



## VISION OF WAR

I went out into the night of quiet stars.

I looked up at the wheeling heavens,

At the mysterious firmament.

I thought of awful distances

Out there, of the incredible magnitudes

Of space, silence and eternity.

I thought of man, his life, his love,

His dreams.

I thought of his body, how it is born

And grows, and of his spirit

That cannot be explained.

All about me slept the land

In peace, and nature

In deep serenity.

Not a cloud broke the clear and tender blue

Of the evening sky.

Then the quiet stars came out,



The air grew cool with  
The breath of night.  
A land breeze flurried, sifting  
The odor of damp woods and hay fields.  
A gentle breeze that scarcely turned the sleeping leaves.  
  
On the eastern horizon a great bright star arose,  
Casting a track across the sky.  
  
I have never seen the world so calm,  
The air so clear and still.  
The silence was penetrating.  
I have never known an hour so full of quietness.  
  
**HOUR OF THE WAR!**  
Now, now-and here-on this same earth,  
And under this same sky!  
Now! Now! The War! The War!  
Night, and a saddened field,  
Starlight over all.  
On the ground the bodies  
Of dead men lying.



Tumbled, broken, grotesque,  
Shattered in attitudes inhuman;  
In lumpish, swollen heaps they lie  
Where death suddenly snatched them up  
And flung them down.  
(Oh God I have seen this scene awake and asleep!)  
Here a strange, dark, silent scene.  
Here passed the awful charge,  
Three days ago or two-  
I do not know.  
Here we met the fiery choking, volley,  
Shattered out and fell.  
Two or three days they have been lying here;  
No help could reach them, cast between the battle lines.  
No help is needed now.  
Slowly above their heads  
The conflict wore itself away.  
Calm settled on the shaking air.  
The sharp cries and groans of the wounded



Stopped one by one.  
Their groans grew fainter; a few crawled off.  
The others lay as they had fallen,  
Under the sun and stars.  
Peace at last; quietness restored.  
Listen! Could one be living?  
Come this way!  
Here where a score of bodies  
Are drawn mysteriously together,  
A turning face catches a gleam of starlight,  
A hand moves waving in the air.  
“Water.” No use-too late.  
His breast is shot away-don’t move him-  
God how he bled!  
To lie there, thinking, suffering, remembering;  
To be left to die alone!  
But not alone:  
Passing brother, you have yet a grim companion.  
Along the edge of an orchard just now,  
As I went to the brook down there for water,



I stumbled over something that must have been left

From the attack days ago; a body that held

The remnants of a man.

He had dragged himself to the brook; he lay

Embedded in tall waving grass.

His stomach had been ripped open by shrapnel.

Maggots were heaving in the wound.

(Did you know that a man could live while maggots formed in his flesh?)

His muscles twitched convulsively, he was barely conscious.

He did not notice the lighter I struck.

His eyes were filmed over; he would not drink.

The region he inhabited was an unknown, unimaginable land.

(At home, a woman waits for news of him; it is well she can never hear.)

That was a man a month ago.

He could see and feel and know.

Then into his throat there sped a bit of lead.

Blood and salt in his mouth; he fell and lay

Amid the battle wreck.

Nothing was left but this tag and a wife and a child perhaps.

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