EVELYN WAUGH

SWORD OF HONOUR

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Sword of Honour

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EVELYN
WAUGH

Sword of Honour

WITH AN INTRODUCTION
BY MARTIN STANNARD

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Introduction

Evelyn Waugh described *Sword of Honour* (1965), as a 'recension' – i.e. an edited-down version – of three earlier novels: *Men at Arms* (1952), *Officers and Gentlemen* (1955), and *Unconditional Surrender* (1961). In effect it is a new work, his last novel, and arguably his greatest. For a decade he had held this massive conception in his head, leading up to his short story, 'Compassion' (1949), most of which, in an astonishing feat of literary carpentry, he spliced into the manuscript of *Unconditional Surrender*. Ultimately, compassion becomes the overarching theme: the spiritual collision between warfare and Christian ethics. The delay between the second and third volumes was mainly caused by Waugh's suffering the hallucinations recounted in his autobiographical fiction *The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold* (1957). Although *Men at Arms* was advertised as beginning a trilogy, *Officers and Gentlemen* was presented as completing the series. When Graham Greene asked what had happened to the third, Waugh replied: 'I'm not sure that I'll be able to write it. I may go off my head again, and this time permanently.'*

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* 'Both Dross and Gold', *Books and Bookman*, 22 (October 1976), 19–21; Greene's review of Waugh's *Diaries*, ed. Michael Davie.

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Madness, darkness and dishonour are *Sword of Honour's leitmotifs*. As we track the disappointments of its loveless Catholic hero, Guy Crouchback, his dead brother, crazy Ivor, haunts the narrative. Waugh's diaries and letters later revealed that Guy closely re-enacts Waugh's military experience, even down to one of his men requesting leave to attend a dancing competition, and the discovery of a dead British soldier on a stretcher. The book is a summation of Waugh's life's work, including half-portraits of his acquaintances: Julia Stitch, his image of Lady Diana Cooper, in *Scoop* (1938), who returns here still charming but now manipulative; Everard Spruce as a version of Cyril Connolly. Corporal-Major Ludovic also goes half-mad (with guilt?), and writes a novel echoing *Brideshead Revisited* (1945). Like *Brideshead*, Ludovic's *The Death Wish* becomes hugely popular. Unlike it, there is no theological dimension to defend against insanity. Spruce describes *The Death Wish* as high-class trash but its title becomes a theme of *Unconditional Surrender*. Was Waugh offering here a self-critical retrospect of *Brideshead*'s romantic Catholicism hinging on divine intervention, of its over-writing which he pruned back for the 1960 revised edition? Was he close to apostasy? Certainly the Second Vatican Council's changes to the liturgy*

* Chiefly these involved replacing Latin with the vernacular of each country, but Vatican 2 also produced changes to the way in which services were conducted e.g. turning the priest round to face the congregation, inviting celebrants to shake hands afterwards with their neighbour. Waugh preferred the impersonal chanting in a *lingua franca*, the fact that one could go into a Catholic church anywhere in the world and find the same ceremony. He felt that the priest should be a mere medium for the Holy Spirit, not a 'personality' engaging his flock with his eloquence.

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nearly broke his heart. 'The buggering up of the Church', he informed Nancy Mitford, 'is a deep sorrow to me [. . .].'* 'On reading the book', he noted in his own brief Preface to *Sword of Honour* (see below), 'I realized that I had done something quite outside my original intention. I had written an obituary of the Roman Catholic Church in England as it had existed for centuries. [. . .] It never occurred to me [. . .] that the Church was susceptible to change. I was wrong.'

Sword of Honour is strung between two crucial statements. The first, near the beginning, explains Guy's attitude to war. He is in sunlit Italy, an aristocrat in the family villa, Santa Dulcina, isolated and alienated. The place had been an earthly paradise for previous generations of Crouchbacks but somehow never for Guy. Among the local people he is not '*simpatico*'. Eight years earlier, in 1931, he had been appalled to discover that he was not *simpatico* to his wife, Virginia, a bright Society girl who had bolted with Tommy Blackhouse. Not being a Catholic, she had been able to divorce Guy, and Blackhouse became the second of her three husbands and many lovers. Being a Catholic, Guy could have no other wife. He carries this wound with him throughout, and in self-imposed exile contemplates his position after the Russo-German Treaty of Non-Aggression signed in Moscow on 23 August 1939:

Towards the end of his life Waugh ceased regular church attendance, and had the Latin Mass said at his home by a friend, Fr. Caraman.

* 5 September 1965, *The Letters of Evelyn Waugh*, ed. Mark Amory (Weidenfeld, 1980), p. 633.

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> He had lived too close to fascism in Italy to share the opposing enthusiasms of his countrymen. He saw it neither as a calamity nor as a rebirth; as a rough improvisation merely. [. . .] The German Nazis he knew to be mad and bad. Their participation dishonoured the cause of Spain. [. . .] He expected his country to go to war in a panic, for the wrong reasons or for no reason at all, with the wrong allies, in pitiful weakness. But now, splendidly, everything had become clear. The enemy at last was plain in view, huge and hateful, all disguise cast off. It was the Modern Age in arms. Whatever the outcome, there was a place for him in that battle.

The second statement, towards the end, constitutes Guy's confession of complicity in evil. He is in conversation with Mme. Kanyi, a Jewish Displaced Person in Communist-controlled Serbia, whom, as a British officer, he is trying to repatriate to Italy. 'Is it too simple,' she asks,

> 'to say that only the Nazis wanted war. These communists wanted it too. It was the only way in which they could come to power. Many of my people wanted it, to be revenged on the Germans, to hasten the creation of the national state. It seems to me there was a will to war, a death wish, everywhere. Even good men thought their private honour would be satisfied by war. They could assert their manhood by killing and being killed. [. . .] Were there none in England?'

'God forgive me,' Guy replies, 'I was one of them'. *Sword of Honour* dramatizes Guy's move from the first position to the second,

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offering a counter-narrative to the many glorious tales of the Allies' victory over Nazi barbarism.

Waugh doesn't explain why the Treaty represented a turning point for Guy, or the reference to 'the cause of Spain'. Guy is reading this development quite differently from most of his countrymen. Just eleven months earlier, Neville Chamberlain's Munich Agreement of 30 September 1938 had apparently saved the UK from combat. Although Hitler had disregarded the Agreement by further dismembering Czechoslovakia, Britain and France had hoped to blockade German expansion with the help of the USSR. Now, suddenly, Chamberlain's 'piece of paper' became worthless. Agreeing not to fight each other allowed Germany and the USSR to partition Poland between them, and on 1 September 1939 when the Nazis invaded Poland, the UK declared war. It was a devastating geopolitical change for Britain to have both massive forces allied against it. For many Britons this meant probable defeat. It was a dark moment, followed by many more as Germany quickly overran Europe, and Italy joined the Axis. America maintained an isolationist stance until Japan bombed Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941. And although at home there were some eerily quiet months (the 'Phoney War'), British forces were routed in Norway and France, and the homeland's cities were soon shattered by the Blitz. All this had begun with the Treaty. Why, then, did Guy welcome it and return in August 1939 to sign up?

The answer is that he is a traditionalist Catholic. The 'cause of Spain' was not the cause as most Britons saw it. For them, Franco's military coup in defence of the Catholic Church and

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the monarchy was a fascist outrage. Waugh was quietly pro-Franco, had lauded Mussolini's 1935 invasion of Abyssinia, and later, like Greene, opposed the suppression of the Catholic Church by Mexico's socialist government. The USSR, to many British socialists in the 1930s still 'Mother Russia', was to Waugh and to Guy nothing short of the Antichrist. Neither man had any interest in politics. Left and Right were equally despicable in their compromises and self-seeking. It was a question of the defence of Christendom, which for both meant the Roman Catholic Church. And this was not merely about dogma. It was associated, essentially, with the defence of European civilization, and with a spiritual view of the world opposed to rationalist secularism. In his early days in the Army, Guy finds himself discussing religion with the Anglican chaplain. 'Do you agree,' [Guy] asked earnestly, 'that the Supernatural Order is not something added to the Natural Order, like music or painting, to make everyday life more tolerable? It *is* everyday life. The supernatural is real; what we call "real" is a mere shadow, a passing fancy.' The chaplain (Anglicans are always seen by Waugh to be cowardly compromisers) replies using a euphemism made famous by *Scoop* when Lord Copper's employees lack the courage to disagree with him: 'Up to a point'.

Guy's supernatural world-view structures the novel's irony, particularly concerning marriage and divorce. *Men at Arms* covered Guy's 'honeymoon' military period in which there are many passages of buffoonery in the style of Waugh's early work. We have Ritchie-Hook's practical jokes, the prep-school atmosphere of Kut-al-Imara House, Apthorpe's enormous and improbable 'gear'

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(like William Boot's in *Scoop*), including his 'thunder-box', the 'Pioneers', 'composed of anti-fascist cellists and dealers in abstract painting from the Danubian Basin'. Guy, we learn, experiences 'something he had missed in boyhood, a happy adolescence'. He 'loved Major Tickeridge and Captain Bosanquet. He loved Apthorpe. He loved the oil painting over the fireplace of the unbroken square of Halberdiers in the desert. He loved the whole corps deeply and tenderly'. But it is the story of a marriage going slowly wrong. Guy is not *simpatico* in the Army, either. He is too old, too mild, too generous. He lacks the virility of his comrades, gets injured, not in action but in a rough-and-tumble regimental game. His failing eyesight renders him a poor marksman. He plays by the rules where others successfully cheat. As in Italy, he is an outsider. The club of chivalric soldiers he had hoped to join doesn't really want him. Throughout the trilogy he remains in a supporting role, ineffective, regarded suspiciously by most of his superiors.

This barrack-room farce is played out against a more sinister backdrop, so lightly sketched as to seem almost irrelevant, and which only gathers force as the trilogy progresses. The narrative is dated by the Christian calendar and its opposition by Axis advances: Russia invades Finland, the Germans cross the Meuse, take Boulogne and Paris, Dunkirk. When Guy finally sees action, it is inaction. The attempted landing at Dakar in West Africa is abandoned. Finally, he inadvertently kills Apthorpe, and is marked down as a disgrace.

The man noting such misdemeanours, Grace-Groundling-Marchpole, is a shadowy figure who becomes increasingly sinister

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in subsequent volumes along with Sir Ralph Brompton and Ian Kilbannock. None is a fighting soldier yet all have huge influence on the war effort. Marchpole keeps secret files and is obsessed with being 'in the picture', making an absurd and pernicious narrative out of meaningless chaos. Brompton, a former ambassador, is what Waugh would have called a 'pansy aesthete', a stereotype he often mocked but for which he usually had sympathy – e.g. Anthony Blanche in *Brideshead* and Ambrose Silk in *Put Out More Flags* (1942). Here, however, Brompton is secretive, self-important, lacks wit, is an untrustworthy communist sympathiser. He has had an affair with Ludovic, whose advancement he oversees. Kilbannock, a peer and former gossip columnist dressed as an Air Force officer, provides publicity for the absurd Hazardous Offensive Operations. As the importance of propaganda increases, so do the rings on his sleeve. All are dishonourable men, creating a fiction of the war unrelated to the truth. Among Guy's fellow soldiers, Apthorpe, Ivor Claire, de Souza and Ludovic are introduced as isolated figures. Apthorpe is plainly a fraud, Claire and Ludovic stylishly gay, and de Souza a subversive wit. Because Guy is neither an artist nor a social figure, Waugh seems to distribute aspects of his own personality among the supporting cast. Claire knows people like Julia; Ludovic is a writer who keeps a war diary; de Souza answers back and manufactures gossip. The only person other than Apthorpe to whom Guy feels close is Tommy Blackhouse, the man who had run off with Virginia and whom she has in turn deserted.

Reviewers of *Men at Arms*, particularly American reviewers, sometimes struggled to see the point of all this. By 1952, Waugh was established as the leading prose stylist of his generation.

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Expectations were high. *Brideshead* had made him an international bestseller with new legions of devotees in the States. *Men At Arms* was a different matter. It still sold well but in nothing like the numbers for *Brideshead*. Even Cyril Connolly had reservations. Waugh, he felt, had failed to establish relations between his military characters; it was more a chronicle than a novel, often reminiscent of Rudyard Kipling, Ian Hay and P. G. Wodehouse. This deliberate, ironical, chamber of echoes to reflect Guy's boyish infatuation with institutional life (the publisher had refused Waugh's idea for a Wodehousian dust-jacket) baffled some readers. Delmore Schwartz spoke for many Americans in finding the book tedious and snobbish. 'If one had no other information on the subject,' he wrote, '*Men At Arms* would convince one that the [. . .] War occurred solely to rescue Englishmen from boredom and decadence'.* There were mixed notices for the next two volumes, too. The young Kingsley Amis found the trilogy unamusing: '[Crouchback] is also a man with whom few, I hope, will want to identify themselves.'† But Connolly finally came round, regarding the whole trilogy as 'unquestionably the finest novel to have come out of the war.'‡

Officers and Gentlemen began unapologetically in the same vein with Guy trying to placate Apthorpe's spirit during the 1941 Blitz by transporting his gear to another clown, his friend Chatty Corner. Waugh had originally thought of making Corner the chief comic figure of the second volume but wisely desisted. Instead, the satire is directed against non-combatants and

* *Partisan Review*, 3 November 1952, 703–4.
† *Spectator*, 8 July 1935, 56–9.
‡ *Sunday Times*, 29 October 1961, 31.

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cowards: experimental novelists squirting a futile jet of water into the blazing Turtle's Club; the Air Marshal emerging from beneath the billiard table at Bellamy's (i.e. White's Club), explaining that he was following government air-raid instructions. The Battle of Britain (10 July–31 October 1940) is mentioned only in passing as the point 'when the Air Force was for a moment almost respectable'. London is darkness and chaos, the ruling class in disarray. Turning his back on this, Guy embarks 'on another stage of his pilgrimage', the search for Corner, 'which had begun [in Italy] at the tomb of Sir Roger' where Guy had touched the sword of this unsuccessful crusader and prayed for success. Guy's chivalric ambitions are now as absurd as Don Quixote's. He is a man marked, as Waugh himself had been, as unsuitable to lead men into battle.

A new character, 'Trimmer', is introduced to counterpoint Guy's fruitless honesty. Trimmer is a 'mongrel dog among the dustbins' of the People's War. Amoral, mindless, promiscuous, he has an affair with Virginia in fog-bound Glasgow. Previously he had been a hairdresser on a transatlantic liner, where he had first flirted with her when she was the gorgeous wife of an American millionaire, Hector Troy. Troy's name is one of several mock-epic allusions. Guy, like Dante, is approaching forty as he enters his dark wood in the last volume. (Guy is just one day older than Waugh.) Claire is described as 'that young prince of Athens [Theseus] sent as sacrifice to the Cretan labyrinth'. Virginia is an image of Helen of Troy, steadily falling from grace. Troy divorces her and leaves her impoverished. Her affair with Trimmer signals a new low point. She despises him but, encouraged by Kilbannock who sees a

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propaganda coup in Trimmer's humble origins, pretends to reciprocate infatuation to maintain his spirits. It is her 'war effort'.

Trimmer, like Apthorpe a fraud and a liar, has wangled his way into the elite Commandos alongside Guy. The first military action, Operation Popgun, involves both in a meaningless attack on an unnamed island, designed as a publicity exercise. Trimmer, ostensibly the commander, is drunk and covers himself in shame but Kilbannock assists him in writing the report. The unscrupulous General Whale insists that the account include a citation for the Military Cross. Trimmer is duly decorated, becomes a national hero, and tours factories to boost production. The hilarious report praises his 'exemplary coolness' and 'complete disregard for personal safety' under fire during a raid on 'the coast of occupied France'.

The second military action involves the Commandos' assisting with the evacuation of Crete. This is a long, much more serious, set-piece, ending with Guy's hallucinating in hospital about his escape, mute and nearly mad after days in an open boat. On Crete, another leading character emerges who is, like Trimmer, another 'dog'. First seen as a dull bureaucrat trying to report Guy in Alexandria for talking to a spy-priest, Col. 'Fido' Hound becomes the epitome of what Waugh sees as the Allied forces' cowardice. Under air attack, he hides in a culvert: 'like a hunted fox, like an air marshal under a billiard table, he crouched in torpor'; he loses touch with his men and HQ. Ivor Claire and Ludovic somehow get away despite clear orders that the Commandos should be the last to leave. Julia Stitch pulls strings, effecting Claire's transfer to Greece to avoid a court marshal for desertion.

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The war has become a series of fictions. There is no 'picture' to be in; all we have is a phantasmagoria, terrifyingly absurd. The style here is one of fractured images; Army language is spattered with unexplained acronyms. Language itself decays, and Waugh inserts arcane but precise words to counterbalance this: 'horripilant', 'undenticulated', 'brumous', 'Confiteor', 'manumissions', 'bibelots'. In one of these surreal scenes, amid the tumult of battle, Guy stumbles across a silent vignette. A dead British soldier, abandoned on a stretcher, 'lay like an effigy on a tomb, like Sir Roger in his shadowy shrine at Santa Dulcina. Only the bluebottles that clustered round his lips and eyes proclaimed that he was flesh. Why was he lying here? It remained one of the countless unexplained incidents of war'. He takes the soldier's identity disc and later hands it to Julia who promises to forward it. As he drives away, she casually drops it into the waste-paper basket. Thus ends volume two with Guy's chivalric hallucination 'dissolved [. . .] after less than two years' pilgrimage in a Holy Land of illusion'.

Unconditional Surrender takes us back to the home front later in 1941. Following the German invasion (22 June), the USSR has swapped sides. Stalin is now Britain's ally, 'Uncle Joe'. It is 'Tanks for Russia' week, reducing to scrap those Victorian cast-iron railings that Waugh so loved as the bulwarks of liberty, diversity and privacy. Returned to basic training, Guy is again kept out of 'the picture'. The drill routine whose precision had previously pleased him – 'The odd numbers of the front rank' etc. – sounds hollowly now.

So boring is this for Guy that the narrative suddenly leaps two years forward. He has not been sent out with the reinforcements

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to his battalion in North Africa as the war began to turn in the Allies' favour. He has not been called to Italy with Blackhouse. We pick up the story again in October 1943, on Guy's fortieth birthday, with crowds queuing to view the Sword of Stalingrad in Westminster Abbey (29-31 October) as though it were a holy relic. On 8 September 1943, Italy had surrendered after losing many thousands of troops supporting the Nazis in their failed attempt to hold Stalingrad. Guy is profoundly depressed.

In all this, Guy's father, Gervase, acts as an essential sounding board. A convent school now occupies the family's stately home, Broome Hall. He lives in two rented rooms in the Marine Hotel where his grasping landlords seek to evict him. But this aristocrat never pulls rank. A pious man, utterly without rancour, he quietly corrects Guy's near-despair, and his attempts to connect theology with politics. 'The Mystical Body', Gervase insists, 'doesn't strike attitudes or stand on its dignity. It accepts suffering and injustice. It is ready to forgive at the first hint of compunction. But quantitative judgements don't apply'. Thus Guy's pilgrimage ends, focussing on Mme. Kanyi, the Jewish refugee, rather than on Sir Roger of Waybroke.

The German invasion of Russia had of course broken the Treaty. Described as 'a day of apocalypse for all the world', it gets no mention in Waugh's diary. This is the point of Guy's final disillusion. The Battle of Stalingrad over two years later represented the Allies' first major success. To celebrate Soviet resistance the Sword of Stalingrad, a magnificent imitation crusader's weapon, had been specially forged at King George VI's request.

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It was taken by Churchill to the Tehran conference,* where he presented it to Stalin, a man he despised, as a mark of Britain's respect. In the press release and Churchill's very brief address it was described as a Sword of Honour. Waugh describes all this manufactured symbolism as a cynical publicity stunt, laying the ground for Guy's dealings with Tito's communist Partisans.

In Serbia and Croatia, Guy, like Waugh, is a Liaison Officer between the Partisans and the British command in Bari. Churchill, having abandoned his previous allies, Mihailovich and his royalist Četnics, now backs the Stalinists as more likely to cut off the German retreat. Guy witnesses British supplies being rebranded with Soviet insignia. When he attends Mass, his Partisan interpreter lingers to check that nothing untoward is said about communism. The Partisans don't like the Catholics, who had helped the Četnics; neither do they much like the British or the Jews. But they do want the aid. Guy, who had briefly discovered 'lustral freedom' in going off alone on Crete and in parachuting, finds none here. It is a place claustrophobic with mistrust, the modern secular age in arms, Christendom under siege.

The narrative flicks back and forth between England and this theatre of lost dreams. At home, Virginia is pregnant by Trimmer and can't get an abortion. She is described by Spruce as 'the last of twenty years' succession of heroines [. . .]. The ghosts of romance who walked between the wars.' Michael Arlen's Iris Storm, from *The Green Hat* (1924) is mentioned by Spruce, as is Aldous Huxley's Mrs. Viveash and Hemingway's Brett Ashley;

* Roosevelt, Stalin and Churchill's meeting to discuss the Second Front.

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Spruce might have included Waugh's Agatha Runcible from *Vile Bodies*, (1930) and Brenda Last from A *Handful of Dust* (1934): beautiful, reckless women who damage their lovers' masculinity. This is where such *femmes fatales* end. In *Men at Arms* Virginia had refused Guy's advances, calling him a 'wet, smug, obscene, pompous, sexless, lunatic pig'. In *Unconditional Surrender* she somewhat desperately suggests that they resume marital relations, and they do. She becomes a Catholic, and rather takes to it. When she is arbitrarily, if conveniently, killed by a flying bomb, Guy marries a 'nice' Catholic girl, Domenica, they bring up Trimmer's child, and the novel ends with his brother-in-law resentfully saying 'Yes [. . .] things have turned out rather conveniently for Guy'.

But have they? Mme. Kanyi is executed thanks to Guy's giving her some American magazines – 'counter-revolutionary propaganda', according to a Partisan report. The mysterious disgraces on and after Crete (Claire's desertion; the hint that Ludovic might have killed the Sapper captain in the open boat, and possibly also Hound) had gone unpunished. Guy had set out to fight communism and ended defending it. *Unconditional Surrender* suggested that he and Domenica have their own children: here they are barren. It is the end of the Crouchback line, that proud recusant heritage. The Santa Dulcina villa is sold – to Ludovic, author of *The Death Wish*. The Common Man has won, the Latin Mass gone, and the final scene at the 1951 Festival of Britain reveals ubiquitous vulgarity with its 'monstrous constructions'. The post-war world, surely, looks as bleak for Guy as it did for Waugh.

Martin Stannard

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To
CHRISTOPHER SYKES
ROBERT LAYCOCK
and
MARGARET FITZHERBERT
with undiminished devotion

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Contents

Preface xxv

SWORD OF HONOUR

1 Sword of Honour 3
2 Apthorpe Gloriosus 46
3 Apthorpe Furibundus 163
4 Apthorpe Immolatus 235
5 Apthorpe Placatus 293
6 Happy Warriors 378
7 Officers and Gentlemen 430
8 State Sword 601
9 Fin de Ligne 661
10 The Last Battle 787
11 Unconditional Surrender 893

List of Abbreviations 899

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Preface

The three books, of which this is a recension, appeared at intervals throughout a decade with the less than candid assurance (dictated by commercial interest) that each was to be regarded as a separate, independent work. It was unreasonable to expect the reader to keep in mind the various characters; still more to follow a continuous, continued plot. Repetitions and discrepancies occurred, which, I hope, are here excised. I have also removed passages which, on re-reading, appeared tedious.

The product is intended (as it was originally) to be read as a single story. I sought to give a description of the Second World War as it was seen and experienced by a single, uncharacteristic Englishman, and to show its effect on him. For this purpose I invented three clowns who have prominent parts in the structure of the story, but not in its theme.

On reading the book I realized that I had done something quite outside my original intention. I had written an obituary of the Roman Catholic Church in England as it had existed for many centuries. All the rites and most of the opinions here described are already obsolete. When I wrote *Brideshead Revisited* I was consciously writing an obituary of the doomed English upper class. It never occurred to me, writing *Sword of Honour*, that the Church was susceptible to change. I was wrong and I have

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seen a superficial revolution in what then seemed permanent. Despite the faith of many of the characters, *Sword of Honour* was not specifically a religious book. Recent developments have made it, in fact, a document of Catholic usage of my youth.

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One

SWORD OF HONOUR

I

When Guy Crouchback's grandparents, Gervase and Hermione, came to Italy on their honeymoon, French troops manned the defences of Rome, the Sovereign Pontiff drove out in an open carriage and Cardinals took their exercise side-saddle on the Pincian Hill.

Gervase and Hermione were welcomed in a score of frescoed palaces. Pope Pius received them in private audience and gave his special blessing to the union of two English families which had suffered for their Faith and yet retained a round share of material greatness. The chapel at Broome had never lacked a priest through all the penal years and the lands of Broome stretched undiminished and unencumbered from the Quantocks to the Blackdown Hills. Forebears of both their names had died on the scaffold. The City, lapped now by the tide of illustrious converts, still remembered with honour its old companions in arms.

Gervase Crouchback stroked his side-whiskers and found a respectful audience for his views on the Irish question and the Catholic missions in India. Hermione set up her easel among

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the ruins and while she painted Gervase read aloud from the poems of Tennyson and Patmore. She was pretty and spoke three languages; he was all that the Romans expected of an Englishman. Everywhere the fortunate pair were praised and petted but all was not entirely well with them. No sign or hint betrayed their distress but when the last wheels rolled away and they mounted to their final privacy, there was a sad gap between them, made by modesty and tenderness and innocence, which neither spoke of except in prayer.

Later they joined a yacht at Naples and steamed slowly up the coast, putting in at unfrequented harbours. And there, one night in their state room, all at last came right between them and their love was joyfully completed.

Before they fell asleep they felt the engines stop and heard the rattle of the anchor-chain, and when Gervase came on deck at dawn, he found that the ship lay in the shelter of a high peninsula. He called Hermione to join him and so standing together hand-in-hand, at the moist taffrail, they had their first view of Santa Dulcina delle Rocce and took the place and all its people into their exulting hearts.

The waterfront was thronged as though the inhabitants had been shaken from bed by an earthquake; their voices came clearly across the water, admiring the strange vessel. Houses rose steeply from the quay; two buildings stood out from the ochre and white walls and rusty pantiles, the church domed, with a voluted façade, and a castle of some kind comprising two great bastions and what seemed a ruined watch-tower. Behind the town for a short distance the hillside was terraced and planted,

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then above broke wildly into boulders and briar. There was a card game which Gervase and Hermione had played together in the schoolroom in which the winner of a trick called 'I claim'.

'I claim,' cried Hermione, taking possession of all she saw by right of her happiness.

Later in the morning the English party landed. Two sailors went first to prevent any annoyance from the natives. There followed four couples of ladies and gentlemen; then the servants carrying hampers and shawls and sketching materials. The ladies wore yachting caps and held their skirts clear of the cobbles; some carried lorgnettes. The gentlemen protected them with fringed sunshades. It was a procession such as Santa Dulcina delle Rocce had never seen before. They sauntered through the arcades, plunged briefly into the cool twilight of the church and climbed the steps which led from the piazza to the fortifications.

Little remained. The great paved platform was broken everywhere with pine and broom. The watch-tower was full of rubble. Two cottages had been built in the hillside from the finely cut masonry of the old castle and two families of peasants ran out to greet them with bunches of mimosa. The picnic luncheon was spread in the shade.

'Disappointing when you get up here,' said the owner of the yacht apologetically. 'Always the way with these places. Best seen from a distance.'

'I think it's quite perfect,' said Hermione, 'and we're going to live here. Please don't say a word against our castle.'

Gervase laughed indulgently with the others but later, when his father died and he seemed to be rich, the project came to life.

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Gervase made inquiries. The castle belonged to an elderly lawyer in Genoa who was happy to sell. Presently a plain square house rose above the ramparts and English stocks added their sweetness to the myrtle and the pine. Gervase called his new house the Villa Hermione, but the name never caught the local fancy. It was cut in large square letters on the gate-posts but honeysuckle spread and smothered it. The people of Santa Dulcina spoke always of the 'Castello Crauccibac' until eventually the family accepted the name and Hermione, proud bride, was left without commemoration.

Whatever its name, however, the Castello kept the character of its origin. For fifty years, until the shadows closed on the Crouchback family, it was a place of joy and love. It was the place of Guy's happiest holidays with his brothers and sister. Guy's father and Guy himself came there for their honeymoons. It was constantly lent to newly married cousins and friends. The town changed a little but neither railway nor high road touched that happy peninsula. A few more foreigners built their villas there. The inn enlarged itself, installed sanitation of a sort and a café-restaurant, took the name of 'Hotel Eden' and abruptly changed it during the Abyssinian crisis to 'Albergo del Sol'. The garage proprietor became secretary of the local fascists. But as Guy descended to the piazza on his last morning, he saw little that would have been unfamiliar to Gervase and Hermione. Already, an hour before midday, the heat was fierce but he walked as blithely as they on that first morning of secret jubilation. For him, as for them, frustrated love had found its first satisfaction. He was packed and dressed for a long journey, already on his way back to his own country to serve his king.

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Just seven days earlier he had opened his morning newspaper on the headlines announcing the Russian–German alliance. News that shook the politicians and young poets of a dozen capital cities brought deep peace to one English heart. Eight years of shame and loneliness were ended. For eight years Guy, already set apart from his fellows by his own deep wound, that unstaunched, internal draining away of life and love, had been deprived of the loyalties which should have sustained him. He lived too close to fascism in Italy to share the opposing enthusiasms of his countrymen. He saw it neither as a calamity nor as a rebirth; as a rough improvisation merely. He disliked the men who were edging themselves into power around him, but English denunciations sounded fatuous and dishonest and for the past three years he had given up his English newspapers. The German Nazis he knew to be mad and bad. Their participation dishonoured the cause of Spain, but the troubles of Bohemia, the year before, left him quite indifferent. When Prague fell, he knew that war was inevitable. He expected his country to go to war in a panic, for the wrong reasons or for no reason at all, with the wrong allies, in pitiful weakness. But now, splendidly, everything had become clear. The enemy at last was plain in view, huge and hateful, all disguise cast off. It was the Modern Age in arms. Whatever the outcome there was a place for him in that battle.

Everything was now in order at the Castello. His formal farewells were made. The day before he had visited the Arciprete, the Podestà, the Reverend Mother at the Convent, Mrs Garry at the Villa Datura, the Wilmots at the Castelletto Musgrave, Gräfin von Gluck at the Casa Gluck. Now there was a last piece of

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private business to transact. Thirty-five years old, slight and trim, plainly foreign but not so plainly English, young now, in heart and step, he came to bid good-bye to a life-long friend who lay, as was proper for a man dead eight hundred years, in the parish church.

St Dulcina, titular patroness of the town, was reputedly a victim of Diocletian. Her effigy in wax lay languorously in a glass case under the high altar. Her bones, brought from the Greek islands by a medieval raiding party, lay in their rich casket in the sacristy safe. Once a year they were carried shoulder high through the streets amid showers of fireworks, but except on her feast day she was not much regarded in the town to which she had given her name. Her place as benefactor had been usurped by another figure whose tomb was always littered with screws of paper bearing petitions, whose fingers and toes were tied in bows of coloured wool as *aides-mémoire*. He was older than the church, except the bones of St Dulcina and a pre-Christian thunderbolt which lay concealed in the back of the altar (whose existence the Arciprete always denied). His name, just legible still, was Roger of Waybroke, Knight, an Englishman; his arms five falcons. His sword and one gauntlet still lay beside him. Guy's uncle, Peregrine, a student of such things, had learned some of his story. Waybroke, now Waybrook, was quite near London. Roger's manor had long ago been lost and over-built. He left it for the second Crusade, sailed from Genoa and was shipwrecked on this coast. There he enlisted under the local count, who promised to take him to the Holy Land but led him first against a neighbour, on the walls of whose castle he fell at the moment

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of victory. The count gave him honourable burial and there he had lain through the centuries, while the church crumbled and was rebuilt above him, far from Jerusalem, far from Waybroke, a man with a great journey still all before him and a great vow unfulfilled; but the people of Santa Dulcina delle Rocce, to whom the supernatural order in all its ramifications was ever present and ever more lively than the humdrum world about them, adopted Sir Roger and despite all clerical remonstrance canonized him, brought him their troubles and touched his sword for luck, so that its edge was always bright. All his life, but especially in recent years, Guy had felt an especial kinship with 'il Santo Inglese'. Now, on his last day, he made straight for the tomb and ran his finger, as the fishermen did, along the knight's sword. 'Sir Roger, pray for me,' he said, 'and for our endangered kingdom.'

The confessional was occupied that morning, for it was the day when Suora Tomasina brought the schoolchildren to their duties. They sat on a bench along the wall, whispering and pinching one another, while the sister flapped over them like a hen leading them in turn to the grille and thence to the high altar to recite their penance.

On an impulse, not because his conscience troubled him but because it was a habit learned in childhood to go to confession before a journey, Guy made a sign to the sister and interrupted the succession of peasant urchins.

'*Beneditemi, padre, perchè ho peccato . . .*' Guy found it easy to confess in Italian. He spoke the language well but without nuances. There was no risk of going deeper than the denunciation of his few infractions of law, of his habitual weaknesses. Into that

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wasteland where his soul languished he need not, could not, enter. He had no words to describe it. There were no words in any language. There was nothing to describe, merely a void. His was not 'an interesting case', he thought. No cosmic struggle raged in his sad soul. It was as though eight years back he had suffered a tiny stroke of paralysis; all his spiritual faculties were just perceptibly impaired. He was 'handicapped' as Mrs Garry of the Villa Datura would have put it. There was nothing to say about it.

The priest gave him absolution and the traditional words of dismissal: '*Sia lodato Gesù Cristo*,' and he answered '*Oggi, sempre*.' He rose from his knees, said three 'Aves' before the waxen figure of St Dulcina and passed through the leather curtain into the blazing sunlight of the piazza.

Children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren of the peasants who first greeted Gervase and Hermione still inhabited the cottages behind the Castello and farmed the surrounding terraces. They grew and made the wine; they sold the olives; they kept an almost etiolated cow in an underground stable from which sometimes she escaped and trampled the vegetable beds and plunged over the low walls until she was, with immense drama, recaptured. They paid for their tenancy in produce and service. Two sisters, Josefina and Bianca, did the work of the house. They had laid Guy's last luncheon under the orange trees. He ate his spaghetti and drank his *vino scelto*, the brownish, heady wine of the place. Then with a fuss Josefina brought him a large ornamental cake which had been made in celebration of his departure. His slight appetite was already satisfied. He watched

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with alarm as Josefina carved. He tasted it, praised it, crumbled it. Josefina and Bianca stood implacable before him until he had finished the last morsel.

The taxi was waiting. There was no carriage drive to the Castello. The gates stood in the lane at the bottom of a flight of steps. When Guy rose to leave, all his little household, twenty strong, assembled to see him go. They would remain come what might. All kissed his hand. Most wept. The children threw flowers into the car. Josefina put into his lap the remains of the cake wrapped in newspaper. They waved until he was out of sight, then returned to their siestas. Guy moved the cake to the back seat and wiped his hands with his handkerchief. He was glad that the ordeal was over and waited resignedly for the fascist secretary to start a conversation.

He was not loved, Guy knew, either by his household or in the town. He was accepted and respected but he was not *simpatico*. Gräfin von Gluck, who spoke no word of Italian and lived in undisguised concubinage with her butler, was *simpatica*. Mrs Garry was *simpatica*, who distributed Protestant tracts, interfered with the fishermen's methods of killing octopuses, and filled her house with stray cats.

Guy's uncle, Peregrine, a bore of international repute whose dreaded presence could empty the room in any centre of civilization – Uncle Peregrine was considered *molto simpatico*. The Wilmots were gross vulgarians; they used Santa Dulcina purely as a pleasure resort, subscribed to no local funds, gave rowdy parties and wore indecent clothes, talked of 'wops' and often left after the summer with their bills to the tradesmen unpaid;

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but they had four boisterous and ill-favoured daughters whom the Santa-Dulcinesi had watched grow up. Better than this, they had lost a son bathing from the rocks. The Santa-Dulcinesi participated in these joys and sorrows. They observed with relish their hasty and unobtrusive departures at the end of the holidays. They were *simpatici*. Even Musgrave who had the Castelletto before the Wilmots and bequeathed it his name, Musgrave who, it was said, could not go to England or America because of warrants for his arrest, 'Musgrave the Monster', as the Crouchbacks used to call him – he was *simpatico*. Guy alone, whom they had known from infancy, who spoke their language and conformed to their religion, who was open-handed in all his dealings and scrupulously respectful of all their ways, whose grandfather built their school, whose mother had given a set of vestments embroidered by the Royal School of Needlework for the annual procession of St Dulcina's bones – Guy alone was a stranger among them.

The black-shirt said: 'You are leaving for a long time?'

'For the duration of the war.'

'There will be no war. No one wants it. Who would gain?'

As they drove they passed on every windowless wall the lowering, stencilled face of Mussolini and the legend '*The Leader is always right*.' The fascist secretary took his hands off the wheel and lit a cigarette, accelerating as he did so. '*The Leader is always right*' . . . '*The Leader is always right*' flashed past and was lost in the dust. 'War is foolishness,' said the imperfect disciple. 'You will see. Everything will be brought to an arrangement.'

Guy did not dispute the matter. He was not interested in what

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the taxi-driver thought or said. Mrs Garry would have thrown herself into argument. Once, driving with this same man, she had stopped the cab and walked home, three hot miles, to show her detestation of his political philosophy. But Guy had no wish to persuade or convince or to share his opinions with anyone. Even in his religion he felt no brotherhood. Often he wished that he lived in penal times when Broome had been a solitary outpost of the Faith, surrounded by aliens. Sometimes he imagined himself serving the last Mass for the last Pope in a catacomb at the end of the world. He never went to Communion on Sundays, slipping into the church, instead, very early on weekdays when few others were about. The people of Santa Dulcina preferred Musgrave the Monster. In the first years after his divorce Guy had prosecuted a few sad little love affairs but he had always hidden them from the village. Lately he had fallen into a habit of dry and negative chastity which even the priests felt to be unedifying. On the lowest, as on the highest plane, there was no sympathy between him and his fellow men. He could not listen to what the taxi-driver was saying.

'History is a living force,' said the taxi-driver, quoting from an article he had lately read. 'No one can put a stop to it and say: "After this date there shall be no changes." With nations as with men, some grow old. Some have too much, others too little. Then there must be an arrangement. But if it comes to war, everyone will have too little. *They* know that. *They* will not have a war.'

Guy heard the voice without vexation. Only one small question troubled him now: what to do with the cake. He could not leave it in the car; Bianca and Josefina would hear of it. It would

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be a great nuisance in the train. He tried to remember whether the Vice-Consul, with whom he had to decide certain details of closing the Castello, had any children to whom the cake might be given. He rather thought he had.

Apart from this one sugary encumbrance, Guy floated free: as untouchable in his new-found contentment as in his old despair. *Sia lodato Gesù Cristo. Oggi, sempre*. Today especially; today of all days.

II

The Crouchback family, until quite lately rich and numerous, was now much reduced. Guy was the youngest of them and it seemed likely he would be the last. His mother was dead, his father over seventy. There had been four children. Angela, the eldest; then Gervase, who went straight from Downside into the Irish Guards and was picked off by a sniper his first day in France, instantly, fresh and clean and unwearied, as he followed the duckboard across the mud, carrying his blackthorn stick, on his way to report to company headquarters. Ivo was only a year older than Guy but they were never friends. Ivo was always odd. He grew much odder and finally, when he was twenty-six, disappeared from home. For months there was no news of him. Then he was found barricaded alone in a lodging in Cricklewood where he was starving himself to death. He was carried out emaciated and delirious and died a few days later stark mad. That was in 1931. Ivo's death sometimes seemed to Guy a horrible caricature of his own life, which at just that time was plunged in disaster.

Before Ivo's oddness gave real cause for anxiety Guy had

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married, not a Catholic but a bright, fashionable girl, quite unlike anyone that his friends or family would have expected. He took his younger son's share of the diminished family fortune, and settled in Kenya, living, it seemed to him afterwards, in unruffled good humour beside a mountain lake where the air was always brilliant and keen and the flamingos rose at dawn first white, then pink, then a whirl of shadow passing across the glowing sky. He farmed assiduously and nearly made it pay. Then unaccountably his wife said that her health required a year in England. She wrote regularly and affectionately until one day, still affectionately, she informed him that she had fallen deeply in love with an acquaintance of theirs named Tommy Blackhouse; that Guy was not to be cross about it; that she wanted a divorce. '*And, please,*' her letter ended, '*there's to be no chivalrous nonsense of your going to Brighton and playing "the guilty party". That would mean six months separation from Tommy and I won't trust him out of my sight for six minutes, the beast.*'

So Guy left Kenya and shortly afterwards his father, widowed and despairing of an heir, left Broome. The property was reduced by then to the house and park and home farm. In recent years it had achieved a certain celebrity. It was almost unique in contemporary England, having been held in uninterrupted male succession since the reign of Henry I. Mr Crouchback did not sell it. He let it, instead, to a convent and himself retired to Matchet, a nearby watering-place. And the sanctuary lamp still burned at Broome as of old.

No one was more conscious of the decline of the House of Crouchback than Guy's brother-in-law, Arthur Box-Bender, who had married Angela in 1914 when Broome seemed

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set unalterably in the firmament, a celestial body emanating tradition and unobtrusive authority. Box-Bender was not a man of family and he respected Angela's pedigree. He even at one time considered the addition of Crouchback to his own name, in place of either Box or Bender, both of which seemed easily dispensable, but Mr Crouchback's chilling indifference and Angela's ridicule quickly discouraged him. He was not a Catholic and he thought it Guy's plain duty to marry again, preferably someone with money, and carry on his line. He was not a sensitive man and he could not approve Guy's hiding himself away. He ought to take over the home farm at Broome. He ought to go into politics. People like Guy, he freely stated, owed something to their country; but when at the end of August 1939 Guy presented himself in London with the object of paying that debt, Arthur Box-Bender was not sympathetic.

'My dear Guy,' he said, 'be your age.'

Box-Bender was fifty-six and a Member of Parliament. Many years ago he had served quite creditably in a rifle regiment; he had a son serving with them now. For him soldiering was something that belonged to extreme youth, like butterscotch and catapults. Guy at thirty-five, shortly to be thirty-six, still looked on himself as a young man. Time had stood still for him during the last eight years. It had advanced swiftly for Box-Bender.

'Can you seriously imagine yourself sprinting about at the head of a platoon?'

'Well, yes,' said Guy. 'That's exactly what I did imagine.'

Guy usually stayed with Box-Bender in Lowndes Square when he was in London. He had come straight to him now from

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Victoria but found his sister Angela away in the country and the house already half dismantled. Box-Bender's study was the last room to be left untouched. They were sitting there now before going out to dinner.

'I'm afraid you won't get much encouragement. All that sort of thing happened in 1914 – retired colonels dyeing their hair and enlisting in the ranks. I remember it. I was there. All very gallant, of course, but it won't happen this time. The whole thing is planned. The Government know just how many men they can handle; they know where they can get them; they'll take them in their own time. At the moment we haven't got the accommodation or the equipment for any big increase. There may be casualties, of course, but personally I don't see it as a soldier's war at all. Where are we going to fight? No one in his senses would try to break either the Maginot or the Siegfried Lines. As I see it, both sides will sit tight until they begin to feel the economic pinch. The Germans are short of almost every industrial essential. As soon as they realize that Mr Hitler's bluff has been called, we shan't hear much more of Mr Hitler. That's an internal matter for the Germans to settle for themselves. We can't treat with the present gang, of course, but as soon as they produce a respectable government we shall be able to iron out all our differences.'

'That's rather how my Italian taxi-driver talked yesterday.'

'Of course. Always go to a taxi-driver when you want a sane, independent opinion. I talked to one today. He said: "When we are at war then it'll be time to start talking about war. Just at present we aren't at war." Very sound that.'

'But I notice you are taking every precaution.'

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Box-Bender's three daughters had been dispatched to stay with a commercial associate in Connecticut. The house in Lowndes Square was being emptied and shut. Some of the furniture had gone to the country; the rest would go into store. Box-Bender had taken part of a large brand-new flat, going cheap at the moment. He and two colleagues from the House of Commons would share these quarters. The cleverest of his dodges had been to get his house in the constituency accepted as a repository for 'National Art Treasures'. There would be no more trouble there with billeting officers, civil or military. A few minutes earlier Box-Bender had explained these provisions with some pride. Now he merely turned to the wireless and said: 'D'you mind awfully if I just switch this thing on for a moment to hear what they're saying? There may be something new.'

But there was not. Nor was there any message of peace. The evacuation of centres of population was proceeding like clockwork; happy groups of mothers and children were arriving punctually at their distributing centres and being welcomed into their new homes. Box-Bender switched it off.

'Nothing new since this afternoon. Funny how one keeps twiddling the thing these days. I never had much use for it before. By the way, Guy, that's a thing that might suit you, if you really want to make yourself useful. They're very keen to collect foreign language speakers at the B.B.C. for monitoring and propaganda and that sort of rot. Not very exciting, of course, but someone has to do it and I think your Italian would come in very handy.'

There was no great affection between the two brothers-in-law. It never occurred to Guy to speculate about Box-Bender's

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view of him. It never occurred to him that Box-Bender had any particular view. As a matter of fact, which he freely admitted to Angela, Box-Bender had for some years been expecting Guy to go mad. He was not an imaginative man, nor easily impressionable, but he had been much mixed up in the quest for Ivo and his ghastly discovery. That thing had made an impression. Guy and Ivo were remarkably alike. Box-Bender remembered Ivo's look in the days when his extreme oddness still tottered this side of lunacy; it had not been a wild look at all; something rather smug and purposeful; something 'dedicated'; something in fact very much like the look in Guy's eyes now as he presented himself so inopportunely in Lowndes Square talking calmly about the Irish Guards. It could bode no good. Best get him quickly into something like the B.B.C., out of harm's way.

They dined that night at Bellamy's. Guy's family had always belonged to this club. Gervase's name was on the 1914–18 Roll of Honour in the front hall. Poor crazy Ivo had often sat in the bay window alarming passers-by with his fixed stare. Guy had joined in early manhood, seldom used it in recent years, but kept his name on the list notwithstanding. It was an historic place. Once fuddled gamblers, attended by linkmen, had felt their way down these steps to their coaches. Now Guy and Box-Bender felt their way up in utter blindness. The first glass doors were painted out. Within them in the little vestibule was a perceptible eerie phosphorescence. Beyond the second pair of doors was bright light, noise, and a thick and stagnant fog of cigar smoke and whisky. In these first days of the black-out the problem of ventilation was unsolved.

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The club had only that day re-opened after its annual cleaning. In normal times it would have been quite empty at this season. Now it was thronged. There were many familiar faces but no friends. As Guy passed a member who greeted him, another turned and asked: 'Who was that? Someone new, isn't it?'

'No, he's belonged for ages. You'll never guess who he is. Virginia Troy's first husband.'

'Really? I thought she was married to Tommy Blackhouse.'

'This chap was before Tommy. Can't remember his name. I think he lives in Kenya. Tommy took her from him, then Gussie had her for a bit, then Bert Troy picked her up when she was going spare.'

'She's a grand girl. Wouldn't mind having a go myself one of these days.'

For in this club there were no depressing conventions against the bandying of ladies' names.

Box-Bender and Guy drank, dined and drank with a group which fluctuated and changed throughout the evening. The conversation was briskly topical and through it Guy began to make acquaintance with this changed city. They spoke of domestic arrangements. Everyone seemed to be feverishly occupied in disencumbering himself of responsibilities. Box-Bender's arrangements were the microcosm of a national movement. Everywhere houses were being closed, furniture stored, children transported, servants dismissed, lawns ploughed, dower houses and shooting lodges crammed to capacity; mothers-in-law and nannies were everywhere gaining control.

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They spoke of incidents and crimes in the black-out. So-and-so had lost all her teeth in a taxi. So-and-so had been sandbagged in Hay Hill and robbed of his poker-winnings. So-and-so had been knocked down by a Red Cross ambulance and left for dead.

They spoke of various forms of service. Most were in uniform. Everywhere little groups of close friends were arranging to spend the war together. There was a territorial searchlight battery manned entirely by fashionable aesthetes who were called 'the monstrous regiment of gentlemen'. Stockbrokers and wine salesmen were settling into the offices of London District Headquarters. Regular soldiers were kept at twelve hours' notice for active service. Yachtsmen were in R.N.V.R. uniform growing beards. There seemed no opportunity for Guy in any of this.

'My brother-in-law here is looking for a job,' said Box-Bender.

'You've left it rather late, you know. Everyone's pretty well fixed. Of course things will start popping once the balloon goes up. I should wait till then.'

They sat on late, for no one relished the plunge into darkness. No one attempted to drive a car. Taxis were rare. They made up parties to walk homeward together. At length Guy and Box-Bender joined a group walking to Belgravia. They stumbled down the steps together and set out into the baffling midnight void. Time might have gone back two thousand years to the time when London was a stockaded cluster of huts down the river, and the streets through which they walked, empty sedge and swamp.

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In the following fortnight Guy came to spend most of the day in Bellamy's. He moved to an hotel and immediately after breakfast daily walked to St James's Street as a man might go to his office. He wrote letters there, a thick batch of them every day, written shamefacedly with growing facility in a corner of the morning-room.

> '*Dear General Cutter, Please forgive me for troubling you at this busy time. I hope you remember as I do the happy day when the Bradshawes brought you to my house at Santa Dulcina and we went out together in the boat and so ignominiously failed to spear pulpi . . .*'

> '*Dear Colonel Glover, I am writing to you because I know you served with my brother Gervase and were a friend of his . . .*'

> '*Dear Sam, Though we have not met since Downside I have followed your career with distant admiration and vicarious pride . . .*'

> '*Dear Molly, I am sure I ought not to know, but I do know that Alex is Someone Very Important and Secret at the Admiralty. I know that you have him completely under your thumb. So do you think you could possibly be an angel . . .*'

He had become a facile professional beggar.

Usually there was an answer; a typewritten note or a telephone call from a secretary or aide-de-camp; an appointment or an invitation. Always there was the same polite discouragement. 'We organized skeleton staffs at the time of Munich. I expect we shall expand as soon as we know just what our commitments are' – from the civilians – 'Our last directive was to

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go slow on personnel. I'll put you on our list and see you are notified as soon as anything turns up.'

'We don't want cannon-fodder this time' – from the Services – 'we learned our lesson in 1914 when we threw away the pick of the nation. That's what we've suffered from ever since.'

'But I'm not the pick of the nation,' said Guy. 'I'm natural fodder. I've no dependants. I've no special skill in anything. What's more I'm getting old. I'm ready for immediate consumption. You should take the thirty-fives now and give the young men time to get sons.'

'I'm afraid that's not the official view. I'll put you on our list and see you're notified as soon as anything turns up.'

In the following days Guy's name was put on many lists and his few qualifications summarized and filed in many confidential registers where they lay unexamined through all the long years ahead.

England declared war but it made no change in Guy's routine of appeals and interviews. No bombs fell. There was no rain of poison or fire. Bones were still broken after dark. That was all. At Bellamy's he found himself one of a large depressed class of men older than himself who had served without glory in the First World War. Most of them had gone straight from school to the trenches and spent the rest of their lives forgetting the mud and lice and noise. They were under orders to await orders and spoke sadly of the various drab posts that awaited them at railway stations and docks and dumps. The balloon had gone up, leaving them on the ground.

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Russia invaded Poland. Guy found no sympathy among these old soldiers for his own hot indignation.

'My dear fellow, we've quite enough on our hands as it is. We can't go to war with the whole world.'

'Then why go to war at all? If all we want is prosperity, the hardest bargain Hitler made would be preferable to victory. If we are concerned with justice the Russians are as guilty as the Germans.'

'Justice?' said the old soldiers. 'Justice?'

'Besides,' said Box-Bender, when Guy spoke to him of the matter which seemed in no one's mind but his, 'the country would never stand for it. The socialists have been crying blue murder against the Nazis for five years but they are all pacifists at heart. So far as they have any feeling of patriotism it's for Russia. You'd have a general strike and the whole country in collapse if you set up to be just.'

'Then what are we fighting for?'

'Oh, we had to do that, you know. The socialists always thought we were pro-Hitler, God knows why. It was quite a job in keeping neutral over Spain. You missed all that excitement living abroad. It was quite ticklish, I assure you. If we sat tight now there'd be chaos. What we have to do now is to limit and localize the war, not extend it.'

The conclusion of all these discussions was darkness, the baffling night that lay beyond the club doors. When the hour came the old soldiers and young soldiers and the politicians made up their same little companies to grope their way home together. There was always someone going Guy's way towards his hotel, always a friendly arm. But his heart was lonely.

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Guy heard of mysterious departments known only by their initials or as 'So-and-so's cloak and dagger boys'. Bankers, gamblers, men with jobs in oil companies seemed to find a way there; not Guy. He met an acquaintance, a journalist, who had once come to Kenya. This man, Lord Kilbannock, had lately written a gossip column; now he was in Air Force uniform.

'How did you manage it?' Guy asked.

'Well, it's rather shaming really. There's an air marshal whose wife plays bridge with my wife. He's always been mad keen to get in here. I've just put him up. He's the most awful shit.'

'Will he get in?'

'No, no, I've seen to that. Three blackballs guaranteed already. But he can't get me out of the Air Force.'

'What do you do?'

'That's rather shaming too. I'm what's called a "conducting officer". I take American journalists round fighter stations. But I shall find something else soon. The great thing is to get into uniform; then you can start moving yourself round. It's a very exclusive war at present. Once you're *in*, there's every opportunity. I've got my eye on India or Egypt. Somewhere where there's no black-out. Fellow in the flats where I live got coshed on the head the other night, right on the steps. All a bit too dangerous for me. I don't want a medal. I want to be known as one of the soft-faced men who did well out of the war. Come and have a drink.'

So the evenings passed. Every morning Guy awoke in his hotel bedroom, early and anxious. After a month of it he decided to leave London and visit his family.

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He went first to his sister, Angela, to the house in Gloucestershire which Box-Bender bought when he was adopted as Member for the constituency.

'We're living in the most frightful squalor,' she said on the telephone. 'We can't meet people at Kemble any more. No petrol. You'll have to change and take the local train. Or else the bus from Stroud if it's still running. I rather think it isn't.'

But at Kemble, when he emerged from the corridor in which he had stood for three hours, he found his nephew Tony on the platform to greet him. He was in flannels. Only his close-cropped hair marked him as a soldier.

'Hullo, Uncle Guy. I hope I'm a pleasant surprise. I've come to save you from the local train. They've given us embarkation leave and a special issue of petrol coupons. Jump in.'

'Shouldn't you be in uniform?'

'Should be. But no one does. It makes me feel quite human getting out of it for a few hours.'

'I think I shall want to stay in mine once I get it.'

Tony Box-Bender laughed innocently. 'I should love to see you. Somehow I can't imagine you as one of the licentious soldiery. Why did you leave Italy? I should have thought Santa Dulcina was just the place to spend the war. How did you leave everyone?'

'Momentarily in tears.'

'I bet they miss you.'

'Not really. They cry easily.'

They bowled along between low Cotswold walls. Presently they came into sight of the Berkeley Vale far below them with the Severn shining brown and gold in the evening sun.

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'You're glad to be going to France?'

'Of course. It's hell in barracks being chased round all day. It's pretty good hell at home at the moment – art treasures everywhere and Mum doing the cooking.'

Box-Bender's house was a small, gabled manor in a sophisticated village where half the cottages were equipped with baths and chintz. Drawing-room and dining-room were blocked to the ceiling with wooden crates.

'Such a disappointment, darling,' said Angela. 'I thought we'd been so clever. I imagined us having the Wallace Collection and luxuriating in Sèvres and Boulle and Bouchers. Such a cultured war, I imagined. Instead we've got Hittite tablets from the British Museum, and we mayn't even peep at them, not that we want to, heaven knows. You're going to be hideously uncomfortable, darling. I've put you in the library. All the top floor is shut so that if we're bombed we shan't panic and jump out of the windows. That's Arthur's idea. He's really been too resourceful. He and I are in the cottage. I know we shall break our necks one night going to bed across the garden. Arthur's so strict about the electric torch. It's all very idiotic. No one can possibly see into the garden.'

It seemed to Guy that his sister had grown more talkative than she had been.

'Ought we to have asked people in for your last night, Tony? I'm afraid it's very dull, but who is there? Besides there really isn't elbow room for ourselves now we eat in Arthur's business-room.'

'No, Mum, it's much nicer being alone.'

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'I so hoped you'd say that. We like it, of course, but I do think they might give you two nights.'

'Have to be in at reveille, on Monday. If you'd stayed in London . . .'

'But you'd sooner be *at home* your last night?'

'Wherever you are, Mum.'

'Isn't he a dear boy, Guy?'

The library was now the sole living-room. The bed already made up for Guy on a sofa at one end consorted ill with the terrestrial and celestial globes at its head and foot.

'You and Tony will both have to wash in the loo under the stairs. He's sleeping in the flower-room, poor pet. Now I must go and see to dinner.'

'There's really not the smallest reason for all this,' said Tony. 'Mum and Dad seem to enjoy turning everything topsy-turvy. I suppose it comes from having been so very correct before. And of course Dad has always been jolly close about money. He hated paying out when he felt he had to. Now he thinks he's got a splendid excuse for economizing.'

Arthur Box-Bender came in carrying a tray. 'Well, you see how we're roughing it,' he said. 'In a year or two, if the war goes on, everyone will have to live like this. We're starting early. It's the greatest fun.'

'You're only here for week-ends,' said Tony. 'I hear you're very snug in Arlington Street.'

'I believe you would sooner have spent your leave in London.'

'Not really,' said Tony.

'There wouldn't have been room for your mother in the flat.

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No wives. That was part of the concordat we made when we decided to share. Sherry, Guy? I wonder what you'll think of this. It's South African. Everyone will be drinking it soon.'

'This zeal to lead the fashion is something new, Arthur.'

'You don't like it?'

'Not very much.'

'The sooner we get used to it the better. There is no more coming from Spain.'

'It all tastes the same to me,' said Tony.

'Well, the party is in your honour.'

A gardener's wife and a girl from the village were now the only servants. Angela did all the lighter and cleaner work of the kitchen. Presently she called them in to dinner in the little study which Arthur Box-Bender liked to call his 'business-room'. He had a spacious office in the City; his election agent had permanent quarters in the market town; his private secretary had files, a typewriter and two telephones in South-West London; no business was ever done in the room where they now dined, but Box-Bender had first heard the expression used by Mr Crouchback of the place where he patiently transacted all the paperwork of the estate at Broome. It had an authentic rural flavour, Box-Bender rightly thought.

In the years of peace Box-Bender often entertained neat little parties of eight or ten to dinner. Guy had memories of many candle-lit evenings, of a rather rigid adequacy of food and wine, of Box-Bender sitting square in his place and leading the conversation in humdrum topical subjects. Tonight with Angela and Tony frequently on their feet moving the plates, he seemed less

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at his ease. His interests were still topical and humdrum but Guy and Tony had each his own preoccupation.

'Shocking thing about the Abercrombies,' he said. 'Did you hear? They packed up and went to Jamaica bag and baggage.'

'Why shouldn't they?' said Tony. 'They couldn't be any use here. Just extra mouths to feed.'

'It looks as though I am going to be an extra mouth,' said Guy. 'It's a matter of sentiment, I suppose. One wants to be with one's own people in wartime.'

'Can't see it,' said Tony.

'There's plenty of useful work for the civilian,' said Box-Bender.

'All the Prentices' evacuees have gone back to Birmingham in a huff,' said Angela. 'They always were unnaturally lucky. We've got the Hittite horrors for life, I know.'

'It's an awful business for the men not knowing where their wives and families are,' said Tony. 'Our wretched Welfare Officer spends his whole day trying to trace them. Six men in my platoon have gone on leave not knowing if they've got a home to go to.'

'Old Mrs Sparrow fell out of the apple-loft and broke both legs. They wouldn't take her in at the hospital because all the beds are kept for air-raid casualties.'

'We have to keep a duty officer on day and night doing P.A.D. It's a ghastly bore. They ring up every hour to report "All clear".'

'Caroline Maiden was stopped in Stroud by a policeman and asked why she wasn't carrying a gas-mask.'

Tony was from another world; their problems were not his. Guy belonged to neither world.

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'I heard someone say that this was a very exclusive war.'

'Well, surely, Uncle Guy, the more who can keep out of it the better. You civilians don't know when you're well off.'

'Perhaps we don't want to be particularly well off at the moment, Tony.'

'I know exactly what I want. An M.C. and a nice neat wound. Then I can spend the rest of the war being cosseted by beautiful nurses.'

'*Please*, Tony.'

'Sorry, Mum. Don't look so desperately serious. I shall begin to wish I'd spent my leave in London.'

'I thought I was keeping such a stiff upper lip. Only please, darling, don't talk like that about being wounded.'

'Well, it's the best one can hope for, isn't it?'

'Look here,' said Box-Bender, 'aren't we all getting a bit morbid? Take Uncle Guy away while your mother and I clear the table.'

Guy and Tony went into the library. The french windows were open on the paved garden. 'Damn, we must draw the curtains before we put on the light.'

'Let's go out for a minute,' said Guy.

It was just light enough to see the way. The air was scented by invisible magnolia flowers, high in the old tree which covered half the house.

'Never felt less morbid in my life,' said Tony, but as he and Guy strolled out into the gathering darkness, he broke the silence by saying suddenly, 'Tell me about going mad. Are lots of Mum's family cuckoo?'

'No.'

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'There was Uncle Ivo, wasn't there?'

'He suffered from an excess of melancholy.'

'Not hereditary?'

'No, no. Why? Do you feel your reason tottering?'

'Not yet. But it's something I read, about an officer in the last war who seemed quite normal till he got into action and then went barking mad and his sergeant had to shoot him.'

'"Barking" is scarcely the word for your uncle's trouble. He was in every sense a most retiring man.'

'How about the others?'

'Look at me. Look at your grandfather – and your great-uncle Peregrine; he's appallingly sane.'

'He's spending his time collecting binoculars and sending them to the War Office. Is that sane?'

'Perfectly.'

'I'm glad you told me.'

Presently Angela called: 'Come in, you two. It's quite dark. What are you talking about?'

'Tony thinks he's going mad.'

'Mrs Groat is. She left the larder un-blacked-out.'

They sat in the library with their backs to Guy's bed. Quite soon Tony rose to say good night.

'Mass is at eight,' said Angela. 'We ought to start at twenty to. I'm picking up some evacuees in Uley.'

'Oh, I say, isn't there something later? I was looking forward to a long lie.'

'I thought we might all go to Communion tomorrow. Do come, Tony.'

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'All right, Mum, of course I will. Only make it twenty-five to in that case. I shall have to go to scrape after weeks of wickedness.'

Box-Bender looked self-conscious, as he still did, always, when religious practices were spoken of. He did not get used to it – this ease with the Awful.

'I shall be with you in spirit,' he said.

Then he left too, and stumbled across the garden to the cottage. Angela and Guy were left alone.

'He's a charming boy, Angela.'

'Yes, so military, isn't he? All in a matter of months. He doesn't mind a bit going to France.'

'I should think not indeed.'

'Oh, Guy, you're too young to remember. I grew up with the first war. I'm one of the girls you read about who danced with the men who were being killed. I remember the telegram coming about Gervase. You were just a schoolboy going short of sweets. I remember the first lot who went out. There wasn't one of them left at the end. What chance has a boy of Tony's age starting now at the very beginning? I worked in a hospital, you remember. That's why I couldn't bear it when Tony talked of a nice neat wound and being cosseted. There weren't any nice little wounds. They were all perfectly beastly and this time there'll be all kinds of ghastly new chemicals too, I suppose. He doesn't know what it will be like. There isn't even the hope of his being taken prisoner this time. Under the Kaiser the Germans were still a civilized people. These brutes will do anything.'

'Angela, there's nothing I can say except that you know very well you wouldn't have Tony a bit different. You wouldn't want

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him to be one of those wretched boys I hear about who have run away to Ireland or America.'

'That's quite inconceivable, of course.'

'Well, then?'

'I know. I know. Time for bed. I'm afraid we've filled your room with smoke. You can open the window when the light's out. Thank goodness Arthur has gone ahead. I can use my torch across the garden without being accused of attracting Zeppelins.'

That night, lying long awake, obliged to choose between air and light, choosing air, not reading, Guy thought: why Tony? What crazy economy was it that squandered Tony and saved himself? In China when called to the army it was honourable to hire a poor young man and send him in one's place. Tony was rich in love and promise. He himself destitute, possessed of nothing save a few dry grains of faith. Why could he not go to France in Tony's place, to the neat little wound or the barbarous prison?

But next morning as he knelt at the altar-rail beside Angela and Tony he seemed to hear his answer in the words of the Mass: *Domine non sum dignus*.

III

Guy had planned to stay two nights and go on Monday to visit his father at Matchet. Instead he left before luncheon on Sunday so as to leave Angela uninterrupted in her last hours with Tony. It was a journey he had often made before. Box-Bender used to send him into Bristol by car. His father used to send for him to

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the mainline station. Now all the world seemed on the move and he was obliged to travel tediously with several changes of bus and train. It was late afternoon when he arrived at Matchet station and found his father with his old golden retriever waiting on the platform.

'I don't know where the hotel porter is,' said Mr Crouchback. 'He should be here. I told him he would be needed. But everyone's very busy. Leave your bag here. I expect we'll meet him on the way.'

Father and son and dog walked out together into the sunset down the steep little streets of the town.

Despite the forty years that divided them there was a marked likeness between Mr Crouchback and Guy. Mr Crouchback was rather the taller and he wore an expression of steadfast benevolence quite lacking in Guy. '*Racé* rather than *distingué*' was how Miss Vavasour, a fellow resident at the Marine Hotel, defined Mr Crouchback's evident charm. There was nothing of the old dandy about him, nothing crusted, nothing crotchety. He was not at all what is called 'a character'. He was an innocent, affable old man who had somehow preserved his good humour – much more than that, a mysterious and tranquil joy – throughout a life which to all outward observation had been overloaded with misfortune. He had like many another been born in full sunlight and lived to see night fall. He had an ancient name which was now little regarded and threatened with extinction. Only God and Guy knew the massive and singular quality of Mr Crouchback's family pride. He kept it to himself. That passion, which is often so thorny a growth, bore nothing save roses for

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Mr Crouchback. He was quite without class consciousness because he saw the whole intricate social structure of his country divided neatly into two unequal and unmistakable parts. On one side stood the Crouchbacks and certain inconspicuous, anciently allied families; on the other side stood the rest of mankind, Box-Bender, the butcher, the Duke of Omnium (whose onetime wealth derived from monastic spoils), Lloyd George, Neville Chamberlain – all of a piece together. Mr Crouchback acknowledged no monarch since James II. It was not an entirely sane conspectus but it engendered in his gentle breast two rare qualities, tolerance and humility. For nothing much, he assumed, could reasonably be expected from the commonality; it was remarkable how well some of them did behave on occasions; while, for himself, any virtue he had came from afar without his deserving, and every small fault was grossly culpable in a man of his high tradition.

He had a further natural advantage over Guy; he was fortified by a memory which kept only the good things and rejected the ill. Despite his sorrows, he had had a fair share of joys, and these were ever fresh and accessible in Mr Crouchback's mind. He never mourned the loss of Broome. He still inhabited it as he had known it in bright boyhood and in early, requited love.

The Marine Hotel, Matchet, was kept by old servants from Broome. They made him very welcome. There he brought a few photographs, the bedroom furniture to which he was accustomed, complete and rather severe – the brass bedstead, the oak presses and boot-rack, the circular shaving glass, the mahogany prie-dieu. His sitting-room was furnished from the smoking-room at

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Broome with a careful selection of old favourites from the library. And there he had lived ever since, greatly respected by Miss Vavasour and the other permanent residents. The original manager sold out and went to Canada; his successor took on Mr Crouchback with the other effects. Once a year he revisited Broome, when a requiem was sung for his ancestors. He never lamented his changed state or mentioned it to newcomers. He went to Mass every day, walking punctually down the High Street before the shops were open; walking punctually back as the shutters were coming down, with a word of greeting for everyone he passed. All his pride of family was a schoolboy hobby compared with his religious faith. When Virginia left Guy childless, it did not occur to Mr Crouchback, as it had never ceased occurring to Box-Bender, that the continuance of his line was worth a tiff with the Church; that Guy should marry by civil law and beget an heir and settle things up later with the ecclesiastical authorities as other people seemed somehow to do. Family pride could not be served in dishonour. There were in fact two medieval excommunications and a seventeenth-century apostasy clearly set out in the family annals, but those were among the things that Mr Crouchback's memory extruded.

Tonight the town seemed fuller than usual. Guy knew Matchet well. He had picnicked there as a child and visited his father whenever he came to England. The Marine Hotel lay outside the town, on the cliff beside the coastguard station. Their way led down the harbour, along the waterfront, then up again by a red rock track. Lundy Island could be seen in the setting sun, beyond

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the brown waters. The Channel was full of shipping held by the Contraband Control.

'I should have liked to say good-bye to Tony,' said Mr Crouchback. 'I didn't know he was off so soon. There's something I looked out for him the other day and wanted to give him. I know he'd have liked to have it – Gervase's medal of Our Lady of Lourdes. He bought it in France on a holiday the year the war broke out and he always wore it. They sent it back after he was killed with his watch and things. Tony ought to have it.'

'I don't think there'd be time to get it to him now.'

'I'd like to have given it to him myself. It's not the same thing sending it in a letter. Harder to explain.'

'It didn't protect Gervase much, did it?'

'Oh yes,' said Mr Crouchback, 'much more than you might think. He told me when he came to say good-bye before going out. The army is full of temptations for a boy. Once in London, when he was in training, he got rather drunk with some of his regiment and in the end he found himself left alone with a girl they'd picked up somewhere. She began to fool about and pulled off his tie and then she found the medal and all of a sudden they both sobered down and she began talking about the convent where she'd been at school and so they parted friends and no harm done. I call that being protected. I've worn a medal all my life. Do you?'

'I have from time to time. I haven't one at the moment.'

'You should, you know, with bombs and things about. If you get hit and taken to hospital, they know you're a Catholic and send for a priest. A nurse once told me that. Would *you* care to have Gervase's medal, if Tony can't?'

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'Very much. Besides, I hope to get into the army too.'

'So you said in your letter. But they've turned you down?'

'There doesn't seem to be much competition for me.'

'What a shame. But I can't imagine you a soldier. You never liked motor-cars, did you? It's all motor-cars now, you know. The yeomanry haven't had any horses since the year before last, a man was telling me, and they haven't any motor-cars either. Seems a silly business. But you don't care for horses either, do you?'

'Not lately,' said Guy, remembering the eight horses he and Virginia had kept in Kenya, the rides round the lake at dawn; remembering, too, the Ford van which he had driven to market twice a month over the dirt track.

'Trains de luxe are more in your line, eh?'

'There wasn't anything very luxurious about today's trains,' said Guy.

'No,' said his father. 'I've no business to chaff you. It's very nice of you to come all this way to see me, my boy. I don't think you'll be dull. There are all kinds of new people in the inn – most amusing. I've made a whole new circle of friends in the last fortnight. Charming people. You'll be surprised.'

'More Miss Vavasours?'

'No, no, different people. All sorts of quite young people. A charming Mrs Tickeridge and her daughter. Her husband is a major in the Halberdiers. He's come down for Sunday. You'll like them awfully.'

The Marine Hotel was full and overflowing, as all hotels seemed to be all over the country. Formerly when he came to visit

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his father, Guy had been conscious of a stir of interest among guests and staff. Now he found it difficult to get any attention.

'No, we're quite full up,' said the manageress. 'Mr Crouchback did ask for a room for you but we were expecting you tomorrow. There's nothing at all tonight.'

'Perhaps you could fix him up in my sitting-room.'

'We'll do what we can, if you don't mind waiting a bit.'

The porter who should have been at the station was helping hand round drinks in the lounge.

'I'll go just as soon as I can, sir,' he said. 'If you don't mind waiting until after dinner.'

Guy did mind. He wanted a change of shirt after his journey, but the man was gone with his tray of glasses before Guy could answer.

'Isn't it a gay scene?' said Mr Crouchback. 'Those are the Tickeridges over there. Do come and meet them.'

Guy saw a mousey woman and a man in uniform with enormous handle-bar moustaches. 'I expect they've sent their little girl up to bed. She's a remarkable child. Only six, no nanny, and does everything for herself.'

The mousey woman smiled with unexpected charm at Mr Crouchback's approach. The man with the moustaches began moving furniture about to make room.

'Cheerioh,' he said. 'Pardon my glove.' (He was holding a chair above his head with both hands.) 'We were about to do a little light shopping. What's yours, sir?'

Somehow he cleared a small space and filled it with chairs. Somehow he caught the porter. Mr Crouchback introduced Guy.

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'So you're joining the lotus-eaters too? I've just settled madam and the offspring here for the duration. Charming spot. I wish I could spend a few weeks here instead of in barracks.'

'No,' said Guy, 'I'm only here for one night.'

'Pity. The madam wants company. Too many old pussy-cats around.'

In addition to his huge moustaches Major Tickeridge had tufts of wiry ginger whisker high on his cheekbones, almost in his eyes.

The porter brought them their drinks. Guy tried to engage him on the subject of his bag but he was off in a twinkling with 'I'll be with you in one minute, sir.'

'Baggage problem?' said the major. 'They're all in rather a flap here. What's the trouble?'

Guy told him at some length.

'That's easy. I've got the invaluable but usually invisible Halberdier Gold standing easy somewhere in the rear echelon. Let him go.'

'No, I say, please . . .'

'Halberdier Gold has not done a hand's turn since we got here except call me too damned early this morning. He needs exercise. Besides, he's a married man and the housemaids won't let him alone. It'll do Halberdier Gold good to get away from them for a bit.'

Guy warmed towards this kind and hairy man.

'Here's how,' said the major.

'Here's how,' said the mousey wife.

'Here's how,' said Mr Crouchback with complete serenity.

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But Guy could only manage an embarrassed grunt.

'First today,' said the major, downing his pink gin. 'Vi, order another round while I winkle out the Halberdier.'

With a series of collisions and apologies, Major Tickeridge made his way across the hall.

'It's awfully kind of your husband.'

'He can't bear a man standing idle,' said Mrs Tickeridge. 'It's his Halberdier training.'

Later when they separated for dinner Mr Crouchback said: 'Delightful people, didn't I tell you? You'll see Jenifer tomorrow. A beautifully behaved child.'

In the dining-room the old residents had their tables round the wall. The newcomers were in the centre, and, it seemed to Guy, got more attention. Mr Crouchback by a long-standing arrangement brought his own wine and kept it in the hotel cellars. A bottle of burgundy and a bottle of port were already on the table. The five courses were rather better than might have been expected.

'It's really remarkable how the Cuthberts cope with the influx. It's all happened so suddenly. Of course one has to wait a bit between courses but they manage to turn out a very decent dinner, don't they? There's only one change I mind. They've asked me not to bring Felix in to meals. Of course he did take up an awful lot of room.'

With the pudding the waiter put a plate of dog's dinner on the table. Mr Crouchback studied it carefully, turning it over with his fork.

'Yes, that looks delicious,' he said. 'Thank you so very much,'

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and to Guy, 'D'you mind if I take it up to Felix now? He's used to it at this time. Help yourself to the port. I'll be back directly.'

He carried the plate through the dining-room up to his sitting-room, now Guy's bedroom, and soon returned.

'We'll take him out later,' said Mr Crouchback. 'At about ten. I see the Tickeridges have finished dinner. The last two nights they've joined me in a glass of port. They seem a little shy tonight. You don't mind if I ask them over, do you?'

They came.

'A beautiful wine, sir.'

'Oh, it's just something the people in London send down to me.'

'I wish you could come to our mess one day. We've got some very fine port we bring out for guest nights. You, too,' he added, addressing Guy.

'My son, in spite of his advanced years, is making frantic efforts to join the army himself.'

'I say, not really? I call that jolly sporting.'

'I'm not seeing much sport,' said Guy, and wryly described the disappointments and rebuffs of the last fortnight.

Major Tickeridge was slightly puzzled by the ironic note of the recitation.

'I say,' he said. 'Are you serious about this?'

'I try not to be,' said Guy. 'But I'm afraid I am.'

'Because if you *are* serious, why don't you join *us*?'

'I've pretty well given up,' said Guy. 'In fact, I've as good as signed on in the Foreign Office.'

Major Tickeridge showed deep concern.

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'I say, that is a pretty desperate thing to do. You know, if you're really serious, I think the thing can be managed. The old corps never quite does things in the ordinary army style. I mean none of that Hore-Belisha stuff of starting in the ranks. We're forming a brigade of our own, half regulars, half temporaries, half militiamen, half long-service. It's all on bumf at present but we're starting cadre training any day now. It's going to be something rather special. We all know one another in the corps, you know, so if you'd like me to put in a word with the captain-commandant, just say so. I heard him saying the other day he could do with a few older chaps among the temporary officers.'

By ten o'clock that night, when Guy and his father let Felix go bounding into the blackness, Major Tickeridge had made notes of Guy's particulars and promised immediate action.

'It's remarkable,' said Guy. 'I spent weeks badgering generals and Cabinet Ministers and getting nowhere. Then I come here and in an hour everything is fixed up for me by a strange major.'

'That's often the way. I told you Tickeridge was a capital fellow,' said Mr Crouchback, 'and the Halberdiers are a magnificent regiment. I've seen them on parade. They're every bit as good as the Foot Guards.'

At eleven lights went out downstairs in the Marine Hotel and the servants disappeared. Guy and his father went up to bed. Mr Crouchback's sitting-room smelled of tobacco and dog.

'Doesn't look much of a bed, I'm afraid.'

'Last night at Angela's I slept in the library.'

'Well, I hope you'll be all right.'

Guy undressed and lay down on the sofa by the open window.

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The sea beat below and the sea-air filled the room. Since that morning his affairs had greatly changed.

Presently his father's door opened: 'I say, are you asleep?'

'Not quite.'

'There's this thing you said you'd like. Gervase's medal. I might forget it in the morning.'

'Thanks most awfully. I'll always wear it from now on.'

'I'll put it here on the table. Good night.'

Guy stretched out in the darkness and felt the light disc of metal. It was strung on a piece of cord. He tied it round his neck and heard his father moving about in his room. The door opened again. 'I say, I'm afraid I get up rather early and I'll have to come through. I'll be as quiet as I can.'

'I'll come to Mass with you.'

'Will you? Do. Good night again.'

Soon he heard his father lightly snoring. His last thought before falling asleep was the uneasy question: 'Why couldn't I say "Here's how" to Major Tickeridge? My father did. Gervase would have. Why couldn't I?'

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Two

APTHORPE GLORIOSUS

I

'Here's how,' said Guy.

'Cheers,' said Apthorpe.

'Look here, you two, you'd better have those drinks on me,' said Major Tickeridge, 'junior officers aren't supposed to drink in the ante-room before lunch.'

'Oh Lord. I am sorry, sir.'

'My dear chap, you couldn't possibly know. I ought to have warned you. It's a rule we have for the youngsters. It's all rot applying it to you chaps, of course, but there it is. If you want a drink tell the corporal-of-servants to send it to the billiard-room. No one will mind that.'

'Thanks for telling us, sir,' said Apthorpe.

'I expect you work up quite a thirst pounding the square. The C.O. and I had a look at you this morning. You're coming along.'

'Yes, I think we are.'

'I heard from my madam today. All's well on the Matchet front. Pity it's too far for week-end leave. I expect they'll give you a week at the end of the course.'

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It was early November. Winter had set in early and cold that year. A huge fire blazed in the ante-room. Junior officers, unless invited, did not sit by it; but its warmth reached the panelled corners.

The officers of the Royal Corps of Halberdiers, from the very fact of their being poor men, lived in great comfort. In fashionable regiments the mess was deserted after working hours by all except the orderly-officer. The Halberdiers had made this house their home for two hundred years. In their month in the regiment neither Guy nor Apthorpe had once been out to a meal.

They were the eldest of the batch of twenty probationary officers now under instructions in barracks. Another similar group was said to be at the depot. Presently they would be brought together. Some hundreds of militiamen were in training on the coast. Eventually in the spring they would all be interjoined with the regular battalions and the brigade would form. This was a phrase in constant use: 'When the brigade forms . . .' It was the immediate end of all their present activity, awaited like a birth; the start of a new unknown life.

Guy's companions were mostly young clerks from London offices. Two or three had come straight from public schools. One, Frank de Souza, was just down from Cambridge. They had been chosen, Guy learned, from more than two thousand applicants. He wondered, sometimes, what system of selection had produced so nondescript a squad. Later he realized that they typified the peculiar pride of the corps, which did not expect distinguished raw materials but confided instead in its age-old

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methods of transformation. The discipline of the square, the traditions of the mess, would work their magic and the *esprit de corps* would fall like blessed unction from above.

Apthorpe alone looked like a soldier. He was burly, tanned, moustached, primed with a rich vocabulary of military terms and abbreviations. Until recently he had served in Africa in some unspecified capacity. His boots had covered miles of bush trail.

Boots were a subject of peculiar interest to Apthorpe.

He and Guy first met on the day they joined. Guy got into the carriage at Charing Cross and found Apthorpe seated in the corner opposite to him. He recognized the badges of the Halberdiers and the regimental horn buttons. His first thought was that he had probably committed some heinous breach of etiquette by travelling with a senior officer.

Apthorpe had no newspaper or book. He stared fixedly at his own feet for mile after mile. Presently by a process of furtive inspection Guy realized that the insignia of rank on Apthorpe's shoulders were not crowns but single stars like his own. Still neither spoke, until after twenty minutes Apthorpe took out a pipe and began carefully filling it from a large rolled pouch. Then he said: 'This is my new pair of porpoises. I expect you wear them too.'

Guy looked from Apthorpe's boots to his own. They seemed very much alike. Was 'porpoise' Halberdier slang for 'boot'?

'I don't know. I just told the man I always go to, to make me a couple of pairs of thick black boots.'

'He may have given you cow.'

'Perhaps he did.'

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'A great mistake, old man, if you don't mind my saying so.'

He puffed his pipe for another five minutes, then spoke again: 'Of course, it's really the skin of the white whale, you know.'

'I didn't know. Why do they call it "porpoise"?'

'Trade secret, old man.'

More than once after their first meeting Apthorpe reverted to the topic. Whenever Guy gave evidence of sophistication in other matters, Apthorpe would say: 'Funny you don't wear porpoises. I should have thought you were just the sort of chap who would.'

But the Halberdier servant who looked after them in barracks – one between four probationary officers – found great difficulty in polishing Apthorpe's porpoises and the only criticism ever made of his turn out on parade was that his boots were dull.

Because of their age Guy and Apthorpe became companions in most things and were called 'uncle' by the younger officers.

'Well,' said Apthorpe, 'we'd better get a move on.'

The luncheon break allowed no time for dawdling. On paper there was an hour and a half but the squad drilled in suits of privates' dungarees (battle-dress had not yet been issued) and they had to change before appearing in the mess. Today Colour Sergeant Cork had kept them five minutes after the dinner call in expiation of Trimmer's being late on parade that morning.

Trimmer was the only member of the batch whom Guy definitely disliked. He was not one of the youngest. His large, long-lashed, close-set eyes had a knowing look. Trimmer concealed under his cap a lock of golden hair which fell over his forehead when he was bare-headed. He spoke with a slightly

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refined cockney accent and when the wireless in the billiard-room played jazz, Trimmer trucked about with raised hands in little shuffling dance steps. Nothing was known of his civilian antecedents; theatrical, possibly, Guy supposed. He was no fool but his talents were not soldierly. The corporate self-esteem of the Halberdiers did not impress Trimmer, nor did the solemn comforts of the mess attract him. The moment work ended Trimmer was off, sometimes alone, sometimes with a poor reflection of himself, his only friend, named Sarum-Smith. As surely as Apthorpe was marked for early promotion, Trimmer was marked for ignominy. That morning he had appeared at the precise time stated in orders. Everyone else had been waiting five minutes and Colour Sergeant Cork called out the marker just as Trimmer appeared. So it was twelve-thirty-five when they were dismissed.

Then they had doubled to their quarters, thrown their rifles and equipment on their beds, and changed into service-dress. Complete with canes and gloves (which had to be buttoned before emerging. A junior officer seen buttoning his gloves on the steps would be sent back to dress) they had marched in pairs to the Officers' House. This was the daily routine. Every ten yards they saluted or were saluted. (Salutes in the Halberdiers' barracks were acknowledged as smartly as they were given. The senior of the pair was taught to count: 'Up. One, two, three. Down.') In the hall they removed their caps and Sam Brownes.

Theoretically there was no distinction of rank in the mess 'Except, gentlemen, the natural deference which youth owes to age', as they were told in the address of welcome on their

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first evening; Guy and Apthorpe were older than most of the regular captains and were, in fact, treated in many ways as seniors. Together they now went into the mess at a few minutes after one.

Guy helped himself to steak-and-kidney pie at the sideboard and carried his plate to the nearest place at the table. A mess orderly appeared immediately at his elbow with salad and roast potatoes. The wine butler put a silver goblet of beer before him. No one spoke much. 'Shop' was banned and there was little else in their minds. Over their heads two centuries of commanding officers stared dully at one another from their gilt frames.

Guy had joined the corps in a mood of acute shyness born of conflicting apprehension and exultation. He knew little of military life save stories he had heard from time to time of the humiliations to which new officers were liable; of 'subalterns' courts martial' and gross ceremonies of initiation. There had been nothing at all like that in the hospitable welcome he and his fellows received from the Halberdiers. It seemed to Guy that in the last weeks he had been experiencing something he had missed in boyhood, a happy adolescence.

Captain Bosanquet, the adjutant, coming cheerfully into the mess after his third pink gin, stopped opposite Guy and Apthorpe and said: 'It must have been pretty bloody cold on the square this morning.'

'It was rather, sir.'

'Well, pass the word to your chaps to wear great-coats this afternoon.'

'Very good, sir.'

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'Thank you, sir.'

'Oh, you two poops,' said Frank de Souza, the Cambridge man, opposite. 'That means we'll have to let out all our equipment again.'

So there was no time for coffee or a cigarette. At half past one Guy and Apthorpe put on their belts, buttoned their gloves, looked in the glass to see that their caps were straight, tucked their canes under their arms and strode off in step to their quarters.

'Up. One, two, three. Down.' They acknowledged a fatigue party called to attention as they passed.

At their steps they broke into a run. Guy changed, and began hastily adjusting his webbing equipment. Blanco got under his fingernails. (This was the time of day which, all his life since school, Guy had spent in an easy chair.) It was permissible to double in drill suits. Guy arrived on the edge of the barrack square with half a minute in hand.

Trimmer looked terrible. Instead of buttoning his great-coat across the chest and clipping it tight at the throat, he had left it open. Moreover he had made a mess of his equipment. He had let one side-strap down at the back, the other in front with monstrous effect.

'Mr Trimmer, fall out, sir. Go to your quarters and come back here properly dressed in five minutes. *As you were*. One pace *back* from the rear rank, Mr Trimmer. *As you were*. On the command "Fall out" you take one pace back with the left foot. About turn, quick march. *As you were*. Swing the right arm level with the belt as the left foot goes forward. Now get it right. Fall out. And let

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me not see any laughter, Mr Sarum-Smith. There's not an officer in this squad so smart as he can laugh at another. Any officer I see laughing at another officer on parade will find himself up before the adjutant. All right. Stand easy. While we wait for Mr Trimmer, we'll just run through a little corps history. The Royal Corps of Halberdiers was first raised by the Earl of Essex, for service in the Low Countries in the reign of Queen Elizabeth. It then bore the name of the Earl of Essex's Honourable Company of Free Halberdiers. What other sobriquets has it earned, Mr Crouchback?'

'"The Copper Heels", and the "Applejacks", sergeant.'

'Right. Why the "Applejacks", Mr Sarum-Smith?'

'Because after the Battle of Malplaquet a detachment of the corps under Halberdier Sergeant Major Breen were bivouacked in an orchard when they were surprised by a party of French marauders whom they drove away by pelting them with apples, sergeant.'

'Very good, Mr Sarum-Smith. Mr Leonard, what part did the corps play in the First Ashanti War . . .'

Presently Trimmer returned.

'Very well. Now we can get on. This afternoon we are going to the kitchens where Halberdier Sergeant Major Groggin will show you how to tell meat. Every officer must know how to tell meat. Many frauds are attempted on the military by civilian contractors and the health of his men depends on the alertness of the officer. All right? Then, Mr Sarum-Smith, you will take command. At the command "Move", step smartly out of the ranks, about turn, face your men. Move. This is your squad now.

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I'm not here. I want them without arms, marched in a soldierly fashion to the kitchen yard. If you don't know where that is, follow your nose, sir. First run through the detail for piling arms, just for refreshment, and then give the executive order.'

The detail for piling arms was the most elaborate part of their education to date. Sarum-Smith faltered. Guy was called out and faltered also. De Souza ran on confidently, but incorrectly. At last Apthorpe, the safe stand-by, was called on. With an expression of strain he got it right – '. . . the odd numbers of the front rank will seize the rifles of the even numbers with the left hand crossing the muzzles, magazines turned outward, at the same time raising the piling swivels with the forefinger and thumb of both hands . . .' and the squad marched off. For the rest of the afternoon period they inspected the kitchens in great heat and the meat store in great cold. They saw vast, purple and yellow, carcasses of beef and were taught to distinguish cat from rabbit by the number of ribs.

At four they were dismissed. There was tea in the mess for those who thought it worth another change of uniform. Most lay on their beds until it was time for physical training.

Sarum-Smith came to Guy's room.

'I say, uncle, have you had any pay yet?'

'Not a penny.'

'Can't we do anything about it?'

'I did mention it to the second-in-command. He says it always takes some time to get through. It's just a matter of waiting.'

'That's all right for those who can afford it. Some firms are

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making up their fellows' salaries so they don't lose by joining the army. Mine doesn't. You're quite happily placed, aren't you, uncle?'

'Well, I'm not quite broke yet.'

'Wish I wasn't. It's jolly awkward for me. Did you realize when we joined they'd make us pay for our food?'

'Well, we don't really. We pay for what we have to supplement rations. It's very good value.'

'That's all very well, but I'd have thought the least they could do would be to feed us in wartime. It was a shock when I found my first mess bill. How do they expect us to live? I'm absolutely stony.'

'I see,' said Guy without enthusiasm or surprise, for this was not the first conversation of the kind he suffered in the last few weeks and Sarum-Smith was not a man whom he particularly liked. 'I suppose you want a loan.'

'I say, uncle, you're a thought-reader. I would be glad of a fiver if you can spare it. Just till the army pays up.'

'Don't tell everyone else.'

'No, of course not. A lot of us are in a bit of a fix, I can tell you. I tried Uncle Apthorpe first. He advised me to come to you.'

'Thoughtful of him.'

'Of course, if it's putting *you* in a fix . . .'

'No, that's all right. But I don't want to become banker for the whole corps.'

'You shall have it back the moment I get my pay . . .'

Guy was owed fifty-five pounds.

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Soon it was time to change into flannels and go to the gym. This was the one part of the day Guy hated. The squad of probationary officers assembled under the arc lights. Two Halberdier corporals were kicking a football about. One of them kicked it so that it smacked against the wall over their heads.

'That's damned cheek,' said a young man named Leonard.

The ball came again, rather closer.

'I believe the fellow's doing it deliberately,' said Sarum-Smith.

Suddenly there was a loud authoritative shout from Apthorpe. 'You two men, there. Can't you see there's a squad of officers here. Take that ball and get out.'

The corporals looked sulky, picked up their ball and strolled out with a plausible suggestion of nonchalance. Outside the door they laughed loudly. The gym seemed to Guy to institute a sort of extra-territorial area, the embassy of an alien and hostile people, that had no part in the well-ordered life of the barracks.

The physical training instructor was a sleek young man with pomaded hair, a big behind and unnaturally glittering eyes. He performed his great feats of strength and agility with a feline and, to Guy, most offensive air of sangfroid.

'The purpose of P.T. is to loosen up,' he said, 'and counteract the stiffening effects of the old-fashioned drill. Some of you are older than others. Don't strain. Don't do more than you feel you can. I want to see you *enjoy* yourselves. We'll start with a game.'

These games had a deeply depressing effect even on the youngest. Guy stood in line, took a football when it came to him from between the legs of the man in front, and passed it on. They were supposed to compete, one rank against the other.

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'Come on,' said the instructor, 'you're letting them get away with it. I'm backing you. Don't let me down.'

After the game came exercises.

'Make it smooth and graceful, gentlemen, as though you were waltzing with your best girl. That's the way, Mr Trimmer. That's very rhythmic. In the old days a soldier's training consisted of standing stiff at attention for long periods and stamping the feet. Modern science has shown that stamping the feet can seriously jar the spinal column. That's why nowadays every day's work ends with half an hour's limbering up.'

This man would never fight, Guy thought. He would stay in his glaring shed, rippling his muscles, walking on his hands, bouncing about the boards like an india-rubber ball, though the heavens were falling.

'At Aldershot today the advance courses are all done to music.'

There would have been no place for this man, Guy reflected, in the Earl of Essex's Honourable Company of Free Halberdiers. He was no Copper Heel, no true Applejack.

After physical training another change of clothes and a lecture on Military Law from Captain Bosanquet. Lecturer and audience were equally comatose. Captain Bosanquet demanded no more than silence.

'. . . The great thing to remember is to stick in all the amendments of *King's Regulations* as soon as they're issued. Keep your *King's Regulations* up to date and you can't go far wrong.'

At six-thirty they were roused, dismissed and the day's work was at last over. This evening Captain Bosanquet called Guy and Apthorpe back.

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'I say,' he said, 'I looked in at your P.T. this evening. Do you think it does you any particular good?'

'I can't say I do, sir,' said Guy.

'No, it's rather rot for people like yourselves. If you like, you can cut it out. Keep clear of the ante-room. Just stay in your quarters and, if anyone asks, say you are mugging up Military Law.'

'Thanks awfully, sir.'

'You'll probably find yourself commanding companies one day. Military Law will be more use to you then than P.T.'

'I think I'll stay on in the gym, if I may,' said Apthorpe. 'I find that after the square I need limbering up a bit.'

'Just as you like.'

'I've always been used to plenty of exercise,' said Apthorpe to Guy, as they returned to their quarters. 'There's a lot of sense in what Sergeant Pringle said about jarring the spinal column. I think I may have jarred mine a bit. I've been feeling a bit off colour lately. It may be that. I don't want anyone to think I'm not as fit as the rest of the crowd. The truth is I've lived hard, old man, and it tells.'

'Talking about being different from the rest of the crowd, did you by any chance pass Sarum-Smith on to me?'

'That's right. I don't believe in borrowing or lending. Seen too much of it.'

There were two baths on every staircase. Coal fires had now been lighted in the bedrooms. Toiling old Halberdiers, recalled to the colours and put on barrack duties, kept them stoked. This was the best hour of the day. Guy heard the feet of the young

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officers scampering down and out to local cinemas, hotels and dance halls. He soaked in hot water and later lay dozing in the wicker Oxford chair before his fire. No Mediterranean siesta had ever given such ease.

Presently Apthorpe came to summon him to the Officers' House. Patrol dress was optional for probationary officers. Only he and Guy had bought it and this tended to set them apart and make them more acceptable to the regulars, not because they could afford twelve guineas which the others could not, but because they had chosen to make a private investment in the traditions of the corps.

When the two 'uncles' in their blues arrived in the anteroom, Major Tickeridge and Captain Bosanquet were alone before the fire.

'Come and join us,' said Major Tickeridge. He clapped his hands. 'Music and dancing-girls. Four pink gins.'

Guy loved Major Tickeridge and Captain Bosanquet. He loved Apthorpe. He loved the oil-painting over the fireplace of the unbroken square of Halberdiers in the desert. He loved the whole corps deeply and tenderly.

Dinner was formal that night. The mess-president struck the table with an ivory hammer and the chaplain said Grace. The young officers, accustomed to swifter and sparser meals, found all this rather oppressive. 'I call it a bit thick,' Sarum-Smith had remarked, 'the way they even make a drill-movement out of eating.'

The table was lit with huge many-branched candlesticks which commemorated the military history of the last century

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in silver palm trees and bowed silver savages. There were about twenty officers in mess that night. Many of the young men were out in the town; the older were in neighbouring villas with their wives. No one drank wine except on guest nights. Guy had made the mistake of ordering claret his first evening and had been rebuked with a jocular: 'Hullo, blood? Is it someone's birthday?'

'There's an Ensa show tonight. Shall we go?'

'Why not?'

'I rather thought of sticking some amendments into the *King's Regulations*.'

'I'm told the orderly-room clerk will do it for a pound.'

'Looks better to do it oneself,' said Apthorpe. 'Still I think I'll come for once. The captain-commandant may be there. I haven't spoken to him since the first day.'

'What d'you want to say to him?'

'Oh, nothing particular. Anything that crops up, you know.'

After a pause Guy said: 'You heard what the adjutant said about our probably getting companies.'

'Doesn't that verge rather on shop, old man?'

Presently the hammer sounded again, the chaplain said Grace and the table was cleared. The removal of the cloth was a feat of dexterity which never failed to delight Guy. The corporal-of-servants stood at the foot of the table. The mess orderlies lifted the candlesticks. Then with a single flick of his wrists the corporal drew the whole length of linen into an avalanche at his feet.

Port and snuff went round. The party broke up.

The Halberdiers had their own Garrison Theatre within the barrack walls. It was nearly full when Guy and Apthorpe arrived.

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The first two rows were kept for officers. In the centre sat the full colonel, who by an idiosyncrasy of the corps was entitled the 'captain-commandant', with his wife and daughter. Guy and Apthorpe looked for places, saw only two empty seats in the centre. They hesitated, Guy seeking to withdraw, Apthorpe rather timidly advancing.

'Come along,' said the captain-commandant. 'Ashamed to be seen sitting with us? Meet madam and the brat.'

They took their places with the distinguished party.

'Do you go home for the week-end?' asked the brat.

'No. You see my home's in Italy.'

'Not really. Are you artistic or something? How thrilling.'

'My home used to be in Bechuanaland,' said Apthorpe.

'I say,' said the captain-commandant. 'You must have some interesting yarns. Well, I suppose I'd better get this thing started.'

He gave a nod; the footlights went up; he rose and climbed the steps to the stage.

'We're all greatly looking forward to this show,' he said. 'These charming ladies and accomplished gentlemen have come a long way on a cold night to entertain us. Let's see we give them a real Halberdier welcome.'

Then he returned to his place amid loud applause.

'It's really the chaplain's job,' he said to Guy. 'But I give the little fellow a rest now and then.'

A piano began playing behind the curtain. The curtain rose. Before the stage was fully revealed, the captain-commandant sank into deep but not silent sleep. Under the corps crest in the proscenium there was disclosed a little concert party

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comprising three elderly women, over-made-up, a cadaverous old man, under-made-up, and a neuter beast of indeterminable age at the piano. All wore the costume of pierrots and pierrettes. There was a storm of loyal applause. A jaunty chorus opened the show. One by one the heads in the first two rows sank into their collars. Guy slept too.

He was awakened an hour later by a volume of song striking him from a few feet away. It came from the cadaverous man whose frail northern body seemed momentarily possessed by the ghost of some enormous tenor from the south. He woke the captain-commandant, too.

'I say, that's not "God Save the King", is it?'

'No, sir. "There'll always be an England".'

The captain-commandant collected his wits and listened.

'Quite right,' he said. 'Never can tell a tune till I've heard the words. The old fellow's got a voice, hasn't he?'

It was the last item. Soon everyone was at attention while company and audience joined in the national anthem.

'On these occasions we always have the performers in for a drink. You might round up some of the young chaps to do the honours, will you? I expect you've more experience in entertaining the theatrical world than we have. And, I say, if you're here for Sunday and have nothing better to do, come and lunch.'

'Very glad to, sir,' said Apthorpe, whose inclusion in the invitation was by no means clear.

'You'll be here, too? Yes, of course, do come. Delighted.'

The captain-commandant did not go with them to the Officers' House. Two regulars and three or four of Guy's batch

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formed the reception committee. The ladies had shed all theatrical airs with their make-up and their fancy dress. They might have come in from a day's household shopping.

Guy found himself next to the tenor, who had shed his wig, revealing a few grey wisps of hair which made him appear somewhat younger, but still very old. His cheeks and nose were blotchy and bright-veined, his eyes watery in a nest of wrinkles. It was many weeks since Guy had looked into a sick man's face.

'You're all wonderfully hospitable. Especially the corps. I've always had a very warm corner for the Copper Heads.'

'Copper Heels.'

'Yes, of course. I meant Copper Heels. We were next to you in the line once in the last show. We got on very well with your chaps. I was in the Artists. Not with a commission, mind you. Joined up in the ranks and saw it all through.'

'I only just scraped in.'

'Oh, you're young. I wonder if I might have another cup of this excellent coffee. Takes it out of one, singing.'

'You've got a fine voice.'

'D'you think it went down all right? One never knows.'

'Oh yes, a great success.'

'Of course we aren't a No. 1 Company.'

'You were all a great success.'

They stood silent. A burst of laughter rose from the group round the ladies. Everything was going easily there.

'More coffee?'

'No more, thank you.'

Silence.

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'The news looks better,' said the tenor at last.

'Does it?'

'Oh, *much* better.'

'We don't get much time to read the papers.'

'No, I suppose you don't. I envy you. There's nothing in them but lies,' he added sadly. 'You can't believe a word they say. But it's all good. Very good indeed. It helps to keep one's spirits up,' he said from the depths of his gloom. 'Something cheerful every morning. That's what we need in these times.'

Quite soon the party bowled away into the night.

'That looked a very interesting man you were talking to,' said Apthorpe.

'Yes.'

'A real artist. I should think he's been in opera.'

'I daresay.'

'Grand Opera.'

Ten minutes later Guy was in bed. In youth he had been taught to make a nightly examination of conscience and an act of contrition. Since he joined the army this pious exercise had become confused with the lessons of the day. He had failed dismally in the detail of the pile-arms . . . – '. . . the even numbers of the centre rank will incline their muzzles to the front and place their rifles under their right arms, guards uppermost, at the same time seizing the piling swivel . . .' – He was not now certain which had the more ribs, a cat or a rabbit. He wished it had been he, not Apthorpe, who had called the impudent corporals to order in the gym. He had snubbed that decent, melancholy old man about the 'Copper Heads'. Was that the real

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'Halberdier welcome' expected of him? There was much to repent and repair.

II

On Saturday at twelve there was a large exodus from barracks. Guy as usual remained. More than his longer and more bitter memories, his modest bank balance, his blue patrols, his boredom in the gym or any of the small symptoms of age which distinguished him from his youthful fellows, there was this recurring need for repose and solitude. Apthorpe went off to play golf with one of the regulars. It was holiday enough for Guy to change at his leisure, wear the same clothes all the afternoon, to smoke a cigar after luncheon, walk down the High Street to collect his weekly papers – the *Spectator*, the *New Statesman*, the *Tablet* – from the local newsagent, to read them drowsily over his own fire in his own room. He was thus employed when, long after nightfall, Apthorpe returned from golf. He wore flannel trousers and a tweed coat much patched and bound with leather. There was a fatuous and glassy squint in his eyes. Apthorpe was tight.

'Hullo. Have you had dinner?'

'No. I don't intend to. It's a sound rule of health not to have dinner.'

'Never, Apthorpe?'

'Now, old man, I never said that. Of course not *never*. Sometimes. Give the juices a rest. You have to be your own doctor in the bush. First rule of health, keep your feet dry; second, rest the juices. D'you know what the third is?'

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'No.'

'Nor do I. Just stick to two rules and you'll be all right. You know you don't look well to me, Crouchback. I've been worrying about you. You know Sanders?'

'Yes.'

'I've been playing golf with him.'

'Good game?'

'Terrible. High wind, poor visibility. Played nine holes and knocked off. Sanders has a brother in Kasanga. I suppose you think that's near Makarikari.'

'Isn't it?'

'Just about twelve hundred miles, that's how near it is. You know, old man, for a chap who's knocked about as much as you have, you don't know much, do you? Twelve hundred bloody miles of bush and you call that near.' Apthorpe sat down and stared at Guy sadly. 'Not that it really matters,' he said. 'Why worry? Why go to Makarikari? Why not stay in Kasanga?'

'Why not indeed?'

'Because Kasanga's a perfectly awful hole, that's why. Still if you like the place, stay there by all means. Only don't ask me to join you, that's all, old man. Of course you'd have Sanders's brother. If he's anything like Sanders he plays pretty rotten golf, but I've no doubt you'd be jolly glad of his company in Kasanga. It's a perfectly awful hole. Don't know what you see in the place.'

'Why don't you go to bed?'

'Lonely,' said Apthorpe. 'That's why. It's always the same, wherever you are, Makarikari, Kasanga, anywhere. You have a good time drinking with the chaps in the club, you feel fine, and

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