

# The Worms In Fool's Fingers

by

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Extract

## England 1644 - 1647

### Marston Moor 1644

Tradition in the area of Long Marston in Yorkshire, northern England, has it that a local boy was ploughing on Marston Moor when, much to his astonishment, the area filled up with arriving troops from the opposing armies. The legends say that he was hard at work just after sunrise when the first troops arrived. He was still there at noon but by mid-afternoon there was no signs of him. Tradition does not say what happened to him. Presumably he took his horses home as the main body of troops arrived, fearing that they would be commandeered by one or other of the armies. Of course he may have stolidly carried on ploughing, unnoticed, as fever rose for the fight.

### I

Although the day would be remembered as being warm and sunny, a thunderstorm began in the early evening – and so did the Coalition attack.

Udo Beck wasn't prepared for either. By late afternoon, rain had been squalling all day long and there was no shelter on this patch of moorland so the thousands of men that had been arriving since mid-morning just had to tolerate it. Some of these men were cynical, vicious and battle hardened individuals of many nationalities in the pay of the Scottish Covenanter army, Udo Beck was lying

on his back on the grassy slope of Marston Hill, ignoring the rain and trying to smoke a pipe and prepare himself mentally for the battle they had been expecting all day. Word was coming down through the slightly more disciplined ranks of regular troops, recently knocked into fighting shape by Sir Thomas Fairfax, through the ragged lines of mercenaries, that the Royalist army, no more than a cornfield away, were preparing supper. The Earl of Leven had decided to attack the minute they broke ranks to fill their bellies.

James Wylam swore, jumped to his feet and kicked Uli Engel, who happened to be nearest to him.

“Up, get up,” he yelled, spittle flecking a face that was streaked with dirt and twisted into a snarl that demanded immediate obedience, “pick up your weapons, we’re gannin’ off te’ kill some Papist bastards!”

Uli rolled over and grabbed his musket and, close by, his brother Dieter did the same. They were on their feet in an instant, grinning through teeth that were mostly unbroken despite the hardships of their military lives. Emile Hacker rose more languidly, stretched and rummaged in his crotch to straighten himself.

“Udo, fer fuck’s sake move.” James called in Udo’s direction. Udo hauled himself to his feet then arched his back to stretch it and shook each muscular limb in turn. A giant of a man, he stood just under seven feet tall with a broad, hard body straining under a worn leather jerkin and a grimy grey shirt that was unbuttoned low enough to reveal a mass of matted in dark tangled hair. His sleeves were pushed up revealing thick, muscular forearms and huge hands. Ignoring his musket he tamped his pipe and scraped a shallow trench in the turf with his heel, into which he carefully laid the pipe, thinking he could retrieve it later but knowing well how unlikely that was to happen. The other men knew that this was a ritual that he performed before every battle. He never went back for them. Many men had pre-battle rituals and Udo’s was fairly unremarkable, especially as he never

smoked at any other time. Most rituals meant something to only the person performing it, some were overtly religious, some bizarre, and some downright disgusting even amongst such eclectic company.

Udo had a sword that had reached almost mythical status among men he had served alongside, both in this campaign and many that preceded it. It was a huge ‘*zweihänder*’, a relic he had looted many years ago and had carried ever since. Almost six feet in length and a considerable weight, it would be too much for anyone much smaller than him, but he slung its scabbard over his shoulder and adjusted its position until he was happy – then he picked up his musket.

Udo peered out over the cornfields that spread out across the Vale of York before them. Although not high, the hill they occupied allowed them to look over the Royalist lines.

“We have the numbers”, said Udo to his companions, without taking his gaze from the encampments opposite, “but that means little while Rupert commands their army”.

“Can you tell which is his tent?” asked Emile.

Udo shook his head “It will be no grander than any other man’s. Rupert has no need for vanity.”

“Sounds like you admire him, Udo” said James. “You have fought against him in Europe?”

“*Nein,*” Udo replied. “I fought *with* him”, and with this he bent down, collected a hessian pack that contained his few belongings and slung it over his shoulder. Unlike his companions, Udo didn’t wear a military sword, but he checked that his dagger was in its sheath at his side. Not far away, his ten-foot pike was among a dozen or so stacked together like the beginnings of a bonfire. He took it carefully so the stack would not collapse, and without even a glance at the others, he ambled away down the slope. Behind him, Uli, Dieter, Emile and James gathered their belongings and weapons and were soon clattering along behind him; tightening the straps of packs and scabbards as they went. James, nominally their superior because he was an enlisted soldier, fell in at the rear. As well

as his sword and pike, James carried a matchlock pistol and a leather bag with a handful of shot, although he couldn't remember a time when he had used it in the heat of battle.

James Wylam had joined the Covenanter army - a Scottish force in coalition with the English Parliamentarians - in Scotland some years ago. Then he had returned with it to take his native Newcastle from the Royalists in a short, rather effortless campaign. This victory had forced the Royalists to accept a treaty with the Covenanters that had gradually fallen apart and now, four years later, the Coalition faced the Royalists across open moorland three miles from York, whose walls they had left just yesterday. James watched the four foreigners as they walked ahead of him. They were men he counted as friends, even though he was ranked above them (by virtue of his Englishness he was fond of telling them) and he had huge respect for their fighting ability. While few others, English or Scottish spent much time with them, he was part of their small cohort and spent most of his time in their company. All four spoke English reasonably well - Dieter in particular, by virtue of his obvious intelligence and having learnt it during years of service with the Covenanters. Emile's command of English wasn't bad but the other Germans' hybrid Teutonic/Scottish accents were a source of good humoured ribaldry that they took so well that it hardly ever ended in violence. For his part, James had learned only a handful of German words (they taught him the common *Hochdeutsch* in deference to their widely different dialects) but he could barely be bothered to remember them.

James now followed the Germans towards the hordes of troops swarming into position – cavalry, dragoons and men of foot all trying to find their commanders and the positions they should take up. The air was thick with shouts and orders being barked, every one of them followed by a curse, whether or not it was necessary. Other noises caused the din to increase as the crowds grew thicker, horses brayed and whinnied, equipment clashed together, and weapons scraped against carts, wagons and each other. The smell of twenty-thousand men was like walking into a wall as the

stenches of unwashed bodies mingled with animals and piss and shit spilling from hastily dug and overflowing latrine trenches. The steadily strengthening rain in the warm evening combined with all this to create a miasma that he could almost taste – and James loved it. This was where battle began.

As if similarly infected by the disease of the anticipation of violence, men all around were becoming both agitated and excited; jostling turned here and there to low-level violence and a lot of blood was drawn with the battle yet to begin. But whether by well-drilled practice, or sheer chance, fighting units were being formed and men were lining up in recognisable units. Already, a wing of cavalry occupied ground way over to the right, towards the village of Long Marston, commanded by the Lieutenant General, Oliver Cromwell. More cavalry, about three thousand James guessed, were deploying in troops, facing the Royalist army across the descending ground, with platoons of musketeers forming up between them. Off to the left, the lighter horses of the Scottish dragoons were lining up behind heavier cavalry. James watched men hauling artillery pieces into place in the centre of the battle line while thousands of Scottish foot soldiers were being verbally whipped into positions that would have the main part of the coming battle.

The five of them skirted the foot of the hill, forcing their way through the viscous mud and ululating throng, avoiding or absorbing the reactive blows of men they bumped into or trod on and returning curses with even coarser ones of their own. Most of the crowd avoided striking or remonstrating with Udo, so Uli, Dieter, Emile and James took what shelter they could from his bulk. Men eyed the huge *zweihänder* warily, unaware that they could be miles away in the time it would take him to draw it. Sword or not, Udo was imposing and the sight of his misshapen nose poking from heavy and matted facial hair, and his scarred face was enough to signal that this was a man who had been through much, and was still standing almost seven feet tall and broad as a barn door. It was a much better idea to step out of his way.

When the group reached a place where the crowd had thinned enough that there was almost a clearing, James called to the others to halt while he looked for the Field Sign of the Covenanter infantry of Sir Thomas Fairfax, or ‘Black Tom’ as he was known. This was their regiment where they would line up with other musketeers, ready to disrupt any charging Royalist cavalry – a strategy that the Earl of Leven had brought with him from his time as a commander of the Swedish army in the great war in Europe.

As they came to a halt, Emile looked back the way they had come, straining in a futile attempt to see over the heads of the massed bodies “Where’s Manfred?”

Udo shrugged. Uli said:

“He went off half an hour ago. Said he was looking for somewhere to have a shit. Said he wouldn’t use the trench. Neither would I. *Mensch!*”

“Does he know where to find us?” Dieter wanted to know. “We need James to tell us where to go, he knows the Field Sign.” A field sign was a small scrap of cloth that indicated the brigade the men belonged to so they could rally at the right point.

“Whether he fights alongside us or someone else, it doesn’t matter” Udo grunted. “He’ll live or die just the same.”

“We need him with us, Udo,” said Uli, “He’s *Landsknechte*, like us”

“There are no *Landsknechte* anymore,” said Udo, dismissing it as a ridiculous statement. “We are only men that fight because someone pays us to fight. We fight, loot and kill for pay. We are scum, even if we enjoy it. You are not *Landsknechte*. Only I am”

“Only because you have the sword, though – the *zweihänder*. The *Landsknechte* sword.” This was a flat acceptance from Dieter

“*Naturalich.*” Udo nodded dispassionately and glanced behind his back to where the dull steel handle of the sword, itself over a foot long, rose above his right shoulder. He barely recollected how he had looted the sword from a church in Alkmaar in Friesland, many years ago, but he always remembered to boast that it had once belonged to the fabled Grutte Pietr himself. Udo may even have believed that, but no-one else did.

Several times in the years he and other mercenaries had been fighting together with the Scots in Leven’s Army of the Covenant, Udo had declared himself to be the last of the *Landsknechte*, men romanticised in Germany as chivalrous knights of the middle ages, but scholars knew they were little more than ruffians serving under the flag of a Duke or Prince even if they were skilled and disciplined fighters when the time came. Naturally, the Scots regulars, completely ignorant of the term, but realising it must be something to brag about, humoured him. They had fought alongside him in many campaigns and a few had even seen him wield the *zweihänder*. It didn’t just kill, it devastated, and even veterans of scores of battles and skirmishes were aghast at bodies dismembered, decapitated or broken with a single stroke.

Uli and Dieter just simply didn’t believe Udo’s claim. They were from Brandenburg where their escape from a wealthy but cold and authoritarian father had driven them into military service. They jointly carried a shame that they shared with no-one and they had enlisted when they were old enough to march and carry a pike. As young men in an army full of the violent and depraved, Uli and Dieter had been strong enough to defend themselves against the brutality and unwanted advances of oversexed and under-sated troops with whom they served in the army of the Hapsberg empire. Eventually they became seasoned enough to be as bad as those they had once feared and avoided but with enough intelligence and self-discipline to make sure they were not dragged to those degenerate depths.

Even before they joined the army, Uli and Dieter had heard the tales of the *Lansdknechte*, who were heroes to boys growing up in violent times. Colourful and formidable, they were the pikemen and foot soldiers who fought for whoever paid highest. Although some were from the Rhinelands of the north, most were Schwabian. What Uli and Dieter were sure of, but would never voice openly in his presence, Udo was never a *Landnsknecht*. For one thing, Udo claimed to be from Hesse- not a state that produced *Landsknehcte*, but mainly because they had ceased to be a force well before Udo had been born. Nevertheless, across the campfires, Udo's sword, and his proficiency with it was much admired. Uli and Dieter explained how the *zweihänder* was only used by comparatively few *Landsknechte* - specialist swordsmen of great strength called *Doppelsöldner*; so called because the sword was used double-handed against enemy pikemen, and also because they received double pay. This knowledge increased Udo's standing to mythical proportions and many of the soldiers wanted to snatch a piece of the legend. For his part, Udo chose not to cultivate any sort of reputation or friendships and kept few companions. The only relationship he formed beyond his four fellow countrymen was with James Wylam, respecting him as his immediate superior and sharing his love for strong English ale and the glorious golden drink of Scotland - whisky.

When James returned he found Udo standing apart from the others, watching the battle formations grow.

"We're with Lumsden on the right flank," he told Udo, removing his scruffy leather cap, revealing his bald head, and pointing with it over in the direction where several divisions of cavalry were just about in place, with musketeers and pikemen either standing or kneeling between them.

"Tek yer men and faal in. I'll look once more for Manfred, then he's on his own."

Uli Engel came up beside Udo and together they looked out over the moorland that would possibly be the last piece of ground that many men here would walk on. From the slight rise on which they stood, they could look over the heads of their own side and see the Royalist army



forming up about half a mile away. Most of the moorland was broken earth and covered in furze, spiky green and golden as it caught brief rays of sun when it broke through the rainclouds. Lines of hedges ran like stitches across the ground, and right in front of the Royalist positions Uli could see a long ditch, backed by a hedge that would provide some cover if any of the Parliamentarian or Covenanter troops were to try scouting forward. This would have been unlikely – battles were fought on open ground and followed very precise rules of engagement, at least in the beginning.

What struck Uli was how colourful the scene was and how that was incongruous with what was about to happen. Seen from a distance, the bare patches of earth and mud were lost amid the short moorland grass and flowering heather, their colours swimming together in shades of green following the rain of the last few days. Clumps of greenish-brown bracken stood taller than the dusky purple heather and small rises and hillocks were topped with mosses and pink-red summer flowers. Trees were sparse and low but here and there they swayed, in twos and threes, in the strengthening breeze. About half a mile behind the Royalist lines, Uli could see a small wood, with a river to the north west, and the whole sprawl in front of him was randomly lit by bright shafts of sunlight that occasionally broke through rain clouds.

Uli could see small villages to the east and west of the Royalist lines (that someone had told him were called Tockwith and Long Marston) and the road between them separated the two armies. The Royalists, as they moved busily around their encampment, were alive with colour, and bright standards were being planted strategically to identify the companies and regiments. Troops wore either blue or red shirts, many with slashed sleeves to allow the white lining to show through, and trousers of the same colours, although not necessarily matched. Some wore mustard-coloured jerkins over their shirts and Uli noticed some darker colours among them that he took to be the steel breastplates and high boots of the cavalry. Looking to his own lines, Uli noted how the flamboyant Royalists contrasted, even just before battle, with the more austere attire of the Parliamentarian

troops; brown or grey coats over ochre shirts, with only the white stockings beneath wide, dark pantaloons to lift the drabness. At least the Scots covenanters wore their traditional tartan trews or kilts, with the flat hat they called a tam-o-shanter.

Uli saw cannon, he counted about thirty pieces in all, both the small-bored '*minions*' and the larger '*demi-cannon*' and '*culverins*'. They were being dragged into position by the artillery teams and he thought that the gunners were deliberately showing their armament strength Uli nudged Udo, pointing to the distant figures.

“If we are in the centre, those heavy guns are pointed right our way,” he said, smiling. “Keep low or they will use you to range all their shots.”

“*Ja*,” Udo replied tonelessly, missing the attempt at humour. “They will point the small guns at our flanks where our cavalry will be” He shielded his eyes with his hand against a sudden ray of light from a sun that was still high and strong when not covered by cloud.

“They will fire when we start to advance but not when the fighting starts or they will hit their own men. Mark where they are pointing and keep out of the direct line, move to the side - those guns are too big and heavy to move easily. Ask James whether we can match those guns with our own – if we haven’t yet run out of ammunition!” Udo was referring to the cannonade that their own artillery had been firing for the past few hours “We have been showing our teeth too much and have only ploughed the fields with our shot”

The two men stood in silence for a while until Udo pointed silently, off to the right in the direction of Long Marston. At first Uli couldn’t see what Udo was pointing at then he gazed incredulously as he saw, about half a mile in the distance, a figure driving two horses that dragged a plough across a small piece of land.

“Does he not realise what is going to happen here very soon?” he asked.

Udo grunted and a very rare smile crossed his face, lighting up green eyes that were usually no more than slits under heavy eyelids. He ran a hand through his long, matted hair and slowly shook his head in disbelief. “When the tale of this fight is written,” he said, “that boy’s story will not be in it and that is right for he is obviously a fool.”

They turned and walked to where Emile and Dieter sat on the grass, appreciating the last rest they may get for some time, unless it was the long rest that comes to everyone eventually. James had gone.

“Manfred?” Udo asked.

Emile shook his head and continued digging absently in the turf with his dagger. Dieter got to his feet.

“I’m going to look for him,” he said flatly.

“*Nein*” said Udo. “We will be moving soon and you cannot get lost as well. James will bring him back and we will walk into the fight together, as every time. Then we will walk out of the other side and stand in line in front of Leslie in the morning for our pay. When *geld* is to be had, Manfred will find us.”

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As the late afternoon passed into early evening, rain squalls became more frequent and men were tired of standing wet through. Even though the summer evening was quite warm, the breeze passing through wet clothing chilled them. Almost all the regiments were in place now, and the whinnying of thousands of equally impatient horses began to grate on already short tempers. The clattering of armour and weapons, so deafening an hour ago, had subsided and there was just the constant hum of complaining voices and harsh coughing. Insects, midges and flies swarmed in the warm moist air, alighting on skin and adding to men’s discomfort. Forbidden now to break ranks, men relieved themselves where they stood and the rain soaked ground became slicker. Tension was at breaking

point as every one of the twenty-four thousand men in the Coalition army waited for the signal gun. They knew that, across the moor, the same was happening in the Royalist ranks. James had returned almost an hour ago and Manfred was not with him. Ready now for battle, pikes upright, the company of five stood among the ranks of infantry in the centre, flanked on both sides by cavalry interspersed with musketeers - a tactic Leslie had learnt from the Swedes although it was becoming common place in armies across Europe. From the Royalist lines, sporadic small cannon fire took place, but all shot fell well short of the Coalition.

James looked around him, seeing the fear and expectancy on the faces of men he didn't know and marvelled at the passivity of the German mercenaries that he stood alongside. Udo even appeared to be sleeping, holding himself upright by grasping his pike staff, although James knew this was a detachment he always affected. Uli and Dieter were their normal composed selves, and as twins they instinctively knew where each other was and bonded in mutual protection. Emile, his normal deep, sly nature ready to take advantage of any situation, was coiled tight with his explosive violence barely under control. He rocked the halberd that he favoured from side to side, its axe head swaying over the heads of those nearest him, its base planted in the ground, and his eyes daring anyone to complain.

As the weakening sun slipped once more behind a bank of cloud, the signal gun cracked through the heavy, humid air and twenty-four thousand voices roared together. A split second later there came a rumbling answering cry '*For God and King*' from the Royalist army and the battle began.

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Uli Engel died ten minutes into the battle. Even before the armies fully engaged, a round shot from a Royalist cannon ploughed through two men in front of him, bounced off the ground and still had enough kinetic energy to crash through his breast bone and exit just below the nape of his neck. He died almost silently, burbling bloody foam, with limbs drumming on the ground. Almost his

whole upper body was destroyed and his head rolled at an impossible angle where the shot had severed his backbone. He wasn't alone, eight other men in front and around him died from that same salvo with others just surviving by diving to the ground in the right place at the right time, dictated by pure luck. Five yards to the left, and a dozen places behind his brother, Dieter saw the tragedy as it happened and halted abruptly, staring unbelieving in absolute shock. He was unable to scream, unable to move and stood mortified as more shot sailed over his head and he heard men behind howling terribly as they died or fell with appalling injuries. James was closest behind him and grabbed Dieter by the nape of his jerkin and propelled him forward. Dieter stumbled and would have fallen if Udo had not stepped alongside him and held him upright with one powerful arm. They staggered this way, Emile running over to join them, for fifteen or twenty yards, until they were under the cannon's trajectory. Dieter continued to wail soundlessly, his broad face in a rictus of pain and grief; he had dropped his pike and at some point this registered and he started looking around him for his weapon. Udo nudged him to keep walking.

“He is gone,” Udo said, with as much sympathy as he could ever muster. “Now you must keep yourself alive. You need to fight.”

They staggered past scores of men dead or injured on the ground. At some point, Emile picked up a fallen pikestaff and tried to thrust it into Dieter's hand. The ten-foot long weapon was difficult enough to handle when its owner was prepared to use it so this was a difficult manoeuvre and Dieter only held onto it after several attempts and continuous urging and assistance from Udo. Dieter began sobbing, loud and heavily as they walked along towards the Royalist lines, but as battle instinct took over and his breathing came in great gulps he realised the reality of the situation and his control gradually returned. As fighting men, seasoned by long and frequent campaigns, they understood death and even expected it, every time they marched into a new battle. Had Dieter not witnessed it and been told later that his brother had been killed, he would have accepted it and

grieved silently and alone for a few hours. But he had seen Uli's body shattered in front of him and the grief went deep and a catharsis would be needed before the day was over; his companions understood that without Dieter saying a word and each of them knew they would join in if the opportunity came.

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James felt helpless. He was devastated to see a friend fall in that way, and was desperate to go to Dieter and support him, but Udo and Emile had taken on that responsibility and, while James felt excluded, he told himself it was natural they would cleave to their own. As they continued their surge forward, surrounded by hundreds of other foot soldiers from the centre formation, he continued to call out encouragement, cursing the enemy in the coarsest way he could think of, and making up his own swear words when he ran out. None of them could see either flank clearly. The left flank was too far away, and obscured by packed bodies and a forest of pikes, standards and pennants, but where the pace had varied among the ranks on the right, James could see Fairfax's cavalry had moved to a canter, hundreds of horses and their armoured riders, with musketeers on foot running along beside them, ready to fire a salvo ahead of the final cavalry charge. By now, the senses of every man on the field were numb; everything melded together until no one sound could be discerned, no single smell rose above the general miasma, and no-one focused on any particular sight; and yet every man was aware of everything that was happening around them. As they pressed forward, instinct signalled who should be next to whom, whether they had been injured, who was addressing another above the cacophonous din of shouted commands and complaints, the clattering of weapons and the screams of the injured. Even in the breeze the air was noxious and redolent of blood and pain, and rank mud mixed with human waste clung to boots and trouser legs. Officers attempted to keep the men's spirits high, riding among them and yelling encouragement; some tried to start men off singing hymns and this began to catch on even though the piety was belied by

pauses to screech and scream about what they would do to the Royalist scum – and their mothers, and their sisters.

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Ahead of the Coalition forces, the Royalists were advancing, experiencing the same hardships and fears, and howling the same threats and insults. Quite suddenly, the Coalition officers high on horseback waved battle signals, and the men in the front rows of the advancing infantry suddenly raised a loud din as they saw the Royalist cavalry break from the back of their lines and begin galloping towards them. A mounted officer that some recognised as a usually gloom Scottish Sergeant called Fraser started yelling, over and over:

“Pikes. Pikes. Pikes - set at charge for horse!”

The command was not heard by anyone beyond the first three rows of his immediate vicinity, but as the pikemen dropped to one knee, or braced themselves from the hip – one foot well forward, and lowered their cumbersome weapons to an angle of about thirty degrees, men across the centre formation began to do the same and in a wave that spread over the battlefield, thousands of pikes and halberds readied to meet the charging horses and the Royalist heavy cavalry. Further back, without being commanded, other rows of pikemen adopted a position called ‘set at charge’ – remaining standing upright but braced and with pikes dipped just enough to take any riders whose horses managed to break through. Ten rows beyond the hapless men at the front, Dieter stood, braced, between Udo and Emile. Tears had left deep tracks through the dirt on his face but his eyes were bright now as adrenaline overcame grief and the urge to kill the charging enemy was an instinct for survival. Without realising it he was yelling, cursing and screaming; unintelligible and impossible threats, the basest of curses and often just chilling howls and everyone around was doing the same. James stood behind Emile’s shoulder and shouted as loud as anyone, daring the Royalist cavalry to come closer.

The first wave of Royalist horse hit the leading ranks of Coalition pikemen like a tremendous gale crashing through the ricks of hay in a summer field, and either crushing them to the ground or scattering them in every direction. Instantly, the casualties on both sides were terrible and seconds after the clash the ground was soaked and slick with blood. The chopping blades of the cavalry severed limbs and split open the heads of the pikemen that were mainly bare headed; but such was the force and the keenness of the blades, those wearing the favoured flat-crowned rounded helmets fared little better. Where the swords were not being swung indiscriminately, the riders jabbed the blades through face guards in very fast stabbing motions so that the swords would not get entangled in the helmets when the wearers went down, their faces ruined and pouring blood, and eyes torn from their sockets. When it seemed impossible that the noise could get any louder, the screams of stricken men and the terrified braying and whinnying of the horses and the clash and crash of steel on steel melded into a single demonic clangour that filled the world as far as any man could see or hear.

As the Royalist cavalry continued to force their way through the Coalition ranks, they fell in as many numbers as did their enemies. The pikes were cumbersome and unwieldy weapons but they devastated when they found their targets. As the horse, urged on by their armoured riders, stepped and clambered over fallen bodies, many were eviscerated by the steel blades and their entrails spilled on already sodden ground, making the progress of those that followed behind even more treacherous. As fallen horses tried to get to their feet, they caused others to crash into them, throwing their riders to the ground where they were dispatched by men who had abandoned their pikes and thrust swords or daggers into armpits and groins that were unprotected by armour.

Men on both sides lost humanity the moment the troops clashed and each man was intent only on survival and killing. The melee grew in size as the armies now locked together fought savagely for whatever little ground they could gain. As the wave of cavalry passed behind the Coalition



formation's now ragged lines, the men whose horses could still move uninjured wheeled them around to attack the centre from behind; the horses whose riders had already fallen trampled aimlessly, terrified without their masters' assurance and brayed pitifully as they tried to find somewhere to run. The Royalist cannon was now being answered by the Coalition artillery, and ball and shot fell indiscriminately, adding to the charnel of both men and beasts. Udo stood in the centre of a skirmish, still holding his pike and turning to meet the rear attack. Emile and Dieter stood close by, protecting Udo's back with swinging swords that had already felled half a dozen attackers who looked little more than boys. Other pikemen had also turned and met the latest cavalry assault that could hardly be deemed a charge as the horses could barely break walking pace. Despite the efforts of their riders, many horses reared onto their back legs, which was just the target the pikemen needed and they thrust the huge weapons into the beasts' exposed breasts or bellies. The animals collapsed screaming and kicking wildly, and several foot soldiers from both sides were injured by flying hooves. Fallen cavalrymen were dispatched, almost to a man, by the Coalition and some were crushed beneath their fallen horses' bodies; the few who scabbled on hands and knees through the throng were chased until their pursuers caught and dispatched them or were attacked and killed themselves.

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Udo claimed seven cavalry riders. Standing taller, he had taken the men with little effort, ripping through the armour breastplates and helmets with his pike, then hauling the ten-foot pole back to strike again within seconds. A red-jacketed trooper with, amazingly, his wide black hat still on his head, saw the bulk that was Udo and urged his mount forward, heedless of the flailing swords and intent on bringing down the giant. The horse trotted forward until almost alongside Udo and the rider raised his sword arm high, bringing it down with a heavy blow aimed at the head of shaggy black hair. Although Udo had seen it coming, Dieter had been quicker and grabbed the big man by

his leather jerkin and pulled him just far enough out of the way for the intended blow to cut through empty space. The horse's momentum carried it forward and the rider hauled on the reins to raise the animal's head and bring it around again. Udo caught his balance just enough to grasp the pike handle, one hand above the other, hands gripping in opposite directions, and he used the whole of his upper body to thrust forward. The rider twisted away from the movement and the pike missed his torso by inches and buried itself in the neck of the hapless grey mare that collapsed instantly, managing only a pitiful keening before it died. Dieter rushed forward and shoved the seven inch blade of his dagger under the trooper's chin guard and up through the man's throat and into his head. The man barely had time to register what had happened before he died lying across his horse.

The killing was instinct to Udo and Dieter and without a further thought for what had just passed, they readied themselves for the next action. Emile, a score of feet away, pushed live and dead bodies out of the way to get to his companions; he was only challenged once and that man died with a dagger between his ribs. The three men stood back to back, parrying assaults that were becoming more infrequent now, although men under both colours still fell around them.

Although there were skirmishes happening in every direction, none of the three rushed to join in and even a cursory glance was enough to tell them the battle on foot was going the way of the Coalition. The cannon still coughed and boomed on both sides, with screams when the shot was well aimed and took out as many as fifteen men at once, or derisory cheers when they fell wide of any mark. Emile marvelled that this black humour could be found in the middle of a battle and he cracked a rare and wry smile. The clamour had still not died down, and he had to shout close to Udo and Dieter to be heard,

“Where's the rest of their their cavalry?” a question he emphasised by looking around and gesturing to the horses nearby – those fallen, and a few that were wandering aimlessly, stumbling over bodies, traumatised by noise and pain and sensing the horrors of death around them. ‘They

won't last a day,' he thought. 'If they aren't killed by the battlefield scavengers, they will die when their nerves fail.' Other than these pathetic creatures, there was no sign of horses or riders, no colours being borne along and no battle cries

Udo stood tall and even strained his neck to see further across the battlefield, now concerned that there was another charge due and they were momentarily off guard.

"Stand fast" he commanded; a low, deep and urgent voice'. "Ready your weapons – or find one."

Emile wandered a few feet away and found a discarded halberd, a weapon he favoured. He stood still for a moment, then "Listen" he urged.

The sound grew and was unmistakable. The vague movement they saw across the field became the movement of hundreds of horses, and the rumbling of hooves, discernible even though the ground was now sodden from the squalls of rain that had been present the whole time, grew in intensity until those Coalition troops still standing, in the centre and on both flanks, turned towards the sound. Royalists that had been routed and on the run back to their own lines stopped, looked and started cheering. The Royalist cavalry had re-grouped on the right flank and were now charging towards the Coalition infantry, most of whom were marooned in the centre of the field and may have numbered a few hundred men. Instantly, the infantry readied themselves for the coming charge. Those that had dropped their pikes retrieved them, or picked up any that were to hand. As at the beginning of the fray they set their ranks at 'charge', and the unluckiest of them at 'charge for horse'. Gradually the battlefield cacophony faded and died and the drumming of the charging horses was the loudest sound - other than some men praying loudly for deliverance, and some battle-hardened grown men openly crying in huge sobs that were full of terror.

The Germans were veterans of many battles, and each of them prepared for the fight in their own way. At the beginning, when all men were fresh and hundreds of voices were cheering, hurling the foulest of curses that the enemy could not possibly hear, bragging about how many men they would

kill and whipping each other up into such frenzied states that made many think they were invincible; well that was one thing. Now, in the hiatus, surrounded by hundreds of dead – both comrades and enemy, amid the stench of blood and bodily excrements, with the low moaning of the wounded and dying men they stood amongst worming its way into their senses, they knew that death in the next few minutes was more of a likelihood than a possibility. None of them spoke. Dieter was praying inwardly; although he was not a religious man, he turned to God on the battlefield as most men did. He didn't know any prayers so he asked the Almighty, over and over to save him in return for leading a better life while another part of his mind knew that bargain would never be kept, no matter what the outcome. Emile's mind wandered back over his squandered life; he had known nothing but violence and the struggle to survive since he had left the misery of a tormented childhood. Being abandoned by his mother at a very young age was only the beginning and for as long as he could remember he had shut away the horrors that wrecked those early years of his life. Emile wasn't resentful, his childhood and adolescence had made him the vicious killer he was now, and that is what had kept him alive all his thirty-nine years. If he had a regret it was that it had been months since he was with a woman and wondered if he would ever get to enjoy those pleasures again.

Like most men in facing possible death, Udo's thoughts were also about his past life. He barely remembered being a very young child - his earliest memories were of working the farm after his father's death. Memories of his mother's shame tried to force their way through but he pushed them back. He couldn't even see her face any more but he did recall the faces of the men she had allowed to use her and destroyed a young boy's love and respect for his mother. He remembered her dying slowly, whimpering with pain and his clumsy efforts to care for her, but he still couldn't see her face. He remembered when the whimpering turned to howls of agony, and her pathetic pleadings for him to make it stop and he saw, quite vividly, himself stuffing a rag into her mouth and covering it with his boy's hands that were already large and strong, holding them there while her thin legs

drummed against her straw covered wooden pallet and her wracking coughs were smothered by the rag. He saw her eyes bulge but with a light of thanks in them. He saw himself still leaning over her, still covering her face long after her breathing stopped and her chest stilled. He remembered covering her body and not once looking at it again until the village women came to wrap it in a shroud, burying the crushing shame and rage deep inside him, from where it had never surfaced again. For a brief moment, Udo remembered Ulrike, for the first time in many years. And that was more shame and embarrassment that he had to push away, so he swung the *Zweihänder* from its scabbard across his broad back, raised it in both hands, then heaved it behind his right shoulder and prepared himself for whatever was going to happen.

\*

Emile and Dieter had not noticed, or hadn't registered, that Udo had un-swung the massive blade - six feet long and ten pounds of steel - a double-edged straight blade with a simple cruciform handle, and was holding it ready to swing as he watched the Royalist cavalry getting closer. It wasn't a charge - the litter of corpses scattered over the field, and earth ploughed by round shot and grapeshot prevented horses reaching a gallop; instead, at a clumsy trot, they picked their way forward. For the same reason, this wasn't a disciplined charge in battle formation, and the cavalry riders steered their mounts around piled bodies and discarded or broken weapons. The line was five, possibly six hundred yards away, stretched across the field, two deep here, three deep there, all wearing the Royalist colours of red or blue and their upper bodies armoured. Most wore high-crowned steel helmets, but among them the more flamboyant affected the wide felt hats, often adorned with feathers. The line must have stretched a quarter of a mile across the moor but the man the cavaliers were following, around whom they had regrouped and rallied was to the fore of the centre, and Udo knew who it was, even at this distance and even though the rain drenched standard hung heavily from its staff where it was carried by a standard bearer further back in the rank.

Udo remembered the first time he had seen Prince Rupert of the Rhine, the favourite nephew of England's King Charles I. Udo had been in the service of Charles Lois, King of Bavaria, and long before his self-appointed '*Landsknecht*' status, he had been part of the force sent to Vloto in the German state of Westphalia, with only a faint idea of why he was there. The teenage Prince Rupert had arrived, already with a considerable reputation as a soldier and another for being impatient and contemptuous. He had ridden onto the soon-to-be battlefield with his brother and some English knights and the whole company had turned to stare at the figure astride a large grey mare, long black hair framing pale, feminine, features and wearing a gold coloured tunic over a flouncy red shirt. There was no sign of a sword, he held only a riding crop and a matchlock pistol tucked in a leather belt. He never met the eyes of a single one of the men, instead keeping his gaze fixed straight ahead, turning only to speak to his brother. Udo recalled how he had fought very well and commanded his men with an arrogant confidence that affirmed why they worshiped him - until he was captured, that was.

"Royalty," he said flatly, barely turning towards his companions.

"Prince Rupert?" Dieter's question didn't need to be answered.

Udo nodded. "He won't fight. He can, but he won't, but the men will follow him until they fall."

"A royal dandy," Emile said, unimpressed. "A fucking fairy. Charles' favoured nephew, but not one in favour at court, if you believe the men's gossip"

"Maybe," Udo replied, never taking his gaze away from the advancing cavalry. "But he is brave and his men are loyal. If he has enemies, they are not in the ranks. Believe me, I was once one of them."

"If that is true," said Dieter, "then we are in trouble." He nodded at the rows and rows of horses that were now close enough for the men to see the faces of the riders in the leading ranks, with their basket-handled swords raised ready for the clash that was now moments away.

There was a volley of loud *cracks* from the direction of the cavalry and some of the advancing horses became skittish, tracking sideways as riders fought to control them. Off to the left, a group of Coalition pikemen scattered briefly before getting back under control and resuming their defensive stance. A murmur rippled down the line and reached Emile.

“Musket fire,” he informed Dieter and Udo, as further shots rang out and were even answered by some from their own ranks.

“At this distance, and from horseback?” Dieter said dismissively, “Useless. As likely to take their own fingers off, or their eye out.”

“They are trying to panic us and make us break ranks.” Udo said. “Hold fast. Any minute now.”

Moments later, the cavalry were upon them. Not a solid wall, as in the first charge, but in twos and threes, targeting smaller groups of Coalition men. The Coalition pikemen aimed for the horses, trying to frighten them, while those armed with only swords or daggers either ducked under the swooping cavalry swords, trying to strike a blow anywhere they could, or milled about in front of the frightened horse, ready to fall upon any unseated riders. Both sides scored successes and men started dying and the noise of battle rose again. Udo stood, with the huge sword so far back over his shoulders that it almost touched the ground behind him. Two cavalry riders charged him, unable to see clearly how he was armed. When they were feet away, Udo started his swing, bringing the blade in an arc up and over his right shoulder, taking both man and beast on that side. The blow hit the rider just above the waist and he toppled instantly from his saddle, almost cut in two. The horse survived the blow, although its instinct to avoid the object it saw in peripheral vision caused it to stumble, then roll over, neighing wildly and snorting as it tried to regain its feet. The arc of the sword carried downwards and slashed the second horse along its flank and down to its belly, and intestines slithered stinking and steaming to the ground. The rider jumped clear as the beast went down and somehow landed on his feet, bravely leaping forward to strike at Udo with his own sword

as the *zweihänder*, under its own inertia, buried itself in the ground. Dieter stepped in quickly and parried the blow aimed for Udo's arm, while Emile came up from behind, pulled back the man's head and drove his dagger into the unprotected throat.

Udo re-set his grip on the sword and stood to meet the next assault. This time, he stepped into the affray, slashing in high and wide parabolas, not aiming, just letting the sword find its own mark. Even amid the battle, men stared, watching the awesome power of the big German and his terrifying attack. Where he connected with unprotected limbs, they were hacked off instantly; already four men rolled, screaming and wailing on the bloody ground, staring in horror at their limbs, now feet away, as their life bled out of them. Those protected by armour fared little better for the sword cut through the steel breastplates and gauntlets as easily as it did flesh. Only the force behind the blow dictated whether the blade slashed or crushed. Udo was completely unsentimental about injuries to the horses but he avoided killing them if he could. He knew the confusion that riderless, terrified horse could wreak, so he spared them where possible to run amok among the ranks that were still pushing forward.

Steadily, under the pressure of the advancing cavalry, the Coalition forces began to fall back, even though they knew there was no cover to be had. They began to join together, shrinking the lines into the centre and unavoidably leaving the sides exposed to flanking movement by the pressing Royalist cavalry. Men fought on out of sheer terror, knowing now that death was inevitable but also because turning and running would only make sport for the enemy. The three Germans stuck together in the centre, with Udo continuing to devastate with the *zweihänder*, uncaring as to whether he inflicted injury or death upon this own side.

The Royalist cavalry had never faced anything like this before and horses clashed into each other as their riders tried to guide them away from the madman standing in their path. The jostling in what was now a very congested space caused the horses to panic and the breaks in the ranks to



spread. Emile took some satisfaction, and some hope from this. He and Dieter had continued to protect Udo's back and they climbed over the bodies of those they had just killed or maimed as they fought hard not to lose ground. Udo was tiring, and he rested, taking huge breaths after each swing. His whole body now trembled from effort and his hair was slick with sweat that turned his shirt black and wringing wet. He was unable to see because of the sweat in his eyes, and being unable to wipe it away he swung blindly; now unaware of whether he was connecting with anything or not.

It was Dieter who first caught the tremors of excitement, even bewilderment, rippling down the Coalition ranks from the right flank. He caught no words, just saw men growing into ever more agitated states and, even in the face of the fighting and dying, were starting to cheer, wave their arms and, incredibly, to start to taunt the Royalist cavalry even as they slashed, stabbed and thrust with pikes. The Royalist horse was losing all semblance of formation and discipline and milled about as if their riders weren't even attempting to control them. The cavalymen themselves knew something was wrong even if they couldn't see the cause, and their appetite for the fight changed to panicked efforts at defending themselves as the Coalition troops took advantage of this unexpected and inexplicable turn of events. Pushing their advantage, the pikemen cast aside the cumbersome weapons and drew swords – plunging forward and savagely hacking at the cavalry, stepping daringly under trampling hooves and flailing, unaimed sword parries.

Eventually, when the Royalist cavalry abandoned their attack and began to scatter in all directions, the cause of the collapse became clear when men saw the counter-charges of hundreds of Coalition cavalry driving into the disorganised rump of the Royalist force. Commentary on what was happening was relayed up and down the Coalition foot from those that could see to those that couldn't. Someone had seen the banner and said it was Fairfax but no one cared, the Scots and Parliamentarians, and the few hundred mercenaries were winning and the cheers of those watching the rout were as loud as any other noise had been since the battle began. They cheered as the

hapless Royalist horse was driven from the field on both flanks, and those still left in the centre galloped back towards the Royalist camp, while euphoric men of foot chased behind them, bolstering their bravado with waving swords and curses.

There remained pockets of hand to hand fighting, although fatigue had long since dulled reactions and for the most part, combatants just traded laboured blows and few inflicted or sustained real injuries. Some just gave up, dropping their weapons in mutual, unspoken consent and simply wandering away back to their own encampment or even leaving the field altogether for destinations unplanned and for reasons they couldn't quite comprehend. Udo and Dieter had a fallen cavalryman pinned to the ground, Dieter's dagger at his throat while Udo held the *zweihänder* high over his head. Seeing what was happening around them, Udo lowered the blade and flicked his thumb to tell Dieter to let the man go. Both men stood back and the man rose, incredulous; his breeches wet where his bladder had let go and he gobbled profuse thanks, his voice a croak that was all his throat, dry from fear, could produce. Without looking at the direction he was taking he staggered a few paces, still mouthing thanks, then quickened his pace in case these two foreigners changed their minds. He had moved barely ten yards when Emile stepped up to him and plunged his dagger, several rapid blows, into the man's side, behind his breastplate. The man slid to the ground as Emile grinned wildly, looking wide-eyes at Udo and Dieter for approval. They both turned away.

## II

When the fighting abated sufficiently, men the length and breadth of the field gulped huge lungfulls of air and tried to steady aching and trembling muscles. Around Udo, Dieter and Emile, men were on their knees or even lying prone - exhausted and gasping for breath and water, not finding either easily. Wiping sweat from his eyes, Emile's attention was caught by a bellowing of an

almost unintelligible language and a noise that swung between clashing steel and dull, heavy thuds. A hundred or so yards away, he saw a familiar tall figure picking his way among piles of corpses, throwing bodies into heaps, peering into the dead faces. The man groaned in effort and shrieked in frustration, evidently unable to find what he was looking for. Emile pointed him out to the other two.

“James Wylam,” he said, as if he had expected that to be the case “What the fuck is he doing? If he’s looting then there had better be some left for me.” His greed lent him the energy to trot over to James as Udo and Dieter followed at a walking pace.

“You’re robbing the wrong bodies, my friend,” Emile said laconically. “These peasants will have nothing, let’s go through the officers. We’ll start with the Royalists – wouldn’t want to get caught robbing out own.” The avarice showed in his eyes.

“Ye stupid twat,” James exploded, without looking up. “Not everybody’s like ye. I’ve been looking for Manfred since before this bloody fight started, Aye, and during it when I got the chance. Ah was telt there was a Georman ower here and other than ye three, there’s nee other Geormans in this army.”

Dieter and Udo had caught up. Udo gave Emile a shove in the back. “Help him look.”

“Poor bastard’s probably deed,” said James, “but I’d be happier if I knew.”

“*Ja, Ja*” Emile retorted, defensively, “I was going to anyway. But if I find a few coins or rings or trinkets, do you want me to throw them away?”

“Shut up and look,” Udo barked. “Start over there,” and he waved towards a score or so of bodies that lay strewn along the edge of a ditch, among which he could see movement that could be injured men, or those who had taken refuge in the shallow ditch and wanted to be certain the battle was over. Emile started off in that direction while Dieter moved even further away to search among some low scrub bushes and broken fences. Udo left James where he was and wandered aimlessly,

kicking at bodies that were mostly dead but some that bore terrible injuries. Their choices were arbitrary – there were bodies, alive and dead, sprawled everywhere and instinct said that the search would be fruitless. Unless they found Manfred walking around, he would be lying seriously injured and, if so, was unlikely to survive much longer.

Nor were they the only ones searching for fallen comrades. There were officers trying to band men together around standards, and even some Royalists chanced the end of hostilities to collect their wounded. The dead of both sides were left where they lay. The Coalition army looked like it had suffered far fewer casualties than the Royalists but there were still dozens of men walking about the field, some searching, some re-grouping and herding others, and some only wondering what to do next. From somewhere, in two's and three's, dun coloured cattle appeared and wandered slowly about, looking for grass that was long enough to feed on. Riderless horses, still saddled and bridled did the same.

Very slowly, the field was clearing of men and horses as the last of the summer light faded. It hadn't rained for a while but the ground was a mire of mud and blood and chaos; the four men continued to search among the bodies, only occasionally encountering others they had served alongside in the past and who may have known Manfred. None did, but word was being passed around that the Coalition troops were gathering outside Long Marston village ready to chase the defeated Royalists. The story was that Rupert had hidden in a nearby beanfield after being driven from the fray but his Generals had rescued him and they were fleeing back to York. There was excitement among the troops about destroying the Royalist garrison there, and of how they would drink the taverns dry, of what would happen to the Royalist-supporting citizens of that city, and of what the wench in York could expect.

Emile was animated, keen to join them for all those reasons, and Dieter was on the brink of being persuaded. Udo chose to ignore all the talk and scowled at Emile in particular as he carried on

searching piles of corpses, hedgerows and ditches, ranging back and forth across the battlefield like a fox tracking the scent of a rabbit. In the aftermath of the fighting, the terrain was a bleak wasteland on which night was now rapidly descending. Rain clouds still covered the sky and only occasionally did a sickle of moon break through, and the men were soon searching virtually by touch alone, peering closely to see into the ghastly faces of the dead where hideous wounds had been inflicted. Hundreds of dead horses were already beginning to bloat and the men crept gingerly among them – men hardened by twenty years of more of battles did not want to touch the magnificent beasts that had met such a violent end. Other detritus of battle impeded their movement and more than once sent one of them sprawling as they tripped over discarded broken weapons, shattered drums, and standards that had been thrown away in terrified retreat or were still clutched in the hands of bearers who had tried to the end to protect them.

As the search moved from the centre field to the edges, they picked their way in the dark around broken fences and short, sharp-thorned shrubs that grabbed at their clothes and any exposed flesh. Rain started falling once more and each one of the four began to realise the futility of what they were doing. Men fell in battle all the time and were never recovered; Manfred would be one of hundreds on this field, and of millions the world over.

“Ach, enough,” Udo snapped, after turning yet more bodies and finding nothing but death. “We will rest here tonight and tomorrow we will think what to do” and he picked out a patch of damp ground with some scant shelter of a hedge and sat down heavily. He leaned forward and took his head in his hands. “*Mude*” he said. “Tired”.

“Aye, right ye are.” James agreed. “Nee chance of findin’ the poor bastard noo. Shame, he was a canny fella.”

“There’ll not be much left for us in York if we hang around here much longer.” Emile’s sympathy was exhausted. “By the time we get there, the ale will be gone and the women shagged out. Leslie will want us back in Scotland where it will be cold and wet – even in summer.”

Udo had his eyes closed and didn’t answer. “Maybe we will get paid, at last,” said Dieter.

“Aye,” James agreed, “aboot time we did. Not that we hev much use for money in wor lives,” he added.

The other men all found spots to sit on the wet ground, and Emile even found a broken fence post to lean against. Dieter and James sat cross-legged.

“But if we go back north again,” said Dieter, “maybe we’ll rest for a while in Newcastle. Wouldn’t you like to see your home town again, James?”

“Aye that would be canny,” James agreed. “A few days in my toon an’ ye’ll knaa how to spend yer money.” James was grinning. “Plenty lasses te gan roond.”

“Will you be able to see your family?” Dieter wanted to know.

“Mam is deed - years ago. The white death - from spending aal day freezing on the quay guttin’ fish off the boats. Me faither’s deed an’ aal, the bastard!” James spat on the ground. “Drunken, useless bastard! He preferred the grog - wasn’t interested in me, not even te’ knock me about like aal the other fathers did wi’ their bairns, an’ if the consumption hadn’t killed mam off, he wad hev. Wouldn’t piss on him if he was on fire. I spent most time wi’ me uncle Davey. Canny bloke was Uncle Davey.”

“Is he still in Newcastle?” Dieter wanted to know. “You could see him at least.”

James’ reply was curt, and Dieter instantly knew he didn’t want to be drawn. “He’s deed an’ aal. Tell ye about it sometime.

“Stick with us James”, Dieter said, trying to sound cheerful and supportive. “We are your family. Maybe not one you would choose, *neh?*” He laughed softly. “If we go to Newcastle, we will visit every tavern and get very drunk, *neh?*”

“That we will, Dieter, me owld Georman marra. Every one. And there are loads of taverns and piss holes in Newcastle – there is a big market there for ale and gin and there’s even whisky from Scotland if ye hev money enough.”

The two men smiled happily as even this small banter drove away the grimness of their situation. If pressed, both would admit it was very unlikely they would ever go to Newcastle and couldn’t even say what they thought tomorrow might bring. They all looked to Udo’s lead and he hadn’t given one. Emile, thought Dieter, would likely go to York. He himself would follow Udo, wherever that took him, but he thought it likely that this would be the last time they would all be together. Dieter wasn’t upset at the thought of not seeing Emile again - the man frightened him. Worried him might be a better description. He was violent and unpredictable, and while they fought, the battles released that energy. Without that there was every chance he would do something that would be bad for them all.

#### IV

Manfred Ritter lay in his own blood among scores of bodies, some dead, some still alive but even closer to death than he was, while he waited to die himself - fighting against the agony that ran the length of his leg. Although he didn’t want to, he occasionally glanced down at the gore speckled white bone that protruded from the side of his leg, just below his left kneecap and at the shredded flesh that surrounded it. Around him lay debris of all kinds: bits of wood, bits of metal - their original form no longer recognisable and he had wondered what it was that had torn through him

when the cannon shot ploughed through the supply train in the heat of the battle. Incredibly, he had seen the projectile coming but there was no chance of getting out of the way. The ten-pound shot had fallen right in front of a line of men guarding the supplies, killing some outright and sending others flying from their feet. The shot bounced once more, tearing clods of earth then smashing into the circled carts.

A solitary blackened boot was in the corner of his vision and he was sure that a dismembered foot would still be inside it so he wouldn't look closer. One of the wooden supply carts lay just feet away, overturned, and with the donkey that has once pulled it lying dead between the shafts. Colourful bits of torn, ragged clothing were caught on branches of the hedge that ran behind his prone body. Manfred had tried to drag himself under the low branches, prickly and heavy with blossom, for shelter but the screeching pain in his leg had made him stop; yet that was a blessing for he was able to turn his head up to the falling rain that both kept his mouth and throat from being parched and cooled the fever in his brow. He could have died content, he thought, but the fire in his shattered limb was relentless. As the light in the sky returned, he thought he must have slept during the long night but he knew he could equally have passed out when the pain became too bad. He had long since stopped crying and groaning, except inwardly.

Manfred drifted in and out of consciousness, lying absolutely still lest the slightest movement cause an eruption of pain. As the morning light grew stronger, there were lucid moments when he saw figures walking around the field, roughly pushing prone bodies face up so they could be identified. He woke suddenly when he heard a group of men talking loudly in gruff Scottish accents that he barely understood, even though his English was decent. He opened his eyes and saw four or five men, dressed in kilts and rough heavy jerkins, no more than ten feet away. He tried to call out to them but the sound was dampened by his dry mouth and raw throat. He turned his head towards them, very gently so his body did not move, and hope they would look his way. Two of them were



on the ground beside a figure that lay still in the mud, and one was slapping the figure's face, not roughly, but expecting some response, while the other called out encouragement to Hamish to wake up. The other kneeling man was running his hands over the body, feeling for broken bones or other injuries. Evidently satisfied that there were none, he assisted in hauling Hamish into a half-sitting position. Manfred watched them pour water from a flask into the man's mouth and he could have cried for a single drop. After a few moments, their ministrations seemed to have some effect as the man's head rolled back and forth and he made low moaning sounds. The Scotsmen combined to try to pull the man to his feet, all the time calling in sounds that must have been encouragement. They pressed the flask to his lips again, urging him to drink and seemed satisfied that he was making an effort to swallow. Manfred could have thought there was no more cruel torture in the world than when they tipped water over the man's head, rubbed it into his face and splashed it around his neck. Coughing, groaning and spitting, the man tried to stand and was held upright by his comrades, but he suddenly let out a hideous cry – deep and rough and filled with horror and despair.

“Ah cannae see,” he wailed, “dear God I'm blind. I cannae see a thing.” He started thrashing and waving his arms, causing the others to duck out of the way. They let him go and he staggered a few paces, turning about and grasping at air. “Ah cannae see, ah cannae see. My eyes! Oh God, I want ma maw,” and he fell to his knees and rested his head on the ground, rocking back and forth and sobbing loudly.

“Wheesht, Hamish,” one man said soothingly. “Ye'll be a'right. We'll get ye back te the regiment and the lassies will tek care o' ye. Ah can see yer eyes, they're both there. Me an' Wullie we'll get ye back. An' Eck and Rab are here te. Ye're lucky we found ye – so many deed.”

Hamish continued sobbing as they lifted him to his feet once more and turned to head away from where Manfred lay. In desperation, Manfred braced himself against the pain that would surely come, and dabbed his hand along the ground beside him, grateful when he splashed it in a puddle of

rainwater. He cupped his hand as best he could and gathered as much of the muddy liquid as possible, raising it to his mouth and swallowing painfully. He did it again, as pain shredded his nerves and hoping it was enough lubrication, then reached the same hand out to the Scots. "*Hilfe mich*", it came out little more than a whisper and no-one heard.

"*Hilfe mich!*" he croaked, louder this time. "*Bitte!*"

One of the men turned and regarded Manfred lying there, one hand raised in plea, face grey and contorted by pain, a wasted leg red and angry, covered in mud and every stitch of clothing soaked right through. Brown hair was plastered in slicks across his crown and forehead and his dark beard was dirty and matted. Manfred opened his mouth, revealing uneven and broken teeth and pleaded again for assistance.

The Scotsman, leaned over him and couldn't conceal his pity as Manfred's mouth worked wordlessly and his hand opened and closed as if trying to grab hold of something.

"Is that man alive Rab?" one of the others called.

"Aye, just aboot. Is there any o' that watter left? Think we can spare a drop fer th' poor bastard. Ah think he's one o' them German sojers wi' Leslie."

Rab took the flask that was handed to him and gently poured water into Manfred's mouth. At first Manfred swilled it around and let it trickle down his throat, then gulped the next draught greedily.

"Sorry laddie," Rab said, handing the flask back to his companions. "We dinnae he' much and dinnae ken when there'll be more."

Manfred let his head fall back heavily on the wet ground. All the pain was in his eyes and he said nothing.

"German are ye?"

“*Ja, ja,*” Manfred croaked. “German. Please help me.”

“Ye speak English then? That’s good. Listen laddie,” Rab leaned close to Manfred, speaking earnestly and trying to show compassion. “Ye’r a big, strong lad and ye look like ye’ve seen yer share o fight’s like this ane. Yer leg is fair bad so ye ken what’s likely te happen, there’s naen can fix that, an’ even if ye survive an’ can find a surgeon te cut it aff, ye’ll be nowt but a cripple beggin’ in the street. That’s nae life fer a fightin’ man like ye. Best ye lie back an’ let it happen.” Rab stood up and looked down on Manfred with sympathy, then on impulse, he took the water flask back and poured another trickle into Manfred’s mouth. “We cannae help ye more,” he said finally. “But if we see any more o your kind, we’ll tell them you’re here.”

Manfred stared back silently then gave an almost imperceptible nod. He watched then go, supporting the one they called Hamish who had since gone silent. As the man had said, he knew the way things were, knew his leg couldn’t be saved and surgeons were for officers only. It was a matter of time before he died from loss of blood, or when his leg got the stinking rot. It throbbed mercilessly and felt hotter than a smith’s furnace. Manfred felt the sudden need to sit up, and gritting what teeth he had left, he braced his forearm along the ground and pushed with his good leg. The wave of pain that followed made him scream out loud, parched throat or not, and he blacked out completely.

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“Over here!” Dieter Engel called out, his voice piercing the early morning and ringing loudly over the field. “He’s over here.” He waved his arms madly above his head to attract their attention. “I think he’s still alive, but...*Scheisse!*”

Dieter fell down beside Manfred, cradling his head in his arm. There was a soft pulse in Manfred’s neck and his breathing was shallow and irregular. His body felt cold and his clothing was wet through from lying on the rain-soaked ground. Dieter slapped his cheeks, gently at first, then

ever harder, trying to get some reaction. Manfred's eyes flickered once or twice and his mouth moved although no words came out. Dieter fumbled in his pack and withdrew a flask that was almost empty but he poured what water he had into Manfred's mouth. Manfred's pale, cracked tongue worked around his lips and he began to groan. Dieter spoke soft words of encouragement, all the time looking down at his friend's ruined leg, wondering how they were going to handle this, whether it was even possible to save him. A thought came to him and even though he tried to push it away. Inwardly, Dieter wondered whether it would be better to leave Manfred to die; better than him living with one leg, even if they could remove it cleanly and keep it from becoming infected. Maybe they could even hasten the process with a knife to the throat. Emile would have to do that.

"*Mein Gott,*" Emile had caught up with them and was staring down at Manfred. Udo lumbered up beside them, the great sword again sheathed at his back, and contemplated his countryman's plight without saying anything. James joined them, looking very distressed. His voice trembled as he spoke.

"Poor bastard," he said, in a tone that conveyed both horror and sympathy. Without looking at anyone he went on "nowt much we can dee, ah wad'nt think. Divvent feel right leavin' 'im here though. Emile?" The implication was obvious to all of them. On the ground Manfred had recovered enough of his voice to rant incoherently, punctuated with pathetic yelps as the pain came once more.

Emile gestured for them all to come together. Dieter gently lowered Manfred's head to the ground as he stood. When all four faced each other, Emile asked,

"I suppose it will be down to me, as you think me to be the most unfeeling of us all?"

"Let's wait a bit longer," Dieter replied, agitated "We cannot just...just finish him like an injured dog."

“Would you leave a wounded dog in pain like that?” Emile shot back, a low sound, almost hissed out between narrowed lips. Dieter shook his head dejectedly. “If we all agree and there really is no other way.”

James nodded, reluctant but resigned. Udo stood silent, looking intently down at the supine body, studying the ruined leg where the bone poked at an angle through torn flesh.

“He’s out of his mind anyway,” Emile reasoned. “He won’t know anything about it. It will be quick and there will be no more pain.”

“But what if we just take the leg,” Dieter spoke brightly, as if it was a brilliant new idea that would solve the problem. “Udo could...”

“Fuck off,” Emile snapped back at him. “If he survived the shock he wouldn’t last more than a couple of hours then die in even worse pain. And in this filth? He’s probably already got the stinking rot. He’ll still die, just more slowly.”

Emile, Dieter and James were surprised when Udo spoke. A low growl that chilled them - so unlike his usual calm, measured speech.

“Find me some more men, three at least. Strong ones.”

Knowing what reaction was likely, they didn’t ask Udo any questions and just looked around, scouring the broken land. There were many men wandering the field, some obviously looking for fallen comrades, some openly robbing corpses and some even sitting among the charnel field, eating God knew what, or just rocking themselves silently.

Dieter couldn’t contain himself any longer and started to ask “Why do we need men?” but Emile grabbed him by the shoulder and dragged him along to where a ragged group of men were sitting under a tree that had caught the blast of cannon shot and leaned on the ground where its canopy made a verdant cave.

“What can ah dee, bonny lad?” James asked.

“Keep him still.” Udo replied. “Wait! Find a stout stick first. Not too thick.”

Without questioning, James walked towards the nearby hedge, drawing his knife from his belt. None of his companions had managed to hold onto their swords, Udo noted. They would need to find some. He continued to stand, looking down on Manfred who had once more lapsed into oblivion.

James was back first, clutching a piece a hazel about eight inches long and about the thickness of Udo’s thumb. Udo took it and his look said that it was what he wanted. After a few minutes, Dieter and Emile returned with three tired looking men in tow. Burly men themselves, they stood looking in awe at the big German, and in wonderment at the massive sword on his back. They had been about to ask for food, money or at least something in return for their presence but thought better of it. Udo pointed down at Manfred.

“Kneel down by his feet,” he ordered. “Don’t touch his leg.”

They did as they were told although none of them wanted to touch the body at all.

“Now,” Udo looked directly at Dieter and James. “Down by his head. When I tell you, put your full weight on his shoulders. Emile, lie across his chest. Don’t crush him, just keep him still; and keep your knife ready. Even a man sick and weak can have enormous strength when he needs to get away from great pain. If he looks like he will harm himself or anyone else, kill him quickly.”

All six men were taken aback at Udo’s order, but only Emile dared to ask “What are you going to do, Udo?”

“Fix the bone in his leg.” Udo said, matter-of-fact. “Quickly, before he wakes again. The pain will be unlike anything he has known and you all need to hold him in place.

“Fuck me” Emile spluttered. “You’ll kill him.”

“Like you were going to?”

“Out of mercy,” Emile protested. “This isn’t mercy!”

“Christ man,” James was also incredulous. ”He’s right, Udo. Ye canna knaa what yer deein’?”

“No, I don’t”, Udo spoke gravely. “But he’ll die anyway.” He looked defiantly around the small group. No one said anything further. “I need to line up the broken bone,” he explained, peering at it closely. “Then we will bind the leg and that will have to do for now. Take off your belts. And whoever has the cleanest shirt, take it off now.”

Understanding what Udo intended, James stood quickly and did both.

“We must be quick,” Udo said loudly. He prised Manfred’s jaws apart and worked the stick of hazel between his teeth. “Now hold him down,” he ordered. Then, after a pause “*Ein, zwei, drei.*”

As the six men pinioned Manfred’s unconscious body to the wet ground, Udo positioned himself below Manfred’s knees, siezed the lower leg and pushed the bone straight, Manfred struggled but, in his unconsciousness, made only loud groaning noises and Udo swiftly moved position to the upper leg, where the bone poked out of the hole in his flesh at an upward angle. He grasped the bone as close as possible to where it protruded and pushed in firmly to line up with the lower portion.

Manfred’s eyes flew open and his scream was unearthly. His teeth clamped so hard on the hazel that two of them broke and blood mixed with saliva poured from his mouth. The combined strength of six men fought to hold his body as he thrashed and writhed, all the time emitting wails that chilled their blood. One of the conscripted men, without daring to let go, turned his head and vomited. They all had tears in their eyes. Udo had to twist one of the ends of bone so that the jagged ends of the break matched then he pushed them together. The ragged flesh around the break began to tear and bleed as he tried to pack it into roughly where it should be and this was the last assault

that Manfred's body could take and the cry he let out was low, wracked and then faded, spluttering, as he lay very still.

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Dieter Engle scoured the immediate vicinity of the muddy field to see what he could salvage that they could eat until they were able to re-join their company and hope that there was food in the field canteen. He searched scores of bodies, often fighting off corpse robbers that had arrived from surrounding villages, as was almost always the case after a battle. He removed and unrolled packs from dead horses and found a couple of rough blankets. He folded one to make a sack in which he could carry anything else he found. Over three or four hours he had accumulated some dried beef, an apple, root vegetables that were beginning to rot, a few pieces of hard cheese, and a big piece of mutton fat wrapped in boiled nettle leaves.

Udo had asked him to find two pieces of strong, straight wood that he could use to splint Manfred's leg, and that was proving more difficult than it should be. Dieter considered breaking a pike staff, but it looked to be too thick and he reflected how something could be so common yet unavailable. In the end, he relieved the corpses of two dead cavalymen of their rigid leather scabbards, including the leather shoulder slings, and hoped that they would suffice.

Dieter trudged back to where Manfred still lay unconscious and breathing shallowly while the others, with the exception of Udo, stood or sat just watching him. He spread the blanket on the ground, drawing unappreciative stares.

"If you can do better..." Dieter spoke almost petulantly. No one answered but Emile reached out and took a piece of the beef, and the apple, which he began to peel the worst bits off with his knife and glared a challenge to the others. James told Dieter how the three English soldiers had gone -



leaving suddenly, retching and coughing, after seeing Udo cut away the badly damaged flesh around the leg wound.

“Whey man, ye should’ve seen them, the big jessies,” he sniggered. “Mind ye, it was not a bonny sight. Ye can see Manny’s bone through a hole the size o’ Cullercoats harbour.” Then, gravely, “That’s ganna rot soon, nee doubt. We’re in a field in the pissin’ rain and not a surgeon for miles. Even if there was, he waddn’t treat the likes o’ us. If ye ask me, Udo’s got this wrang – poor soul is still ganna die. Mebbe a chance if we get him te the village ower there,” he pointed in the direction on Long Martin at the edge of the York road, “but canna see how we’re ganna get him there.”

After silent thought, Dieter said: “I have an idea. Noticed it on my way back here. Over there,” he started walking and stopped near the overturned cart that lay near their rough camp. “Wheels are still working,” he pointed out, “and not too much damage.”

“Aye that might work.” James nodded. “Once we cut it away from that deed cuddy. We can get Manny onto it alreet, but how are we ganna pull it? P’ticularly through this mud. Must be a good mile te the village.”

“We’ll think about that but I really don’t know what else there is. He won’t survive being manhandled all that way, and we can’t even be certain he’ll survive even if we get that thing moving. Besides, he’s a big man.”

While not Udo’s size, Manfred was at least six feet tall and well built; muscular from battle and carrying his long pike from campaign to campaign, and in his present condition he would be a dead weight.

“We’ll see what Udo and Emile suggest.” Dieter said finally. “I’m done for now. I need a rest and I need to eat.” He was about to be disappointed to find that Emile had eaten everything but the slimy vegetables and was already asleep. Clutching his knife.

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“Go and get that horse.” Udo said firmly.

The brown and white horse that had somehow not been rounded up like the others, had wandered into sight a moment ago and was now standing about a hundred paces away, muzzling the ground as it grazed - occasionally snorting and shaking its head, tail flicking to ward off the flies that were now thick and buzzing in the early afternoon heat. Unlike the man who had once ridden it, it had survived the battle save for a cut along its flank where congealed blood attracted its own share of the insects. A saddle hung loosely from its back where the cinch had become loosened - probably as its rider fell with foot still in the stirrup.

On cue they heeded Udo’s command. Emile picked up the harness they had unfastened from the dead donkey (which was already starting to swell and attract even more flies) and motioned to James and Dieter to follow him.

No one questioned Udo’s right to stay with Manfred after watching his ministrations - somehow he was keeping the wounded man alive. Manfred lapsed in and out of consciousness and the pain was evidently relentless and severe. He was quickly developing a fever as his body shook and teeth chattered. While never fully awake, in his brief lucid moments he raved unintelligibly and cried out random names and curses – sometimes soft and pleading, at other times loudly and aggressively. All Udo could do was attempt to cool the fever with scummy water scooped from a nearby ditch.

When Udo had returned earlier in the day, he was holding in his hand a large clump of moss, glistening and dripping, and laid it over a few stones to dry in the sun that was now breaking through the low cloud. Veterans of the long war in Europe, both Dieter and Emile knew that certain mosses could be used to dress wounds. There didn’t seem any point in questioning whether this was one of those types - it was all there was. Udo took the shirt that James had removed (James seemed to fare well enough in just a sleeveless leather jerkin). The shirt was grubby but better than anything

else they had and Udo made a pad from a section of it, tearing the rest into strips. When he judged the moss to be dry enough, he packed it into that part of Manfred's leg where no flesh covered the bone and the tissue was red, angry and weeping. He touched the flesh, causing Manfred to convulse briefly in his world that seemed almost catatonic and his only refuge from pain. Udo sniffed his fingers and was relieved that there was no fetid smell nor any sign of a black tinge to the wound. Udo used the pad to cover the moss-packed wound then bound it in place with the strips of torn shirt. Finally, he examined the leather scabbards and tried to flex them then, satisfied they were suitable, he got Dieter to hold them in place, one on either side of Manfred's leg, then he bound them tightly in place with the leather strap and belts.

Looking directly at Dieter, he said "Loosen those straps every ten minutes, then tighten them again. Do not take off the bandages and do not move the leg. *Verstehtst du?*"

Dieter nodded his assent.

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When Emile and James returned they were coaxing along the horse that wanted to do no more than peacefully feed. Dieter held the harness that they had managed to fasten- once around the beast's neck, and a strap around back and belly as a surcingle. Emile walked behind, lightly tapping it on the rump with a long stick. If Udo was impressed, he didn't say so.

There was a patch of long grass nearby and Dieter sensibly led the animal to it. When he let go of the harness, it stayed there and resumed grazing, unconcerned by the men or its new surroundings.

"It's a placid beast," Emile reported. "We had to separate the harness we had to tie around it. We'll still need a couple more to make a breastband and traces – James is a forager, he's going to go and look."

James was off across the field shouting something unintelligible as he went.

Udo cocked his head at Emile to follow him. “The cart”, he said.

There was some damage to the cart but the wheels were intact and the flat-bed was solid. It still lay on its side and, without asking for Emile’s help, Udo bent, grasped the underside rim and heaved it upright. It tottered from wheel to wheel before setting. One of the sides had slats missing or broken and the tailgate was hanging off. Inspecting the yoke, Udo saw that one of the tongues has sheered off but it was still serviceable

“Take off those broken boards,” Udo told Emile, “then get the blankets that James brought and lay them on the bed” He patted the planks to show what he meant. “And look around – see if there’s anything we can fix in place to rest Manfred’s leg on.”

Appreciating the gravity of the situation, Emile made no bawdy or witty reply, nor gave any sign of dissent and went about his task immediately.

### III

Later, on what had turned into a bright summer evening with the rain long past, many bodies had been cleared from the battlefield though many more were still lying, bloated now, where they lay. The drumming of millions of flies was a persistent hum and there was not a hint of a breeze to drive away the smell of decay that was getting worse by the hour. The strange transport lumbered into the only street in Long Marston and stopped outside the All Saints church where a small group of villagers had watched its approach as it wound its way across the field. The makeshift harness and traces had just about lasted the journey and slipped from the horse’s back at the halt. The yoke crashed to the ground and the other tongue snapped off. The horse wandered off in search of pasture.

A burly man wearing a blacksmith's apron came to greet the party, egged on by the villagers who had obviously chosen the biggest of their number as a spokesman.

"Sam Smith," the man said brusquely. "Be thee Royalists or Scots or Covenanters? Whatever, thee's not welcome here. Be on thy way, now." Smith pointed along the road towards York.

"There's nowt of value here."

Dieter answered. Unfamiliar with the heavy local accent he was hearing, he took care over his pronunciation as he answered, in English "We are none of those. We were in the pay of the Scots general, Lord Leven but he has gone. Our friend is badly injured. Please help."

"Foreigner," Smith said with obvious disdain. "Fight fer whoever pays thee. Not my business, or theirs," He lifted a thumb over his shoulder towards where the villagers were gathered around to hear the exchange, "but we didn't invite any of this and t' fields will stink for weeks 'ere we move the dead. Road's good, thee can pull yon cart yersen's an tek thy friend t' York. There's not a surgeon in this village."

James stepped forward, thinking to appeal to this man Smith – Englishman to Englishman.

"Howay, marra. The lad's in a bad way a' we're starvin' an' knackered. Just let us bed doon in a barn or summat fer the neet, and mebbes giz some auld rags so we can dress the lad's leg."

Smith gestured towards Dieter. "Foreigner?" he asked James.

"Whey aye, Georman."

"Then let him speak," Smith said, very seriously. "I can understand him, I cannot understand thee."

"All we ask, sir", Dieter said quickly, "is shelter for tonight and to tend to our friend. And food, if you can spare some. We can pay." And he hoped that between them they had a few coins that would make his words true.

Smith turned away without a further word and strolled over to the dozen or so villagers, men and women, who closed in a circle around him. As a hushed discussion went on for a few moments, Manfred woke from the fitful sleep he had been in for the last hour and cried out loudly. The sudden noise made most of the villagers turn around and three women walked forward to regard the wounded man in the bed of the cart. The three whispered together then returned to their circle and the muted conversation went on again.

Dieter drained his water flask over Manfred's head and rubbed water into his lips. Manfred twisted from side to side, groaning softly. Dieter thought he could smell something unpleasant and looked down at Manfred's leg, although he couldn't bring himself to remove the bandage. He looked to Emile for some empathy but the little man was twirling his knife in his hand and staring menacingly at the villagers.

The circle of people broke up and Smith returned to stand in front of Dieter.

"Where's thy brass?" He asked. Dieter stared uncomprehending.

"He wants money." James explained. Dieter rummaged in the leather bag at his belt and withdrew two coins that he proffered towards Smith.

"Tha's jokin," Smith sneered. "Dig deeper."

Sensing, rather than understanding Smith's meaning, Dieter turned to Emile, James and Udo, the expression on his face asking the question. Udo gave Emile an intense stare that needed no words to follow it up.

"*Ja, Ja. Ich weiss,*" Emile knew better than to argue and Udo knew exactly what Emile carried in his purse. He turned away so no-one could see him tip a number of coins into his hand, select three of them and hand them to Dieter.

Dieter held the coins out to Smith, who nodded in agreement as he took them.

“An’ I’ll be keepin’ thy horse.” Smith’s tone warned that there was no room for discussion.

“Thee can stay t’ night in yon barn.” He pointed at a timber building on the edge of the road as it left the village. It looked in good enough repair and their spirits lifted a little. Udo and James took hold of the broken yoke and dragged it as best they could along the road. Just as they had it rolling, Dieter waved them to a stop. He had only just noticed the villagers staring at Udo and a chattering broke out that sounded alarmed. Smith gestured to Dieter.

“Leave thy weapons. Especially thon greet thing that thy big man is carryin’. Put them in the porch o’ the church and someone will look after them. There’s nowt but trouble when strangers carry weapons. Especially foreigners.”

“They want us to leave our weapons,” Dieter explained.

“*Nein.*” Udo said flatly.

“Udo, we have no choice. We need their help. Anyway, who do you think will be able to use your sword?” Dieter looked at Manfred who had been silent for a while now but had started to tremble and his boot heels drummed on the bed of the cart. “For Manfred.”

Reluctantly, Udo swung the sword and its sheath from his broad back and laid it on the ground. Dieter and James unsheathed their swords and laid the beside it. Emile carried no sword but he added his knife to the pile. Dieter thought that it was the first time he had seen Emile surrender his weapon so easily and thought that he was bound to have another hidden somewhere.

With Udo and James holding the cart on course, they steered it towards the barn. It was surprisingly easy once it was moving but dragging it any distance would be back-breaking. The doors opened without too much effort and they piled inside. There were shutters on one wall that they threw open and which, combined with the open door, let enough of the summer evening light in so that they could see their surroundings. The building was almost empty but there were hay and straw bales that they moved around to build a three-sided enclosure around them that Udo reckoned

they could protect easily if they had to. They put a thick layer of straw on the ground in the centre and moved Manfred to it. His screams were terrible and they noticed the trembling was getting worse. His body felt hot and there was a sheen of sweat across his brow while his eyes were dull and his mouth parched. James left the barn to look for water and something to put it in, heading for the village centre where a well or a water pump was most likely to be located. He was back within a very short time carrying, to the relief of all, a wooden bucket half filled with water. They tended to Manfred first, coaxing him to drink and washing him down, even removing his shirt. They took great pains in removing his breeches, not wanting to move his damaged leg and fought back the instinctive revulsion when they found he had soiled himself more than once. They covered him by offering up some of their own clothing, dirty and ragged though it was, and piling straw around him. Manfred continued to toss around, even close to fitting at times, drifting in and out of sensibility and moaning heavily

Sam Smith arrived with another man as twilight deepened and the shadows at the edges of the barn became impenetrable. He couldn't disguise a look of disgust as he saw Manfred and he wrinkled his nose at the putrid smell that was getting worse by the minute. Smith carried a basket that contained several small loaves of bread that each of the men grabbed at greedily, unsurprised to find that it was easily a day old and chewy but it was the first thing they had eaten in over twenty-four hours. The other man laid down a wooden crate that held a couple of onions and some cold, boiled turnips. There were bones – looked like rabbit bones but at least had a good amount of meat clinging to them, and there was a slab of shiny white tripe. What lifted their morose moods sharply was the jug of dark ale - barely more than a mouthful or two each, although James later suggested they could dilute it with water to make it go further. Smith had little to say, and his companion said nothing.



“Best we can do,” he said. “We don’t have much oursen’s. Mek it last, there’ll be nowt more i’ t’ mornin’”

“*Danke*, thank you, We are very grateful” said Dieter, meaning it. James and Udo muttered their own thanks while Emile prodded and pulled at the tripe, wondering how he was supposed to eat it.

“Think he’ll mek it t’night?” Smith asked, looking at Manfred.

“He was a strong man before,” Dieter replied. “He may, but there is nothing more we can do for him.”

“Leg smells summat terrible. Tha’ knows what that means?”

Dieter nodded.

“’Appen I can ask the widow Earnshaw to come by.” Smith said. “If owt can be done, she’ll do it. She’ll not be wanting to, mind, bein’ a bit flayt, but seein’ as yers will be long gone tomorrow, she’ll be in no danger. Will she?”

“No, of course not,” said Dieter, not understanding what Smith meant. “Please ask her to help him.”

“Aye, that I will.” Smith said as he and his companion left.