

## ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT

Erich Maria Remarque

He clears off. It gets quieter, but the screaming doesn't stop.

'What's up, Albert?' I ask.

'A couple of the columns over there got direct hits.'

The screaming goes on and on. It can't be men, they couldn't scream that horribly.

'Wounded horses,' says Kat.

I have never heard a horse scream and I can hardly believe it. There is a whole world of pain in that sound, creation itself under torture, a wild and horrifying agony. We go pale. Detering sits up.

'Bastards, bastards! For Christ's sake shoot them!'

He is a farmer and used to handling horses. It really gets to him. And as if on purpose the firing dies away almost completely. The screams of the animals become that much clearer. You can't tell where it is coming from any more in that quiet, silver landscape, it is invisible, ghostly, it is everywhere, between the earth and the heavens, and it swells out immeasurably. Detering is going crazy and roars out, 'Shoot them, for Christ's sake, shoot them!'

'They've got to get the wounded men out first,' says Kat. We stand up and try to see where they are. If we can actually see the animals, it will be easier to cope with. Meyer has some field glasses with him. We can make some bigger things, black mounds that are moving. Those are the wounded horses. But not all of them. Some gallop off a little way, collapse, and then run on again. The belly of one of the horses has been ripped open and its guts are trailing out. It gets its feet caught up in them and falls, but it gets to its feet again.

Detering raises his rifle and takes aim. Kat knocks the barrel upwards. 'Are you crazy?'

Detering shudders and throws his gun on the ground.

We sit down and press our hands over our ears. But the terrible crying and groaning and howling still gets through, it penetrates everything.

We can all stand a lot, but this brings us out in a cold sweat.

You want to get up and run away, anywhere just so as not to hear that screaming any more. And it isn't men, just horses.

Some more stretchers are moved away from the dark mass.

Then a few shots ring out. The big shapes twitch a little and then become less prominent. At last! But it isn't over yet. No one can catch the wounded animals who have bolted in terror, their wide-open mouths filled with all that pain.

One of the figures goes down on one knee, a shot - one horse collapses - and then there is another. The last horse supports itself on its forelegs, and moves in a circle like a carousel, turning around in a sitting position with its forelegs stiff - probably its back is broken. The soldier runs across and shoots it down. Slowly, humbly, it sinks to the ground.

We take our hands away from our ears. The screaming has stopped. Just a long-drawn-out, dying sigh is still there in the air. Then, just like before, there are only the rockets, the singing of the shell, and the stars - and it feels almost eerie.