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"BILLY" --- A Christmas Carol

"WHO'S your lady friend, Billy?"
"My mother."

I knew it, but lord! how I loved to hear the fellow say that word!

We were standing-to on the trench fire-step, within three minutes of the word "go!" It wanted a good half-hour of daylight and I know the boy couldn't see the picture he took from his pocket. But, bless you, he only wanted to *feel* that it was there.

It was Billy's first time over the top. He had been in our section less than a month and only yesterday had been promoted to full corporal! But the responsibility had been well placed. He was a peach at any job, and there wasn't a man of us from the section commander down who would have grugged Billy anything in promotion.

We were all cheerful—or pretended to be—in those tense moments before the pipe of the whistle.

"How goes it, Billy?"

"All right, Sergeant, but I wish we were off—"

And we were.

Now you know all about the Somme advance. It has been described in a way by newspaper men, but "The Somme" isn't the point of my story. It's Billy and Billy only I am concerned with, and I think any of us chaps could tell you better about him than the writer Johnnies could.

Nervy? Lord bless ye, no sir! I never saw anything of the jumps about Billy, and yet he looked more like a good-looking girl than most girls I have known.

In the minutes before that attack when we fellows fairly ate up the fags to steady our nerves, Billy looked as I have seen him at church parade back of the line. Ye see we're all right when we get going, but it takes "some" man to play the waiting game before a big scrap.

Well we got there—and a few hundred yards beyond—but we dropped quite a bunch on the way. I was knocked out, as I thought, pretty early in the game, but they tell me I was picked up within ten yards of the Hun second line.

That's the time—between clearing the parapet and getting home—when you "see red" or see nothing. But one thing I did

A True Story of the Canadian Army of Liberation, told by a Sergeant of the Line in the Citizen Army, and specially transcribed for the "Canadian Thresherman and Farmer."

see and can remember was Billy digging himself in like a ground-hog, with a couple of fellows lying dead or senseless beside him.

Well, sir, I woke up at the dressing station—concussion and left leg done to a pulp. They trimmed it at the base hospital next day, and there I was, out of the show.

recognized me. Lord, sir! the light of Heaven was in that boy's eyes. The nurse wouldn't give me any details but said it would be a miracle if he lived many hours.

He knew he was going out. To the rest of us that would have felt like taking our medicine, but to see Billy, you'd have thought the war was over and he had won it.

The night he went west, he gave me that picture I saw him take from his pocket on the fire-step. He pointed to an address on the back and I read all he wanted to say in his eyes for he couldn't speak. They pulled my bed close to Billy's and when he knew I

had his message all right he gripped my hand—and it was still there when he passed on.

Well, here we are in Halifax harbor—home again, a company of "broken men," they call us! But we'll give them the lie yet, won't we, Ginger? They gave me a new peg at Rockhampton and now I can do almost anything with it that I could do with the old leg.

Them three fellows are all from our section. They knew Billy and were with him when last post was sounded. We got him a nice little cross and there's a bunch of angels over there who will never let a weed grow on Billy's grave.

Ginger and Weedon and Gillie can speak for themselves, but as for me—well if I'm not a better man I'm a different chap from the bo-hunk I was when I enlisted at Regina. And Billy did it.

You see it's like this—we boys have discussed it on the way across and we're all agreed. Last Christmas eve our old padre was preaching his best Christmas preach from that text where it says that Emmanuel means "God with us."

Well you know what a professional Bible puncher would have to say about that, but we chaps got to debating on how it was possible for us to have a date with God all the time if the Huns with their "Gott mitt uns" were in line with the Almighty as well.

We were a rough bunch and we could make nothing out of it until some time after we got to know Billy. One night he took a



EMMANUEL

I could have stood that, sir, but the worst was yet to come. They got Billy, too, and his lights were on the blink, they said. He rallied and lived a week and I wouldn't swap that week for the whole lifetime of any other man on earth. As luck would have it, he was put next me in the ward, and you should have seen Billy's face when he first