

AT ANY COST

By

Lockhart North

Adapted for
CCC
Presentation

Works Progress Administration
FEDERAL THEATRE CCC DIVISION
122 East 42nd Street
New York, N. Y.

AT ANY COST

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CHARACTERS

WILLIAM WATERS.Honorary-Lieutenant and Quartermaster.

PRIVATE TONKS Cook to the Officer's Mess.

CAPTAIN WORRALL

LIEUT.-COLONEL STRAUBENZEE. . Commanding the 201st Battalion of the Loyal
South Wessex Regiment.

TEMPORARY SECOND-LIEUTENANT ORPEN

MAJOR ENTWHISTLE, D.S.O.

SCENE: The interior of a farm-kitchen in use as
the officer's mess of the 201st (Service)
Battalion of the Loyal South Wessex Regi-
ment in the Ypress Sector of the line.

AT RISE: 3:30 A.M. on a morning in winter.

WATERS is seated with his feet on the
table, asleep. Private Tonks, the cook,
enters from R. door. Tonks is dressed in
service kahki. His uniform is fairly
clean but his boots are muddy. He also
speaks with a marked cockney accent and
is of an even lower type than Waters. He
clumps across the floor, goes to the
stove, lifts the kettle and stirs the
fire in the firepot. In doing so he knocks
the iron plate off the top. It clatters to
the floor and wakes Waters who sits up
with a start.

WATERS

What the 'ell!

TONKS

Beg pardon, Bill--I mean, sir!

WATERS

What d' yer want to make such a noise for? Can't yer remember this
is the horficer's mess?

TONKS

There ain't no doubt about that, Bill--I mean sir. It's a mess all right.
I can't keep the place clean, try as I will! You see Bill----

WATERS

Don't keep callin' me Bill! 'oo the 'ell d' yer think yer talkin' to?

TONKS

I beg pardon, Bill--sir--it slipped out. Yer see it's so 'ard to keep track
of all the blokes that gets permoted. One minute you're a bloomin' private
an' the next you're a bloomin' orficer an' I got to call you, "Sir!"

WATERS

That'll do. I don't want to be reminded about them sort of things. I got a position to keep up and I don't mind tellin' you, 'Arry, it's no easy job. I 'ave a lot o' trouble with my 'haitches" and I ain't never sure if you spell hofficer with a haitch or a hen.

TONKS

I dunno, I'm sure. I naver could spell.

(he stirs the fire again. Picks up the top-plate and drops it again with a yell)

Eli'me--that thing's 'ot.

WATERS

What'd you expect it to be? Shove it on the stove again and clear out! We'll 'ave the battalion back directly. You better try an' tidy up this room.

TONKS

(replaces plate and kettle)

All right, Bill--sir! I said "Sir"! I wish you orficer blokes'd be a bit more careful with yer things--you get 'em all over the place.

(he wipes the table with a wool helmet)

WATERS

I dunno if you know it, my boy, but that's the Colonel's 'at you're usin' for a duster. 'Ere! What's the time? I must ha' been asleep for hours.

TONKS

It's about 'arf-past three.

WATERS

Is there any news of 'ow the battle went?

TONKS

Nothing much. There's a 'ell of a lot of wounded been goin' down the line. The ambulances is workin' overtime. Some of 'em say we took 'Ill Sixty-three an' lorst it again.

WATERS

Well, my lad, you an' I 'ave got a lot to be thankful for. A quartermaster and a mess-cook ain't much, maybe, but they do 'ave a chance to keep above ground.

TONKS

Yus. I ain't no 'ero meself, an' if the truth was known, there's a lot of 'em'd sooner be in our shoes than in their own. When the Jar's over;--if it ever is over we'll get a medal the same as the rest.

WATERS

Yes, an' I suppose if we're put to it we can tell as good lies as any other fool that goes scrappin'. Did you say we took 'Ill sixty-three or lost it?

TONKS

Some says we took it an' lorst it and others says we never took it at all.

WATERS

Well, I don't see what we wanted to mess about with takin' it for anyway. It's only a dirty, muddy little 'ill an' wouldn't be no use to us---

(the noise and tramp of feet is heard off. Then COL. STRAUBENZEE is heard shouting in the distance and drawing nearer. He is calling angrily for CAPTAIN WORRALL)

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WATERS (continued)

There's the Colonel. You'd better get out, 'Arry, my lad.

COLONEL S

(off stage)

Captain Worrall! Where's Captain Worrall?

WORRALL

(ENTERS. He is a typical "regular" officer. Good-natured, but with the manner of the man in whom discipline is inbred. His khaki uniform is faded and muddy. His face is dirty and he looks bedraggled and tired. TONKS springs to attention and stands rigid)

Here I am, sir--Oh, is that you Waters! I thought I heard the Colonel calling me.

WATERS

He was. He sounded as if he was on the other side of the house.

WORRALL

He sent me to look for the Major and he keeps shouting after me all the time.

WATERS

(to TONKS)

That'll do, Tonks, you can go.

(TONKS EXITS Right. door)

WORRALL

(crossing to stove and warming hands)

You're a lucky devil, Waters. I wish I were a quarter-master. You get a night's rest now and then. Has the Major been in here?

WATERS

No. You're first in. Well, how did the battle go?

WORRALL

It didn't. We went!

WATERS

Lost a trench?

WORRALL

No, but we didn't gain a yard of ground.

WATERS

Lose many men?

WORRALL

Quite a few. The old man spread himself to-night. He tried to get Hill Sixty-three but of course we never got it.

COLONEL S

(off stage R.)

Worrall! Captain Worrall!

WORRALL

Oh, Lord! There he is again. He never gives me a minute's peace!

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COLONEL S

(off stage R.

Captain Worrall! Where the devil are you?

(he ENTERS. He is a man of fifty, red-faced and choleric. He has bullying manner and is the typical old-fashioned, martinet)
Worrall! Where the devil are you?

WORRALL

Here, Sir! I can't find the Major, Sir.

COLONEL S

Damn, it! You haven't looked. D'you expect to find him in here under the table? Waters!

WATERS

Good-morning, sir.

COLONEL S

What the devil d' you mean, sir. It is not a good morning. It is the very devil of a morning, dammit!

WATERS

Did the show go off all right, sir?

COLONEL S

No, sir! It did not go off all right. It went damned well wrong. We had the very devil of a time and we've lost Hill Sixty-three.

WATERS

Many casualties, sir?

COLONEL S

About half the battalion put out of action--that's nothing. That doesn't matter. What does matter is Hill Sixty-three! I ordered them to take it at any cost--and they fail, sir--fail, Waters! Go and find Major Entwistle at once and get that fellow Orpen and bring him here--and--Worrall--

(he whispers to WORRALL; makes inclination of his head toward WATERS and a second toward the door--indicating that WORRALL is to get WATERS out of the room. He then stalks across the L. door and EXITS, banging the door)

WORRALL

Ahem! I say, Waters--the Colonel wants me to--you won't mind, I'm sure--the fact is, the Colonel wants this room for the--er--officers.

WATERS

(bristling with offended dignity)

Ain't I a horficer?

WORRALL

Of course, old chap--Honorary-Lieutenant and all that--yes, yes, but this is something the Colonel wants to keep quiet--er--private. I can't very well explain, but there it is and you know what the Colonel is.

WATERS

(mollified by this diplomacy)

Oh, all right. I see. You want me to clear out? Well, I was just going to bed anyway. I only stayed up in case we should 'ave to skedaddle. You'll find the kettle a-boilin' if any of you want a 'ot drink.

(WATERS goes to door R. but just as he reaches it, it opens and Temporary Second Lieutenant ORPEN ENTERS. ORPEN is a man of twenty-six or twenty-eight, who in pre-war days was a stock-broker in a good business. He is alert and quick in manner. Clean cut in feature. Since gaining his temporary commission he has mastered his new job and added to it the quality of common sense. His uniform is faded and his boots muddy. His right hand is bandaged and the bandage is blood-stained.)

ORPEN

(to WATERS)

Hullo, Quarter-bloke! How goes it?

WATERS

'Ulloh, Horpen! Glad to see yer back. Are you 'urt?

ORPEN

Oh, it's nothing. I tore my hand on some wire--that's all.

WATERS

Shall I mix you a 'ot drink?

ORPEN

Thanks. I wish you would.

WORRALL

Not now, Waters, if you don't mind. The Colonel wants this room.

WATERS

Oh, all right--he can have the room!

(to ORPEN)

There's 'ot water in the kettle an' the rum's in one o' them boxes.

Good-night, ol' top.

(WATERS crosses to door R. and EXITS. ORPEN sits on corner of table)

WORRALL

Well, Orpen you're in for a bad time. The Colonel is in a devil of a temper.

ORPEN

The old fool!

WORRALL

You mustn't speak like that of the Colonel. It isn't discipline.

ORPEN

Maybe, but it's the truth.

WORRALL

If you ask me, I should say you're done enough for one night.

ORPEN

What I did tonight, I'd again if I had to.

WORRALL

It's a pretty serious business. I don't know what the Colonel means to do about it.

ORPEN

I do. He'll put me under arrest and try me by court-martial.

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WORRALL

I don't see what else he can do.

ORPEN

Of Course you don't. You're a professional soldier. I'd never expect you to see the obvious.

WORRALL

Well, we won't discuss it. Have you seen Major Entwhistle?

ORPEN

(smiling)

Not since he started to retreat. I saw him then--running like blazes with three of the enemy on his trail. If he can do nothing else, he can run.

WORRALL

Well, I've got to find him. You don't suppose the enemy got him, do you?

ORPEN

I don't think so. He had a good start. Well, I think I'll turn in. I'm dog-tired.

WORRALL

You can't -- not yet. The Colonel wants to see you in here.

(MAJOR ENTWHISTLE opens the door and stand in the doorway. He is a tall man with a monocle, fixed immovable in his R. eye. He has a vacant expression. His mouth is always slightly open. He is covered with mud, his cheek is gashed and he mops it with a dirty handkerchief.)

Oh, there you are, sir! I was just looking for you.

ENTWHISTLE

(ENTERS the room and throws himself down in the chair)

Haw! By Jove! The deuce you were. What? Well, here I am. By Jove! I never thought I was going to see this merry farm again. This mud's the very devil for sprinting on. I came very near losing the event--eh, what?

ORPEN

I'm glad you made it, Major!

ENTWHISTLE

By Jove! What! Orpen! How did you get here? You oughtn't to be here at all, y'know.

ORPEN

Just sheer luck, sir. Nothing else.

ENTWHISTLE

But dammit! I thought---

(COLONEL STRAUBENZEE ENTERS from L. door. He closes the door behind him and stalks into the room)

COLONEL S

Ah, there you are then, Entwhistle.

ENTWHISTLE

Yes, by Jove, Colonel! Merry and bright, eh, what?

ORPEN

(stands up. Salutes the COLONEL with his L. hand)

Good-morning, Sir!

COLONEL S

Don't say good-morning to me, sir! Don't talk to me at all. I have nothing to say to a coward, sir--a damned coward who shirks death in the face of the enemy, sir. What have you to say for yourself, sir?

ORPEN

Nothing at all, sir. You just told me not to talk to you.

COLONEL S

(sits at table)

Entwhistle! This damned fellow has disgraced the regiment.

ENTWHISTLE

Has he? By Jove! By Gad, you know, that won't do! How did he disgrace it?

COLONEL

Disobeyed my orders. Rank cowardice in face of the enemy.

ENTWHISTLE

By Jove! Eh, what? Disgraceful. You'll try him by court-martial, of course?

ORPEN

Why "of course", You might let me explain first.

COLONEL S

(shouting)

Explain! How can you explain, sir?

ENTWHISTLE

Yes, how the deuce can you explain?

(to COLONEL)

Haw! Exactly what happened, sir?

COLONEL

Pull up your chair, Entwhistle. We'll hold an informal court of enquiry at once.

ORPEN

You'll excuse me, sir. I don't think there is any regulation covering informal courts of enquiry, and I want to go to bed.

COLONEL

You can go to the devil, sir. You are under arrest. Captain Worrall! Stand guard over the door.

(to ORPEN)

Be good enough to hand over your sword to Captain Worrall, sir.

ORPEN

I haven't got a sword. I never bought one. They're no use out here.

COLONEL

No sword, sir? Come to think of it, I haven't a sword myself. I was thinking of South Africa. We carried them out there.

ORPEN

Is that so, sir? Did you really carry swords? Did you ever find any use for them?

COLONEL S.

Don't talk to me, sir! We carried our swords as emblems of our honor. We used 'em to toast the infernal stale bread on. I don't understand this war at all. No swords--no discipline--nothing that a soldier is accustomed to. The army is going to the dogs, sir!

ORPEN

I thought it was supposed to be going to Berlin.

COLONEL S.

Don't be frivolous, sir! Since you have no sword, kindly hand your revolver to Captain Worrall.

ORPEN

I'm awfully sorry, sir. I've lost that too. I dropped it when I fell into the wire and tore my hand. I've got this flash-light---shall I hand this to Captain Worrall?

(he produces flash-light and flashes it in WORRALL'S face)

COLONEL S

You are frivolous, sir! How dare you!

ENTWHISTLE

Haw!

(yawns)

You'll excuse me, Colonel, but we don't seem to be getting at the trouble and it's nearly four o'clock. What was it the blighter did?

COLONEL S

Did? Did? He surrendered Hill Sixty-three without firing a shot or losing a man!

ENTWHISTLE

Good Gad! You don't say so! Disgraceful! Eh, what?

COLONEL

Damnable! My orders to him before he went over the top were to capture Hill Sixty-three and to hold it at any cost. At any cost, I said, sir.

(to ORPEN)

Do you deny that I said "at any cost"?

ORPEN

No, sir. You said it four or five times. I heard you.

COLONEL S.

Well, sir! Then what the devil do you mean by coming back alive and bringing all your infernal platoons with you? You never lost a man, sir,--not one!

ORPEN

Yes I did, sir. I lost one. He fell into a shell-hole full of water and drowned before we could reach him.

COLONEL

Drowned, sir! Who ever heard of such a death for a soldier?

ORPEN

We did our best to save him, sir, but he went down like a lump of lead. It's all this equipment we make the men carry--nobody could possibly swim in it. It's ridiculous.

COLONEL S

Silence, sir! I shall try you by court-martial and have you shot.

ORPEN

If you are going to shoot me, sir, why waste time on a trial?

ENIWHISTLE

Be silent, sir! Do you dare to suggest that the Colonel is prejudiced?

ORPEN

He said he was going to have me shot, so I suppose he is just a little bit prejudiced.

COLONEL S

Don't aggravate your offense by insolence, sir!

ORPEN

I don't see any reason for being polite; you can't do more than shoot me whatever I say.

COLONEL S.

Try to remember, sir, that you are an officer and a gentleman.

ORPEN

Temporary, sir, temporary!

COLONEL S.

What do you mean, sir?

ORPEN

A temporary officer is only a temporary gentleman.

COLONEL S.

You are a disgrace to the regiment, sir,--I am ashamed to command a battalion in which such a disgraceful thing could occur. I've a dashed good mind to resign.

ORPEN

I wish you would. You needn't shoot me then.

(COLONEL STRAUBENZEE is overcome with rage)

ENIWHISTLE

Haw! By Jove! Haven't you a spark of decency left?

ORPEN

Lots of it. I think I did the only decent thing.

COLONEL S.

Decent thing! Good heaven! You surrender Hill 63 without a struggle, sir! You return with your damnable platoon intact, sir! You don't lose a single man---

ORPEN

(interrupting)

I tell you I did lose one--by drowning.

COLONEL S.

Don't interrupt, sir! Your orders were to hold Hill 63 at any cost--at any cost, sir! Your brother officers carried out my orders, sir. They fought magnificently, sir! We've lost half the battalion in casualties! All your brother officers have died for their country, sir-----

ORPEN

I really don't see how that helps us to get to Berlin.

COLONEL S

Silence! Half the battalion killed and wounded, and you and your miserable platoon save your skins and retreat!

ORPEN

I didn't retreat until I saw your attack had failed, sir. Suppose I had stayed out there with my platoon after you were driven back, what would have happened to me and my men, sir?

COLONEL S.

You would have been wiped out to the last man, sir.

ORPEN

You'll forgive my saying so, Colonel, but I don't think you've quite caught the idea of this war. We came here to beat the dear old enemy. If we all get wiped out--the enemy wins!

COLONEL S.

Silence, sir! Wiped out I say, sir--a glorious achievement! Half the battalion was gloriously destroyed---

ORPEN

And if I'd stayed on that rotten hill we should have lost another quarter. As it is, I've saved 'em for your next performance.

COLONEL S.

But think of the disgrace, sir!

ORPEN

I don't see it, sir. We should have done no good if we had stayed there. All we could have done would be to have died. It wouldn't have done anybody any good.

COLONEL S

It was your plain duty to hold that hill or die, sir.

ORPEN

May I ask if you had any special grudge against me and my platoon when you picked us for that job?

COLONEL S.

How dare you suggest such a thing, sir! It was an honor.

ORPEN

We came mighty near to joining the roll of honor. The whole hill was infested with Germans and machine-guns. Our getting away was sheer luck.

COLONEL S.

The worst piece of luck that ever came your way, sir. If I had been there I'd have shot you with my own gun!

ORPEN

If you had been there, we'd all have been shot. But you weren't. You were safe in your dug-out!

(COLONEL S. is again speechless with rage. He appears to be going to throw a fit)

ENTWHISTLE

If the position was so impossible, how did you manage to withdraw your men without losing any of them?

ORPEN

(irritably)

I do wish you'd.....

COLONEL S.

Don't be insolent, sir! Answer the Major's question.

ORPEN

I told you, sir. It was sheer luck. When we got through the wood and tried to deploy on the slope of the hill, we found it was simple bristling with machine-guns and Huns all dug in. They could have wiped us off the earth, but they were pretty decent and called to us to surrender.

COLONEL S.

And you surrendered! You damned coward!

ORPEN

Well, sir, not exactly. I made my men lie down, and went on myself with my hands up. One of the enemy came out to meet me and he turned out to be a fellow I knew---

COLONEL S.

You have the audacity to confess that you know a German? A Boche? A Hun?

ORPEN

He was on the stock exchange in London when I knew him. He's an awfully good fellow. His name is---

COLONEL S.

I do not wish to hear his name, sir. You should have shot him.

ORPEN

How could I? My hands were over my head! And, besides, I'd have been a cad to do a thing like that. He's really a good chap and he was pleased to see me. We had a yarn about old times and then got down to cases. He showed me that he and his chaps had got us cold if we started scrapping, but he didn't want to shoot me and he didn't want to lose any of his men, so he gave me the choice of calling it off or taking a free ride to happy Germany as prisoners.

COLONEL S.

You have been negotiating with the enemy, sir!

ORPEN

But he was a pal of mine!

COLONEL S.

Disgusting! You saved your miserable life at the expense of your honor. You come skulking back without losing a man---

ORPEN

I keep telling you I did lose one. Drowned in a shell-hole. He's got to be accounted for somehow. If you won't count him he'll have to go as a naval casualty.

COLONEL S.

You disobeyed my orders, sir! I told you to hold Hill 63 at any cost.

ORPEN

Yes, I know. It sounds all right if you say it quickly and don't think what it means, but we never had a chance to hold it. The enemy was there first.

ENTWHISTLE

In spite of that, sir, you, disobeyed orders.

ORPEN

If it comes to that, Major, you and your crowd didn't do what you were told. You were ordered to occupy the Boche first line but I saw you all running like mischief for the home trench. How did you manage to slip away from those three Germans who were chasing you, Major?

ENTWHISTLE

I -- er -- haw! Damn!

COLONEL S.

That is not the point, sir. You were told to hold Hill 63 at any cost!

ORPEN

Yes, sir, I know! You keep on saying it and it doesn't mean a thing. You expected me to throw away my men's lives and my own for nothing because you've got an idea that dying for the country is the whole art of war. Well, I didn't do it. Now what are you going to do about it?

COLONEL S.

(points to the door L.)

Go into my room sir. Major Entwhistle and I will discuss your case in private. Captain Worrall!

WORRALL

Sir?

COLONEL S.

Escort the prisoner into the next room.

(Worrall salutes. Turns to Orpen and motions him to go into the Colonel's bedroom, Worrall closing the door. Colonel Straubensee rises from the table and goes to fire.)

Well! of all the impertinent cubs!

ENTWHISTLE

That's the worst of bringing these civilians into this job as officers. If they can see any way of getting out of dying for the country, by Gad, they take it.

COLONEL S.

Was it true that he saw you running away from those Boches?

ENTWHISTLE

I don't know how many there were. I didn't stay to count the blighters. I just sprinted.

COLONEL S.

H'm. Suppose that comes out at his trial.

ENTWHISTLE

You are going to court-martial him, then?

COLONEL S.

Of course! What else can I do?

ENTWHISTLE

Why not shoot him and cut out the trial? If you try him he'll say just the kind of things he said to us. You know it'll never do for the General to hear that you were in your dug-out while the attack was on.

COLONEL S.

No, and I don't suppose you want the General to know that you were chased home by three Huns.

ENTWHISTLE

I suggest that you adopt the German method. Order him to commit suicide.

COLONEL S.

I thought that was Japanese?

ENTWHISTLE

It doesn't matter what it is. Order him to do it.

COLONEL S.

Suppose he refuses?

ENTWHISTLE

He wouldn't do that. If he knows it's coming to him anyhow he might as well do it himself. He's a fairly obliging sort of bounder.

COLONEL S.

It's an idea, certainly. We could say he had an accident - cleaning his gun.

ENTWHISTLE

That's the ticket. It'll save a lot of explanation.

COLONEL S.

You're right. What's more, he shall do it now - at once. Will you call him in, please?

(Entwhistle rises, crosses to L. door and calls Orpen, followed by Worrall, enters)

I have decided to give you a chance to avoid scandal. I do not wish to bring disgrace upon the regiment, so I shall not try you by court-martial.

ORPEN

Thank you, sir.

COLONEL S.

Instead, you will shoot yourself - now!

ORPEN

Thank you, sir! What with, sir?

COLONEL S.

Your own revolver. We shall say that you had an accident with it.

ORPEN

You took mine away from me.

ENTWHISTLE

How infernally careless you temporary fellows are!

COLONEL S.

(unhitches his gun from his holster)

Take mine.

(hands gun)

ORPEN

(takes gun in L. hand)

Thank you, sir. I'm not sure if I can shoot it left-handed...my right is out of action.

COLONEL S.

Remember! It is for the honor of the regiment. Go into that room - and may God have mercy on your soul!

ORPEN

I hope he'll have mercy on my shooting. Don't blame me if I make a mess of it left-handed. I suppose you don't mind my bleeding all over your bed?

COLONEL S.

Have some decency! Go!

(Orpen looks at the three men with a flicker of a smile.

Then he walks quietly to the bedroom door. He turns and speaks)

ORPEN

Goodbye.

(He goes into the bedroom and closes the door. Col. Straubensee signs to Worrall and Entwistle to fall in along-side himself. They line up with the Colonel with their backs to the door. At the salute there is a long pause. Then three shots ring out from the bed-room in quick succession. Simultaneously a long splinter splits out of the door and through the hole the smoke of the gun curls. The three officers each give a scream of pain, clasp the lower portion of their backs and gyrate round in a series of hops. The bedroom door is flung open, disclosing Orpen, the gun in his hand.)

I say! I hope you're not hurt! I had three shots and missed myself every time.

COLONEL S.

(faces Orpen and shakes his fist at him)

You infernal scoundrel! You did it on purpose!

ORPEN

I'm frightfully sorry. I told you I wasn't sure with my left hand.

COLONEL S.

Are you incapable of carrying out an order, sir? I told you to shoot yourself!

ORPEN

(raises gun)

Shall I try again?

(Colonel S. and Major Entwistle dive for cover under the table. Worrall crouches behind boxes.)

COLONEL S.

(shouting)

Put that gun down, sir!

ORPEN

What's the matter? You all seem scared!

ENTWISTLE

Scared! Who wouldn't be?

COLONEL S.

Put that infernal gun down, sir! Put it down at once! I order you to do so!

ORPEN

Don't you want me to commit suicide, sir?

COLONEL S.

Yes! Go and drown yourself with your infernal man in that trench hole. You're not fit to be trusted with firearms.

ENTWHISTLE

No, don't let's have any more suicide. By Gad! It hurts!

ORPEN

I warned you I wasn't much good with my left hand, sir.

COLONEL S.

Listen! What the devil's that?

(He, Worrall and Entwhistle scramble to their feet. The R. door opens and Lieutenant Waters, followed by Private Tonks, in a state of tousled half dress and sleepiness, burst into the room.)

WATERS

I thought I 'erd shots. Did any of you 'ear 'em?

COLONEL S.

Did any of us hear them? Three of us felt them. I'm hit and so is the Major and Worrall.

WATERS

But 'oo did it?

ORPEN

I think it must have been a Boche spy who slipped in among our men when we came back. I didn't see him - I was in the Colonel's room when it happened. Tonks! You'd better telephone down to the dressing station for an ambulance. The Colonel and the others all need first aid.

WATERS

But what became of the 'Un?

ORPEN

He -- er -- escaped. Didn't he, Colonel?

COLONEL S.

(repressing an impulse to strangle his junior)

Er - yes - he did. I shot at him but missed. Dammit! Tonks, are you going to telephone for that ambulance or not?

TONKS

Yes, sir! H'at once, sir!

(He salutes and exits R.)

COLONEL S.

Waters, you'd better go and telephone yourself. That fool is sure to make a mess of it. Tell 'em to send the doctor up with the ambulance; perhaps he can attend to us here. We're not much hurt.

ENTWHISTLE

I say! You know I believe I'm bleedin' to death! What!

At Any Cost. . .16

COLONEL S.

Nonsense. Waters, get along to that telephone, and hurry!
(Waters, entirely mystified, salutes and exits R.)

ORPEN

(to Colonel S.)

Thank you, sir. That was very good of you.

COLONEL S.

What the devil d'you mean, sir? Do you suppose I was going to take an infernal cockney quartermaster into my confidence and tell him that I'd been shot in the - ahem! - back by my junior second lieutenant? No, sir! We have to avoid scandal at any cost.

ENTWHISTLE

I say, you know, I believe I'm bleedin' to death!

COLONEL S.

Nonsense! Come along -- we'll hobble down and meet the ambulance.
As for you, sir!

(to Orpen)

Let this be a lesson to you. Come along, Major.

(the Colonel, Entwhistle and Worrall link arms and hobble out of door R. Orpen follows to door and looks after them. Then looks down at the gun in his hand.)

ORPEN

That was pretty decent of the old man. Funny that he never noticed that I'm left-handed!

C U R T A I N