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| Siegfried Sassoon  14. **A Working Party**   |  |  | | --- | --- | | THREE hours ago he blundered up the trench, |  | | Sliding and poising, groping with his boots; |  | | Sometimes he tripped and lurched against the walls |  | | With hands that pawed the sodden bags of chalk. |  | | He couldn’t see the man who walked in front; | *5* | | Only he heard the drum and rattle of feet |  | | Stepping along barred trench boards, often splashing |  | | Wretchedly where the sludge was ankle-deep. |  | |  |  | | Voices would grunt ‘Keep to your right—make way!’ |  | | When squeezing past some men from the front-line: | *10* | | White faces peered, puffing a point of red; |  | | Candles and braziers glinted through the chinks |  | | And curtain-flaps of dug-outs; then the gloom |  | | Swallowed his sense of sight; he stooped and swore |  | | Because a sagging wire had caught his neck. | *15* | |  |  | | A flare went up; the shining whiteness spread |  | | And flickered upward, showing nimble rats |  | | And mounds of glimmering sand-bags, bleached with rain; |  | | Then the slow silver moment died in dark. |  | | The wind came posting by with chilly gusts | *20* | | And buffeting at corners, piping thin. |  | | And dreary through the crannies; rifle-shots |  | | Would split and crack and sing along the night, |  | | And shells came calmly through the drizzling air |  | | To burst with hollow bang below the hill. | *25* | |  |  | | Three hours ago he stumbled up the trench; |  | | Now he will never walk that road again: |  | | He must be carried back, a jolting lump |  | | Beyond all need of tenderness and care. |  | |  |  | | He was a young man with a meagre wife | *30* | | And two small children in a Midland town; |  | | He showed their photographs to all his mates, |  | | And they considered him a decent chap |  | | Who did his work and hadn’t much to say, |  | | And always laughed at other people’s jokes | *35* | | Because he hadn’t any of his own. |  | |  |  | | That night when he was busy at his job |  | | Of piling bags along the parapet, |  | | He thought how slow time went, stamping his feet |  | | And blowing on his fingers, pinched with cold. | *40* | | He thought of getting back by half-past twelve, |  | | And tot of rum to send him warm to sleep |  | | In draughty dug-out frowsty with the fumes |  | | Of coke, and full of snoring weary men. |  | |  |  | | He pushed another bag along the top, | *45* | | Craning his body outward; then a flare |  | | Gave one white glimpse of No Man’s Land and wire; |  | | And as he dropped his head the instant split |  | | His startled life with lead, and all went out. |  | |