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| Siegfried Sassoon14. **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. |  |

 |