yellow soup, sir. (Standing at attention C)

OSBORNE. It's got a very deep yellow flavour.

TROTTER (*taking a melodious sip*) It wants some pepper; bring some pepper, Mason.

MASON (*anxiously*) I'm very sorry, sir. When the mess box was packed the pepper was omitted, sir.

TROTTER (*throwing his spoon with a clatter into the plate*) Oh, I say, but damn it!

(MASON stands L of Stanhope, behind the table)

OSBORNE. We must have pepper. It's a disinfectant.

TROTTER. You must have pepper in soup!

STANHOPE (*quietly*) Why wasn't it packed, Mason?

MASON. It—it was missed, sir.

STANHOPE. Why?

MASON (*miserably*) Well, sir, I left it to——

STANHOPE. Then I advise you never to leave it to anyone else again—unless you want to rejoin your platoon out there. (*He points into the moonlit trench*)

MASON. I'm—I'm very sorry, sir.

STANHOPE. Send one of the signallers.

MASON. Yes, sir.

(*He hastens to the tunnel entrance and calls*)

Bert, you're wanted!

(*A SOLDIER enters from up L with a rifle. He stands stiffly to attention LC, R of Stanhope*)

STANHOPE. Do you know 'A' Company Headquarters?

SOLDIER. Yes, sir.

STANHOPE. Go there at once and ask Captain Willis, with my compliments, if he can lend me a little pepper.

SOLDIER. Very good, sir.

(*He does not salute, slings rifle over shoulder, turns smartly and goes up the steps, MASON stopping him for a moment at the bottom of the steps to say confidently: 'A screw of pepper, you ask for.'*)

MASON exits L)

OSBORNE. We must have pepper.

TROTTER. I mean—after all—war's bad enough *with* pepper—(*noisy sip*) but war without pepper—it's—it's bloody awful!

OSBORNE. What's it like outside?

TROTTER. Quiet as an empty 'ouse. There's a nasty noise going on up north.

OSBORNE. Wipers, I expect. I believe there's trouble up there. I wish we knew more of what's going on.

TROTTER. So do I. Still, my wife reads the papers every morning and writes and tells me the news.

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