

The Bearer

By JOSEPH SCHULL, MOOSE JAW

JULES stared steadily into the night. Occasionally star-shells bursting overhead threw a ghastly light upon the waste of No Man's Land in front of him. The wire, which had appeared as a dark blur, gleamed redly for a moment. On the ground showed weird, distorted heaps, which seemed to change, to move, as a lurid green light succeeded the red. Jules shuddered.

"Is it not terrible, Pierre?" he said to his companion. "At times I am almost unnerved with the horror of it; men striving and planning to kill their fellow men, living like rats—hating like beasts. Les Boches; can I hate them? I should, I should. They have destroyed a fair land, have rendered it hideous in the sight of God and man—my own land—and yet I cannot hate them, the men, the poilus of their army. We, who lived in their land for a time, know that most of them were as kindly, as lovable as our own people. And I cannot believe that they wished the war—it was their overlords, their generals, their Emperor, and God's vengeance will fall upon them. But—s-st!"

He was staring out into the night again, more intently than ever, his hand gripped on his rifle, his lips suddenly drawn back from clenched teeth.

"See," he hissed into his companion's ear, "straight in front. A raiding party."

There was a muttered curse from the man who stood beside him, a click, and the machine gun sputtered its deadly message into the dark.

Again a ghastly light illumined the ground. The figures that Jules had seen were visible no more; only the wire gleaming redly and the darker gap where the lane began.

No; he was mistaken.

He gripped Pierre's arm. "Pierre," he cried, "see; there is someone moving out there still! See, by the lane."

"One moment and there will not be," said Pierre, grimly training the gun, "Ma petite longs to speak again."

"No, no!" cried Jules, "see, he is wounded, else he would not rise to his feet as he does. Ah! he falls! Do not shoot, Pierre, it is useless."

They stood staring out into the blackness, now less and less frequently illumined.

"He moves again," cried Jules suddenly, as another light went up. "See, he is on

his knees crawling round and round. Poor wretch, he has lost his head in his pain!"

"Better to put him out of it," said Pierre, glaring through the loophole. "It is our duty, and would be a kindness to him probably."

Jules also stared through a loophole. "No," he said, "he is helpless and wounded. He can do no harm, Pierre. It would be murder."

The night seemed blacker. Rain fell with a steady patter upon their helmets. The darkness was like a curtain before their faces.

Jules shuddered again. "God! to be out there in this cold and rain," he said, "wounded, perhaps dying—perhaps, when prisoner who died yesterday. Is it not terrible? Perhaps he is young—a mere boy, as that prisoner who died yesterday. It is not terrible to think of, Pierre?"

"But it is war," said Pierre.

They were silent. At long intervals a star-shell burst overhead, but the man by the wire moved no more. Stray bullets whined past occasionally. Some distance off was heard the roaring of the guns, occasionally a spatter of machine-gun fire down the line. And still the rain fell steadily.

There was another burst of light. Jules seized Pierre's arm.

"He moved again!" he cried. "See, Pierre, did he not move?—I can hear it no longer," and before Pierre could interpose he had climbed over the parapet and was making his way toward the wire.

"Jules! Jules!" cried Pierre wildly. "Jules, come back! It is madness! And for a damned Boche!"

He made as if to follow, then he relaxed with a groan. It was useless. Jules was too far on his way now, and, in another burst of light, he thought he saw him, prostrate on the ground. Then slowly, very slowly, Jules crawled forward toward the figure by the wire.

He drew near. The form on the ground moved, it rose; the man was on one knee facing Jules as he came forward.

"He cannot be badly wounded," thought Jules as he approached, "or he would not move like that."

"Do you speak French?" he asked when he neared the man.

"Yes," came the reply.

"Are you badly hurt?"

"I do not know. I seem paralysed, I cannot walk."

"Perhaps you are still dazed. I will carry you."

"They are together," cried the agonized watcher in the trench. "What are they doing? Will this cursed light never go out? Ah, Jules is taking him up in his arms. He is coming back!" and the light died out, hiding the scene from his straining eyes.

Another light illumined the ground. The watcher saw Jules making his way slowly forward, staggering under his burden.

"Why does he not wait until the light goes out?" cried Pierre. "It is death to walk upright as he is doing."

Even as he spoke there was a burst of machine gun firing, and Jules, laboring under his burden, stumbled and fell, as the light faded.

"Jules! Jules!" cried Pierre brokenheartedly, "My brother, my little brother! He is killed! Oh, God . . . But stop!"

Another star-shell had flashed out, and by its light he saw one of the figures kneeling by the side of the other.

"Ah-h, le bon Dieu!" he cried, weak from relief, "he is not killed! See, he picks the Boche up again. How he staggers. Leave him, Jules, leave him! How slowly you come! Hurry, my brother! Ah, Jules, you are wounded."

The man staggered slowly forward, carrying his burden upon his shoulders. He seemed almost about to sink to the ground, but still he made his way toward the trench. The distance lessened slowly.

Nearer and nearer staggered the man. "Hurry, Jules, hurry!" cried Pierre, "only a little farther."

The light had gone out but the man was within ten yards of Pierre now. Nearer and nearer he came.

Pierre seized the burden from his shoulders and placed it in the trench. He opened the coat and placed his ear to the man's heart for a moment. Then he turned to the other.

"Jules," he said, "it was foolish to do this. The Boche is quite dead. Are you badly wounded, mon cher?"

Then he fell back with a gasping cry. The man who had borne the body in was not Jules.

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