

La Derniere Mobilisation

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From *The Fabulist*

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On the left the road comes up the hill out of a pool of mist; on the right it loses itself in the shadow of a wood. On the farther side of the highway a hedgerow, dusty in the moonlight, spreads an irregular border of black from the wood to the fog. Behind the hedgerow slender poplar trees, evenly spaced, rule off the distance with inky lines.

A movement stirs the mist at the bottom of the hill. A monotonous rhythm grows in the silence. The mist darkens, and from it there emerges a strange shadowy column that reaches slowly up the hill, moving in silence to the sombre and muffled beating of a drum. As it draws nearer the shadow becomes two files of marching men bearing between them a long dim burden.

The leaders advance into the moonlight. Each two men are carrying between them a pole, and from pole to pole have been slung planks making a continuous platform. But that which is heaped upon the platform is hidden with muddy blankets.

The uniforms of the men--of various sorts, indicating that they are from many commands--are in shreds and spotted with stains of mould and earth; their heads are bound in cloths so that their faces are covered. The single drummer at the side of the column carries slung from his shoulder the shell of a drum. No flag flies from the staff at the column's head, but the staff is held erect.

Slowly the head of the line advances to the shadow of the wood, touches it and is swallowed. The leaders, the bare flag-staff, the drummer disappear; but still from the shade is heard the muffled rhythm of the drum. Still the column comes out of the mist, still it climbs the hill and passes with its endless articulated burden. At last the rearmost couple disengages itself from the mist, ascends, and is swallowed by the shadow. There remain only the moonlight and the dusty hedgerow.

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From the left the road runs from Belgium; to the right it crosses into France.

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The dead were leaving their resting places in that lost land.