

Clearing-Station

Wilhelm Klemm

Straw rustling everywhere.

The candle-stumps stand there staring solemnly.

Across the nocturnal vault of the church

Moans go drifting and choking words.

There's a stench of blood, pus, shit and sweat.

Bandages ooze away underneath torn uniforms.

Clammy trembling hands and wasted faces.

Bodies stay propped up as their dying heads slump down.

In the distance the battle thunders grimly on,

Day and night, groaning and grumbling non-stop,

And to the dying men patiently waiting for their graves

It sounds for all the world like the words of God.

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Trans. Patrick Bridgwater