

# *Schöffling & Co.*

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English sample translation

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((pp7-12))

The swell had completely subsided. The sun was burning down on a dead calm sea. A light haze lay over the horizon. The rubber dinghy moved imperceptibly. The one-armed man kept a constant watch on the horizon. The other man was sleeping.

There was nothing in sight.

When an arm can no longer be nourished by the body, the skin peels off. It begins to suppurate and becomes gelatinous and discolored. It is advisable to operate quickly. Since the large blood vessels contracted when it was shot off, there is no danger of hemorrhaging. The frayed and jagged stump sticks out of the wound, a smooth bullet fracture. It is fairly simple: the remaining muscles are separated with a circular cut, and the arm is then off. The wound is bandaged with half of the under vest. Of course it goes on suppurating. The remains of the muscles also discolor, becoming mainly grey and green. The pain is at times severe. The lymph glands turn red and become as big as chicken's eggs. A racing pulse and violent shivering, shortage of breath and a dry mouth. And so it goes on. There is scarcely anything to be done.

"Give me another whisky, it'll be time to stop work in a moment anyway," he said. "And throw the arm overboard for God's sake."

"How's the pain?"

"Good."

"Cigarette?"

The other man threw the arm overboard and gave the one-armed man a light. The arm sank very slowly and could be seen for quite a while in the clear water. They leaned far over and watched it until it had disappeared into the depths.

"There it goes and it will sing no longer," said the one-armed man and emptied his mug. A drop clung to the stubble on his chin and sparkled in the sunshine. The cigarette smoke clung motionless to their faces. A few wisps of seaweed floated across. The sky was cloudless. The horizon trembled in the heat. The sea lay like a board.

They each drank another shot of whisky and then tried to go to sleep. The dinghy rocked gently as they moved about, trying to find a bearable position to sleep in. The one-armed man lay on his good side. The stump of his arm stood straight up towards the sky. His dreams moved beneath the stubble of his beard and his left leg twitched at times.

A rubber dinghy is about seven and a half feet long and four and a half feet wide. In proportion to this, the mid-Atlantic, at this point, is so large that the exact measurements make no difference.

When a rubber dinghy is floating on its own in the mid-Atlantic, it is immaterial whether it is drifting there in peace or war. The nationality of two people floating along alone in the mid-Atlantic, two people destined to die of thirst if they are not found in good time, is also of no consequence. The sun is not interested in whether the one-armed man is an American and the other man a German. And whether both of them are sitting in a rubber dinghy in the middle of the Atlantic in the year 1943. The sun merely radiates its thermal energy, rises, reaches its zenith and sets again. The sea is dead calm and has no interest in who is floating on it. The mid-Atlantic remains large and the rubber dinghy remains small. The limits never change.

Meanwhile the arm lies on the sea-bed at a depth of about 7000 feet, if it hasn't already been eaten by a fish.

Towards evening, the one-armed man woke up again. He felt a pain in his arm at the place where there was no longer any arm. The sky was a cardinal's robe spread wide. The sea was spread with water-colors.

He was looking for his pack of cigarettes and then he couldn't light a match; his other hand was missing. He held the cigarette between his lips. His tongue lay woody and thick in his mouth. But he did not wake the other man. He was glad that the other man was there at all, he leaned forward and looked into his sleeping face. Only his forehead glistened. There were violet shadows in the hollows and folds of his face. His lips looked cracked. Like the bark of a pine tree, he thought. Or like the skin of a roast that has been burnt.

He took the cigarette out of his mouth and felt his own lips. It was the same. Broken and cracked.

You only ever notice something when you see it, he thought, and again he tried to strike the match. In vain. He clasped the pack between his knees, but his legs suddenly trembled so violently that the pack fell down. It just wouldn't work. He felt the cigarette paper provocatively smooth between his cracked lips.

He scanned the horizon. There was nothing in sight.

That's the way it is, he reflected. Betsy will be surprised that I've become a left-hander. I imagine she won't be surprised. *Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori.*

The other man had awakened with a start and looked around distractedly. His face went on sleeping until he realized where he was.

"Give me a light," said the one-armed man. "I can't strike the damn match."

"How many cigarettes do we actually have left?"

They counted. They still had 64 cigarettes. And a good half bottle of whisky. And a few bars of Chocacola and some pieces of chewing gum. That was all. They hadn't found anything else in the rubber dinghy.

The other man gave him a light and then lit a cigarette for himself. The smoke did him good. He breathed deeply and grew a little dizzy.

The sky had gradually grown green. Light cumulus clouds lay on the horizon.

They drank their evening ration of whisky. The liquid did not seem to get nearly as far as their stomachs, it was as though it had already been absorbed by their dry tongues.

The stump of the arm was once again standing straight up from the one-armed man's body. The other man wanted to tell him to finally put his arm back on again, the unnatural position irritated him. Better not to, he thought, people are difficult when something's wrong with them. So he only said,

"How's the arm?"

"It's churning. They've got to find us soon. We're already thirty-six hours overdue. They've got our last position. There's just a stupid ache in my shoulder."

"Let me have a look."

"And I tell you, they've long ago given up on us and they're not looking for us any more."

The other man examined the stump.

The edges of the wound had eaten further into the healthy flesh. The bandage was soaked with pus.

The other man took the second half of the shirt and bandaged the wound up again. Then he washed out the old bandage. The water was tepid and enveloped his hands like jelly. The pus had eaten its way into the fabric and could not be dissolved in the water. The other man turned pale and felt his stomach heave. But it passed off again.

Everything will pass, he said to himself and once more felt his hands in the soft tepid water. The strange rather kitschy saying that he had read somewhere—heaven knows where—occurred to him ... "and our harsh, wet, human existence slips through our hands."

For further information on international rights for this title please contact Kathrin Scheel at [kathrin.scheel@schoeffling.de](mailto:kathrin.scheel@schoeffling.de)

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