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A TRENCH TRAGEDY.

I murdered him!!! There is no question that I was the one who committed the deed—I cannot even plead temporary insanity; in fact the only temporary thing I have about me is my commission in His Majesty's Canadian Forces—and that, surely, would not be taken as evidence of insanity! Even now as I sit in the gathering darkness, no ghosts rise up ethereally from the ground to haunt me—no “still small voice”, or “qualms”, or “pricks” or what ever it is of conscience, disturb me; in fact, callous as it may seem, I have no regrets.

Just listen for a few moments and I will tell you the whole story

It was early morning, that glorious period just after “stand-down”—and rum issue, when all the world seems painted in roseate hues, and life is just one long sweet song. I had just returned from my usual before-breakfast constitutional down the trench, and satisfied myself that all my company's riflebarrels were “mineral jellied” and all feet “frost bite greased” satisfactorily—that is the former—I cannot claim that the smell of pedal extremities is ever really satisfactory to me in the early morn. I had solemnly assured the irate adjutant (through the long distart phone) that to the best of my knowledge the wind was north-east by east, with a slight taste of muskmelon in it that might be a new German gas; but on the other hand it might be from someone having thrown over the parapet the last pair of lavender socks he had received from home. Sitting down in my dug-out I made out my report to the O. C. concerning our progress during the twenty-four hours that elapsed since my last report—I acquainted him with the fact, that our working parties had really worked themselves to a standstill (that is; in the opinion of the junior N. C. Os. and privates) and that the retvetting stakes driven had really been driven in the manner laid down by SC/14/Z/942 and that the prescribed number of filled sand-bags per square metre had been well and truly laid (I was tempted at this point to add that if he didn't believe me he could come and count them himself, but an inborn reverence for discipline stayed my hand—and besides I am due for leave in two weeks). Then having done my “bit” towards ending this terrible struggle, I breakfasted.

My Aunt Agatha heard some time ago that there was a dearth of suitable literature in the trenches and since that time has kindly forwarded the “War Cry” each week. I had just picked up the latest copy and was enthralled in a graphic personal description by Brigadier - - - - of how in the dim past he had fallen from grace, and how on being picked up by the police he had claimed that it was

a banana skin that was the cause of his downfall—but that he had seen “the light” in time and pleaded guilty and got away with a fine of ten of the best or the option of twenty-one days of the worst—and how “They” had come forward and held out a helping hand (and paid the fine) and given him a job beating the big drum and so he had never “back-slid” again, and had risen to his present high and dignified rank.

I was, as I said before, enthralled in this wonderful story when HE walked in. He wore no equipment; though this is always done in the best of circles when on “front line” work; he spoke never a word either of apology or enquiry; though he was a stranger to me and had no right to come in. He did not stand to attention and salute, in fact his whole manner was so insolent that instead of inquiring his business I simply yelled “GET OUT”. He merely turned and glared at me with a half-snarl on his face and shuffled over to one side of my dug-out.

Thoroughly enraged by now I seized the first thing handy on the table (which happened to be my “very pistol”) and threw it at his ugly head—unfortunately I missed; then getting more enraged every minute I threw everything else I could grab until suddenly I realized that my only box of “De Reskes” had gone with the rest, then I pulled out my automatic, for my blood was up by now and almost without looking I fired—there was a terrific crash and splinters of glass and my last bottle of pickles had gone west, and there appeared as though by magic a neat hole through my new trench waders hanging on the opposite wall. He gave one earthly shriek as the bullet whistled past his ear and jumped for the other corner—outside I could hear cries of “stand too”, “here they come”, “gas” and the banging of gongs, and the yells of men suddenly awakened; but I was past worrying about how much disturbance I caused now. A terrible calm had come over me now and I stood there looking down the sights full into his terror stricken eyes. He stood in his corner, his back to the wall and snarled horribly yet afraid to advance. Then I fired, and as the bullet struck him full in the forehead he rolled over sideways and with a last sobbing gasp he died.

I returned my gun to it's holster, and with a forced calmness, I called my batman to bury the corpse and clean up the mess, then went and quieted the false alarm, that my shooting had caused.

In my reports to the O. C. that day, at noon, was recorded the following:

Casualties. Killed in action 23/1/26.

One rat, brown, large; regtl. number and unit unknown.

By Iddy Umpty.