Decision

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Abstract

It was early morning. I was miserable!...
left, calling up old memories only to smother them with new times, new places; so that when Artie Shaw wound up on the sweet trumpet again it would be all that had gone before and this too—a blue rabbit moving in moon shadows on the early snow, midnight in a strange house, and upstairs an old man and a child asleep.

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IT WAS early morning. I was miserable! No sleep for forty-eight hours and soaked to the skin by the constant drizzle. Joe was sacking it beneath his raincoat. In a few minutes, relief would come, and then I could join him. I was dead on my feet. God, how I hated this!

We were occupying a holding position, and Joe and I were outpost guards. The rest of the platoon was dug in about one hundred yards to the rear. The quietness was killing. Suddenly I heard a dull crack as if someone had stepped upon a twig. I whirled and looked behind, hoping to see a relief patrol. Instead I saw a dim figure crawling through the underbrush. It was a Jerry attempting to make it to his own lines. He was wearing a field uniform with a sniper's camouflaged jacket. He carried no weapons. It was obvious that he did not see me watching him, for he continued to crawl silently, but wearily. His beard was shaggy, his clothing torn almost to rags. The cold drizzle was enough to make anyone feel bitter. As he crept I started to think of the situation.

I hated the Jerries. I hated their guts! This war was their idea. Let 'em suffer like me. The guy wasn't more than twenty-three and the poor bastard was suffering as much as anyone could—hating the whole affair as I did. I could let him go. What's one Kraut in a world war? His jacket—a damned sniper. Right between the eyes—should I? He looked depressed, miserable and yet hopeful. If I traded positions with him what would happen? To hell with him! I aimed and fired. The shot woke up Joe.

"What the hell? What's goin' on?"
"Nothing, Joe—just a dead German."
"Oh," he said dully, and turned over to sleep some more.