

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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PAT BARKER

REGENERATION



PENGUIN BOOKS

For David, and in loving memory of
Dr John Hawkings (1922-1987)

PENGUIN BOOKS

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Part 1

Finished with the War
A Soldier's Declaration

I am making this statement as an act of wilful defiance of military authority, because I believe the war is being deliberately prolonged by those who have the power to end it.

I am a soldier, convinced that I am acting on behalf of soldiers. I believe that this war, upon which I entered as a war of defence and liberation, has now become a war of aggression and conquest. I believe that the purposes for which I and my fellow soldiers entered upon this war should have been so clearly stated as to have made it impossible to change them, and that, had this been done, the objects which actuated us would now be attainable by negotiation.

I have seen and endured the suffering of the troops, and I can no longer be a party to prolong these sufferings for ends which I believe to be evil and unjust.

I am not protesting against the conduct of the war, but against the political errors and insincerities for which the fighting men are being sacrificed.

On behalf of those who are suffering now I make this protest against the deception which is being practised on them; also I believe that I may help to destroy the callous complacency with which the majority of those at home regard the continuance of agonies which they do not share, and which they have not sufficient imagination to realize.

S. Sassoon
July 1917

Bryce waited for Rivers to finish reading before he spoke again. 'The "S" stands for "Siegfried". Apparently, he thought that was better left out.'

'And I'm sure he was right.' Rivers folded the paper and ran his fingertips along the edge. 'So they're sending him here?'

Bryce smiled. 'Oh, I think it's rather more specific than that. They're sending him to *you*.'

Rivers got up and walked across to the window. It was a fine day, and many of the patients were in the hospital grounds, watching a game of tennis. He heard the *pok-pok* of rackets, and a cry of frustration as a ball smashed into the net. 'I suppose he is - "shell-shocked"?''

'According to the Board, yes.'

'It just occurs to me that a diagnosis of neurasthenia might not be inconvenient confronted with this.' He held up the Declaration.

'Colonel Langdon chaired the Board. *He* certainly seems to think he is.'

'Langdon doesn't believe in shell-shock.'

Bryce shrugged. 'Perhaps Sassoon was gibbering all over the floor.'

"'Funk, old boy.'" I know Langdon.' Rivers came back to his chair and sat down. 'He doesn't *sound* as if he's gibbering, does he?'

Bryce said carefully, 'Does it matter what his mental state is? Surely it's better for him to be here than in prison?'

'Better for *him*, perhaps. What about the hospital? Can you imagine what our dear Director of Medical Services is going to say, when he finds out we're sheltering "conchies" as well as cowards, shirkers, scrimshankers and degenerates? We'll just have to hope there's no publicity.'

'There's going to be, I'm afraid. The Declaration's going to be read out in the House of Commons next week.'

'By?'

'Lees-Smith.'

Rivers made a dismissive gesture.

'Yes, well, I know. But it still means the press.'

'And the minister will say that no disciplinary action has been taken, because Mr Sassoon is suffering from a severe mental breakdown, and therefore not responsible for his actions. I'm not sure I'd prefer that to prison.'

'I don't suppose he was offered the choice. Will you take him?'

'You mean I *am* being offered a choice?'

'In view of your case load, yes.'

Rivers took off his glasses and swept his hand down across his eyes. 'I suppose they *have* remembered to send the file?'

Sassoon leant out of the carriage window, still half-expecting to see Graves come pounding along the platform, looking even more dishevelled than usual. But further down the train, doors had already begun to slam, and the platform remained empty.

The whistle blew. Immediately, he saw lines of men with grey muttering faces clambering up the ladders to face the guns. He blinked them away.

The train began to move. Too late for Robert now. Prisoner arrives without escort, Sassoon thought, sliding open the carriage door.

By arriving an hour early he'd managed to get a window seat. He began picking his way across to it through the tangle of feet. An elderly vicar, two middle-aged men, both looking as if they'd done rather well out of the war, a young girl and an older woman, obviously travelling together. The train bumped over a point. Everybody rocked and swayed, and Sassoon, stumbling, almost fell into the vicar's lap. He mumbled an apology and sat down. Admiring glances, and not only from the women. Sassoon turned to look out of the window, hunching his shoulder against them all.

After a while he stopped pretending to look at the smoking chimneys of Liverpool's back streets and closed his eyes. He needed to sleep, but instead Robert's face floated in front of him, white and twitching as it had been last Sunday, almost a week ago now, in the lounge of the Exchange Hotel.

For a moment, looking up to find that khaki-clad figure standing just inside the door, he thought he was hallucinating again.

'Robert, what on earth are *you* doing here?' He jumped up and ran across the lounge. 'Thank God you've come.'

'I got myself passed fit.'

'Robert, *no*.'

'What else could I do? After getting *this*.' Graves dug into his tunic pocket and produced a crumpled piece of paper. 'A covering letter would have been nice.'

'I wrote.'

'No, you didn't, Sass. You just sent me this. Couldn't you at least have *talked* about it first?'

'I thought I'd written.'

They sat down, facing each other across a small table. Cold northern light streamed in through the high windows, draining Graves's face of the little colour it had.

'Sass, you've got to give this up.'

'Give it up? You don't think I've come this far, do you, just to give in now?'

'Look, you've made your protest. For what it's worth, I agree with every word of it. But you've had your say. There's no point making a martyr of yourself.'

'The only way I can get publicity is to make them court-martial me.'

'They won't do it.'

'Oh, yes, they will. It's just a matter of hanging on.'

'You're in no state to stand a court-martial.' Graves clasped his clenched fist. 'If I had Russell here now, I'd *shoot* him.'

'It was my idea.'

'Oh, pull the other one. And even if it was, do you think anybody's going to understand it? They'll just say you've got cold feet.'

'Look, Robert, you think exactly as I do about the war, and you *do . . . nothing*. All right, that's your choice. But don't come here lecturing *me* about *cold feet*. This is the hardest thing I've ever done.'

Now, on the train going to Craiglockhart, it still seemed the hardest thing. He shifted in his seat and sighed, looking out over fields of wheat bending to the wind. He remembered the silvery sound of shaken wheat, the shimmer of light on the stalks. He'd have given anything to be out there, away from the stuffiness of the carriage, the itch and constriction of his uniform.

On that Sunday they'd taken the train to Formby and spent the afternoon wandering aimlessly along the beach. A dull, wintry-looking sun cast their shadows far behind them, so that every gesture either of them made was mimicked and magnified.

'They won't *let* you make a martyr of yourself, Sass. You should have accepted the Board.'

The discussion had become repetitive. For perhaps the fourth time, Sassoon said, 'If I hold out long enough, there's nothing else they can do.'

'There's a lot they can do.' Graves seemed to come to a decision. 'As a matter of fact, I've been pulling a few strings on your behalf.'

Sassoon smiled to hide his anger. 'Good. If you've been exercising your usual tact, that ought to get me at least two years.'

'They won't court-martial you.'

In spite of himself, Sassoon began to feel afraid. 'What, then?'

'Shut you up in a lunatic asylum for the rest of the war.'

'And that's the result of your string-pulling, is it? Thanks.'

'No, the result of my string-pulling is to get you another Board. You must take it this time.'

'You can't put people in lunatic asylums just like that. You have to have *reasons*.'

'They've got reasons.'

'Yes, the Declaration. Well, that doesn't prove me insane.'

'And the hallucinations? *The corpses in Piccadilly?*'

A long silence. 'I had rather hoped my letters to you were private.'

'I had to persuade them to give you another Board.'

'They won't court-martial me?'

'No. Not in any circumstances. And if you go on refusing to be boarded, they *will* put you away.'

'You know, Robert, I wouldn't believe this from anybody else. Will you *swear* it's true?'

'Yes.'

'On the Bible?'

Graves held up an imaginary Bible and raised his right hand. 'I swear.'

Their shadows stretched out behind them, black on the white sand. For a moment Sassoon still hesitated. Then, with an odd little gasp, he said, 'All right then, I'll give way.'

In the taxi, going to Craiglockhart, Sassoon began to feel

frightened. He looked out of the window at the crowded pavements of Princes Street, thinking he was seeing them for the first and last time. He couldn't imagine what awaited him at Craiglockhart, but he didn't for a moment suppose the inmates were let out.

He glanced up and found the taxi-driver watching him in the mirror. All the local people must know the name of the hospital, and what it was for. Sassoon's hand went up to his chest and began pulling at a loose thread where his MC ribbon had been.

For conspicuous gallantry during a raid on the enemy's trenches. He remained for 1½ hours under rifle and bomb fire collecting and bringing in our wounded. Owing to his courage and determination, all the killed and wounded were brought in.

Reading the citation, it seemed to Rivers more extraordinary than ever that Sassoon should have thrown the medal away. Even the most extreme pacifist could hardly be ashamed of a medal awarded for *saving* life. He took his glasses off and rubbed his eyes. He'd been working on the file for over an hour, but, although he was now confident he knew all the facts, he was no closer to an understanding of Sassoon's state of mind. If anything, Graves's evidence to the Board – with its emphasis on hallucinations – seemed to suggest a full-blown psychosis rather than neurasthenia. And yet there was no other evidence for that. Misguided the Declaration might well be, but it was not deluded, illogical or incoherent. Only the throwing away of the medal still struck him as odd. That surely had been the action of a man at the end of his tether.

Well, we've all been there, he thought. The trouble was, he was finding it difficult to examine the evidence impartially. He *wanted* Sassoon to be ill. Admitting this made him pause. He got up and began pacing the floor of his room, from door to window and back again. He'd only ever encountered one similar case, a man who'd refused to go on fighting on religious grounds. Atrocities took place on both sides, he'd said. There was nothing to choose between the British and the Germans.

The case had given rise to heated discussions in the MO's common room – about the freedom of the individual conscience in wartime, and the role of the army psychiatrist in 'treating' a

man who refused to fight. Rivers, listening to those arguments, had been left in no doubt of the depth and seriousness of the divisions. The controversy had died down only when the patient proved to be psychotic. That was the crux of the matter. A man like Sassoon would always be trouble, but he'd be a lot less trouble if he were ill.

Rivers was roused from these thoughts by the crunch of tyres on gravel. He reached the window in time to see a taxi draw up, and a man, who from his uniform could only be Sassoon, get out. After paying the driver, Sassoon stood for a moment, looking up at the building. Nobody arriving at Craiglockhart for the first time could fail to be daunted by the sheer gloomy, cavernous bulk of the place. Sassoon lingered on the drive for a full minute after the taxi had driven away, then took a deep breath, squared his shoulders, and ran up the steps.

Rivers turned away from the window, feeling almost ashamed of having witnessed that small, private victory over fear.

Light from the window behind Rivers's desk fell directly on to Sassoon's face. Pale skin, purple shadows under the eyes. Apart from that, no obvious signs of nervous disorder. No twitches, jerks, blinks, no repeated ducking to avoid a long-exploded shell. His hands, doing complicated things with cup, saucer, plate, sandwiches, cake, sugar tongs and spoon, were perfectly steady. Rivers raised his own cup to his lips and smiled. One of the nice things about serving afternoon tea to newly arrived patients was that it made so many neurological tests redundant.

So far he hadn't looked at Rivers. He sat with his head slightly averted, a posture that could easily have been taken for arrogance, though Rivers was more inclined to suspect shyness. The voice was slightly slurred, the flow of words sometimes hesitant, sometimes rushed. A disguised stammer, perhaps, but a life-long stammer, Rivers thought, not the recent, self-conscious stammer of the neurasthenic.

'While I remember, Captain Graves rang to say he'll be along some time after dinner. He sent his apologies for missing the train.'

'He *is* still coming?'

'Yes.'

Sassoon looked relieved. 'Do you know, I don't think Graves's caught a train in his life? Unless somebody was there to *put* him on it.'

'We were rather concerned about you.'

'In case the lunatic went missing?'

'I wouldn't put it quite like that.'

'I was all right. I wasn't even surprised, I thought he'd slept in. He's been doing a . . . a lot of rushing round on my behalf recently. You've no idea how much work goes into *rigging* a Medical Board.'

Rivers pushed his spectacles up on to his forehead and

massaged the inner corners of his eyes. 'No, I don't suppose I have. You know this may sound naïve but . . . to *me* . . . the accusation that a Medical Board has been rigged is quite a serious one.'

'I've no complaints. I was dealt with in a perfectly fair and reasonable way. Probably better than I deserved.'

'What kind of questions did they ask?'

Sassoon smiled. 'Don't you know?'

'I've read the report, if that's what you mean. I'd still like to hear your version.'

'Oh: "Did I object to fighting on religious grounds?" I said I didn't. It was rather amusing, actually. For a moment I thought they were asking me whether I objected to going on a crusade. "Did I think I was qualified to decide when the war should end?" I said I hadn't thought about my qualifications.' He glanced at Rivers. '*Not true*. And then . . . then Colonel Langdon asked *said* "Your friend tells us you're very good at bombing. Don't you still dislike the Germans?"'

A long silence. The net curtain behind Rivers's head billowed out in a glimmering arc, and a gust of cool air passed over their faces.

'And what did you say to that?'

'I don't remember.' He sounded impatient now. 'It didn't matter what I said.'

'It matters now.'

'All right.' A faint smile. '*Yes*, I am quite good at bombing. *No*, I do not still dislike the Germans.'

'Does that mean you once did?'

Sassoon looked surprised. For the first time something had been said that contradicted his assumptions. 'Briefly. April and May of last year, to be precise.'

A pause. Rivers waited. After a while Sassoon went on, almost reluctantly. 'A friend of mine had been killed. For a while I used to go out on patrol every night, looking for Germans to kill. Or rather I told myself that's what I was doing. In the end I didn't know whether I was trying to kill them, or just giving them plenty of opportunities to kill me.'

'"Mad Jack."'

Sassoon looked taken aback. 'Graves really *bar* talked, hasn't he?'

'It's the kind of thing the Medical Board would need to know.' Rivers hesitated. 'Taking *unnecessary* risks is one of the first signs of a war neurosis.'

'Is it?' Sassoon looked down at his hands. 'I didn't know that.'

'Nightmares and hallucinations come later.'

'What's an "unnecessary risk" anyway? The maddest thing I ever did was done under orders.' He looked up, to see if he should continue. 'We were told to go and get the regimental badges off a German corpse. They reckoned he'd been dead two days, so obviously if we got the badges they'd know which battalion was opposite. Full moon, not a cloud in sight, *absolutely mad*, but off we went. Well, we got there – eventually – and what do we find? He's been dead a helluva lot longer than two days, and he's French anyway.'

'So what did you do?'

'Pulled one of his boots off and sent it back to battalion HQ. With quite a bit of his leg left inside.'

Rivers allowed another silence to open up. 'I gather we're not going to talk about nightmares?'

'You're in charge.'

'Ye-es. But then one of the paradoxes of being an army psychiatrist is that you don't actually get very far by *ordering* your patients to be frank.'

'I'll be as frank as you like. I did have nightmares when I first got back from France. I don't have them now.'

'And the hallucinations?'

He found this more difficult. 'It was just that when I woke up, the nightmares didn't always stop. So I used to see . . .' A deep breath. 'Corpses. Men with half their faces shot off, crawling across the floor.'

'And you were awake when this happened?'

'I don't know. I must've been, because I could see the sister.'

'And was this always at night?'

'No. It happened once during the day. I'd been to my club for lunch, and when I came out I sat on a bench, and . . . I suppose I must've nodded off.' He was forcing himself to go on. 'When I woke up, the pavement was covered in corpses. Old ones, new ones, black, green.' His mouth twisted. 'People were treading on their faces.'

Rivers took a deep breath. 'You say you'd just woken up?'

'Yes. I used to sleep quite a bit during the day, because I was afraid to go to sleep at night.'

'When did all this stop?'

'As soon as I left the hospital. The atmosphere in that place was really terrible. There was one man who used to boast about killing German prisoners. You can imagine what living with *him* was like.'

'And the nightmares haven't recurred?'

'No. I do dream, of course, but not about the war. Sometimes a dream seems to go on after I've woken up, so there's a kind of in-between stage.' He hesitated. 'I don't know whether that's abnormal.'

'I hope not. It happens to me all the time.' Rivers sat back in his chair. 'When you look back now on your time in the hospital, do *you* think you were "shell-shocked"?''

'I don't know. Somebody who came to see me told my uncle he thought I was. As against that, I wrote one or two good poems while I was in there. *We-ell . . .*' He smiled. 'I was pleased with them.'

'You don't think it's possible to write a good poem in a state of shock?'

'No, I don't.'

Rivers nodded. 'You may be right. Would it be possible for me to see them?'

'Yes, of course. I'll copy them out.'

Rivers said, 'I'd like to move on now to the . . . thinking behind the Declaration. You say your motives aren't religious?'

'No, not at all.'

'Would you describe yourself as a pacifist?'

'I don't think so. I can't possibly say "*No war is ever justified*", because I haven't thought about it enough. Perhaps some wars are. Perhaps this one was when it started. I just don't think our war aims – *whatever they may be* – and we don't know – justify this level of slaughter.'

'And you say you *have* thought about your qualifications for saying that?'

'Yes. I'm only too well aware of how it sounds. A *second-lieutenant*, no less, saying "The war must stop". On the other

hand, I have *been* there. I'm at least as well qualified as some of the old men you see sitting around in clubs, cackling on about "attrition" and "wastage of manpower" and . . .' His voice became a vicious parody of an old man's voice. "'*Last heavily in that last scrap.*" You don't talk like that if you've watched them die.'

'No intelligent or sensitive person would talk like that anyway.'

A slightly awkward pause. 'I'm not saying there are no exceptions.'

Rivers laughed. 'The point is you hate civilians, don't you? The "callous", the "complacent", the "unimaginative". Or is "hate" too strong a word?'

'No.'

'So. What you felt for the Germans, rather briefly, in the spring of last year, you now feel for the overwhelming majority of your fellow-countrymen?'

'Yes.'

'You know, I think you were quite right not to say too much to the Board.'

'That wasn't my idea, it was Graves's. He was afraid I'd sound too sane.'

'When you said the Board was "rigged", what did you mean?'

'I meant the decision to send me here, or or somewhere similar, had been taken before I went in.'

'And this had all been fixed by Captain Graves?'

'Yes.' Sassoon leant forward. 'The point is they weren't going to court-martial me. They were just going to lock me up somewhere . . .' He looked round the room. '*Worse than this.*'

Rivers smiled. 'There *are* worse places, believe me.'

'I'm sure there are,' Sassoon said politely.

'They were going to certify you, in fact?'

'I suppose so.'

'Did anybody on the Board say anything to you about this?'

'No, because it was —'

'All fixed beforehand. Yes, I see.'

Sassoon said, 'May I ask you a question?'

'Go ahead'

'Do *you* think I'm mad?'

'No, of course you're not mad. Did you think you were going mad?'

'It crossed my mind. You know when you're brought face to face with the fact that, yes, you did see corpses on the pavement . . .'

'Hallucinations in the half-waking state are surprisingly common, you know. They're not the same thing as psychotic hallucinations. Children have them quite frequently.'

Sassoon had started pulling at a loose thread on the breast of his tunic. Rivers watched him for a while. 'You must've been in agony when you did that.'

Sassoon lowered his hand. 'No-o. *Agony's* lying in a shell-hole with your legs shot off. I was *upset*.' For a moment he looked almost hostile, then he relaxed. 'It was a futile gesture. I'm not particularly proud of it.'

'You threw it in the Mersey, didn't you?'

'Yes. It wasn't heavy enough to sink, so it just' — a glint of amusement — '*bobbed* around. There was a ship sailing past, quite a long way out, in the estuary, and I looked at this little scrap of ribbon floating and I looked at the ship, and I thought that me trying to stop the war was a bit like trying to stop the ship would have been. You know, all they'd've seen from the deck was this little figure jumping up and down, waving its arms, and they wouldn't've known what on earth it was getting so excited about.'

'So you realized *then* that it was futile?'

Sassoon lifted his head. 'It still had to be done. You can't just acquiesce.'

Rivers hesitated. 'Look, I think we've . . . we've got about as far as we can get today. You must be very tired.' He stood up. 'I'll see you tomorrow morning at ten. Oh, and could you ask Captain Graves to see me as soon as he arrives?'

Sassoon stood up. 'You said a bit back you didn't think I was mad.'

'I'm quite sure you're not. As a matter of fact I don't even think you've got a war neurosis.'

Sassoon digested this. 'What have I got, then?'

'You seem to have a very powerful *anti-war* neurosis.'

They looked at each other and laughed. Rivers said, 'You realize, don't you, that it's my duty to . . . to try to change that? I can't pretend to be neutral.'

Sassoon's glance took in both their uniforms. 'No, of course not.'

to have considered suicide? That might account both for the post-mortem apron and for the extreme terror he'd felt on waking. At the moment he didn't know Anderson well enough to be able to say whether suicide was a possibility or not, but it would certainly need to be borne in mind.

The smell of chlorine became stronger as they reached the bottom of the stairs. Sassoon felt Graves hesitate. 'Are you all right?'

'I could do without the smell.'

'Well, let's not bother -'

'No, go on.'

Sassoon pushed the door open. The pool was empty, a green slab between white walls. They began to undress, putting their clothes on one of the benches that lined the end wall.

'What's your room-mate like?' Graves asked.

'All right.'

'Dotty?'

'Not visibly. I gather the subject of German spies is best avoided. Oh, and I've found out why there aren't any locks on the doors. One of them killed himself three weeks ago.'

Graves caught sight of the scar on Sassoon's shoulder and stopped to look at it. It was curiously restful to submit to this scrutiny, which was prolonged, detailed and impersonal, like one small boy examining the scabs on another's knee. 'Oh, *very* neat.'

'Yes, isn't it? The doctors kept telling me how beautiful it was.'

'You were lucky, you know. An inch further down -'

'Not as lucky as you.' Sassoon glanced at the shrapnel wound on Graves's thigh. 'An inch further up -'

'If this is leading up to a joke about ladies' choirs, forget it. I've heard them all.'

Sassoon dived in. A green, silent world, no sound except the bubble of his escaping breath, no feeling, once the shock of cold was over, except the tightening of his chest that at last forced him to the surface, air, noise, light, slopping waves crashing in on him again. He swam to the side and held on. Graves's dark head bobbed purposefully along at the other side of the pool. Sassoon thought, we joke about it, but it happens. There'd been

a boy in the hospital, while he was lying there with that neat little hole in his shoulder. The boy - he couldn't have been more than nineteen - had a neat little hole too. Only his was between the legs. The dressings had been terrible to witness, and you had to witness them. No treatment in that overcrowded ward had been private. Twice a day the nurses came in with the creaking trolley, and the boy's eyes followed them up the ward.

Sassoon shut the lid on the memory and dived for Graves's legs. Graves twisted and fought, his head a black rock splintering white foam. 'Lay off,' he gasped at last, pushing Sassoon away. 'Some of us don't have the full complement of lungs.'

The pool was beginning to fill up. After a few more minutes, they climbed out and started to dress. Head muffled in the folds of his shirt, Graves said, 'By the way, I think there's something I ought to tell you. I'm afraid I told Rivers about your plan to assassinate Lloyd George.'

Rivers's round as duty officer ended in the kitchens. Mrs Cooper, her broad arms splashed with fat from giant frying-pans, greeted him with an embattled smile. 'What d' y' think of the beef stew last night, then, sir?'

'I don't believe I've ever tasted anything quite like it.'

Mrs Cooper's smile broadened. 'We do the best we can with the materials available, sir.' Her expression became grim and confiding. 'That beef was *walking*.'

Rivers got to his room a few minutes after ten and found Sassoon waiting, his hair damp, smelling of chlorine. 'I'm sorry I'm late,' Rivers said, unlocking the door. 'I've just been pretending to know something about catering. Come in.' He waved Sassoon to the chair in front of the desk, tossed his cap and cane to one side, and was about to unbuckle his belt when he remembered that the Director of Medical Services was due to visit the hospital some time that day. He sat down behind the desk and drew Sassoon's file towards him. 'Did you sleep well?'

'Very well, thank you.'

'You look rested. I enjoyed meeting Captain Graves.'

'Yes, I gather you found it quite informative.'

'*Ab.*' Rivers paused in the act of opening the file. 'You may have told me something you'd rather I didn't know?'

'No, not necessarily. Just something I might have preferred to tell you myself.' A moment's silence, then Sassoon burst out, 'What I can't understand is how somebody of Graves's intelligence can have such a shaky grasp of of *rhetoric*.'

Rivers smiled. 'You were going to kill Lloyd George rhetorically, were you?'

'I wasn't going to kill him at all. I said I *felt* like killing him, but it was no use, because they'd only shut me up in a lunatic asylum, "like Richard Dadd of glorious memory". There you are, *exact words*.' He looked round the room. 'Though as things have turned out -'

'This is *not* a lunatic asylum. You are *not* locked up.'

'Sorry.'

'What you're really saying is that Graves took you too seriously.'

'It's not just that. It suits him to attribute everything I've done to to to to . . . a state of mental breakdown, because then he doesn't have to ask himself any awkward questions. Like why he agrees with me about the war and does nothing about it.'

Rivers waited a few moments. 'I know Richard Dadd was a painter. What else did he do?'

A short silence. 'He murdered his father.'

Rivers was puzzled by the slight awkwardness. He was used to being adopted as a father figure - he was, after all, thirty years older than the youngest of his patients - but it was rare for it to happen as quickly as this in a man of Sassoon's age. "'Of glorious memory"?''

'He . . . er . . . made a list of old men in power who deserved to die, and fortunately - or or otherwise - his father's name headed the list. He carried him for half a mile through Hyde Park and then drowned him in the Serpentine in full view of everybody on the banks. The only reason Graves and I know about him is that we were in trenches with two of his great nephews, Edmund and Julian.' The slight smile faded. 'Now Edmund's dead, and Julian's got a bullet in the throat and can't speak. The other brother was killed too. Gallipoli.'

'Like your brother.'

'Yes.'

'Your father's dead too, isn't he? How old were you when he died?'

'Eight. But I hadn't seen much of him for some time before that. He left home when I was five.'

'Do you remember him?'

'A bit. I remember I used to like being kissed by him because his moustache tickled. My brothers went to the funeral. I didn't - apparently I was too upset. Probably just as well, because they came back terrified. It was a Jewish funeral, you see, and they couldn't understand what was going on. My elder brother said it was two old men in funny hats walking up and down saying jabber-jabber-jabber.'

'You must've felt you'd lost him twice.'

'Yes. We did lose him twice.'

Rivers gazed out of the window. 'What difference would it have made, do you think, if your father had lived?'

A long silence. 'Better education.'

'But you went to Marlborough?'

'Yes, but I was *years* behind everybody else. Mother had this theory we were delicate and our brains shouldn't be taxed. I don't think I ever really caught up. I left Cambridge without taking my degree.'

'And then?'

Sassoon shook his head. 'Nothing much. Hunting, cricket. Writing poems. Not very good poems.'

'Didn't you find it all . . . rather unsatisfying?'

'Yes, but I couldn't seem to see a way out. It was like being three different people, and they all wanted to go different ways.'

A slight smile. 'The result was I went nowhere.'

Rivers waited.

'I mean, there was the riding, hunting, cricketing me, and then there was the . . . the other side . . . that was interested in poetry and music, and things like that. And I didn't seem able to . . .' He laced his fingers. 'Knot them together.'

'And the third?'

'I'm sorry?'

'You said three.'

'Did I? I meant two.'

Ah. 'And then the war. You joined up on the first day?'

'Yes, in the ranks. I couldn't wait to get in.'

'Your superior officers wrote glowing reports for the Board. Did you know that?'

A flush of pleasure. 'I think the army's probably the only place I've ever really belonged.'

'And you've cut yourself off from it.'

'Yes, because -'

'I'm not interested in the reasons at the moment. I'm more interested in the result. The effect on you.'

'Isolation, I suppose. I can't talk to anybody.'

'You talk to *me*. Or at least, I think you do.'

'You don't say stupid things.'

Rivers turned his head away. 'I'm pleased about that.'

'Go on, *laugh*. I don't mind.'

'You'd been offered a job in Cambridge, hadn't you? Teaching cadets.'

Sassoon frowned. 'Yes.'

'But you didn't take it?'

'No. It was either prison or France.' He laughed. 'I didn't foresee this.'

Rivers watched him staring round the room. 'You can't bear to be safe, can you?' He waited for a reply. 'Well, you've got twelve weeks of it. *At least*. If you go on refusing to serve, you'll be safe for the rest of the war.'

Two red spots appeared on Sassoon's cheekbones. 'Not *my* choice.'

'I didn't say it was.' Rivers paused. 'You know you reacted then as if I were attacking you, and yet all I did was to point out *the facts*.' He leant forward. 'If you maintain your protest, you can expect to spend the remainder of the war in a state of Complete. Personal. Safety.'

Sassoon shifted in his seat. 'I'm not responsible for other people's decisions.'

'You don't think you might find being safe while other people *die* rather difficult?'

A flash of anger. 'Nobody else in this *stinking* country seems to find it difficult. I expect I'll just learn to live with it. Like everybody else.'

Burns stood at the window of his room. *Rain had been* landscape, dissolving sky and hills together in a wash of grey. He loathed wet weather because then everybody stayed indoors, sitting around the patients' common room, talking, in strained or facetious tones, about the war the war the war.

A sharper gust of wind blew rain against the glass. Somehow or other he was going to have to get out. It wasn't forbidden, it was even encouraged, though he himself didn't go out much. He got his coat and went downstairs. On the corridor he met one of the nurses from his ward, who looked surprised to see him wearing his coat, but didn't ask where he was going.

At the main gates he stopped. Because he'd been inside so long, the possibilities seemed endless, though they resolved themselves quickly into two. *Into* Edinburgh, or away. And that was no choice at all: he knew he wasn't up to facing traffic.

For the first few stops the bus was crowded. He sat on the bench seat close to the door of the bus. People smelling of wet wool jerked and swayed against him, bumping his knees, and he tensed, not liking the contact or the smell. But then at every stop more and more people got off until he was almost alone, except for an old man and the clippie. The lanes were narrower now; the trees rushed in on either side. A branch rattled along the windows with a sound like machine-gun fire, and he had to bite his lips to stop himself crying out.

He got off at the next stop, and stood, looking up and down a country lane. He didn't know what to do at first, it was so long since he'd been anywhere alone. Raindrops dripped from the trees, big, splashy, persistent drops, finding the warm place between his collar and his neck. He looked up and down the lane again. Somewhere further along, a wood pigeon cooed monotonously. He crossed over and began climbing the hill between the trees.

Up, up, until his way was barred by a fence whose wire twitched in the wind. A tuft of grey wool had caught on one of the barbs. Burns blinked the rain out of his eyes. He pressed two strands of wire apart and eased himself through, catching his sleeve, and breaking into a sweat as he struggled to free it.

Trembling now, he began to scramble along the edge of the ploughed field, slipping and stumbling, his mud-encumbered

down". I imagine most of us could if the pressure were bad enough. I know I could.'

Prior gazed round the room in mock amazement. 'Did the wallpaper speak?'

Rivers smiled. 'I'll tell them to give you a sleeping tablet.'

At the door Prior turned. 'He had very blue eyes, you know. Towers. We used to call him the Hun.'

After making sure Prior got his sleeping tablet, Rivers went upstairs to his own room and began to undress. He tugged at his tie, and as he did so caught sight of himself in the looking-glass. He pulled down his right lid to reveal a dingy and blood-shot white. *What am I supposed to do with this gob-stopper?* He released the lid. *No need to think about that.* If he went on feeling like this, he'd have to see Bryce and arrange to take some leave. It'd reached the point where he woke up in the morning feeling almost as exhausted as he had done when he went to bed. He sat on the edge of the bath and began to take his boots off. *Ye will surely say unto me this proverb. Physician, heal thyself.* One of his father's favourite texts. Sitting, bored and fidgety, in the family pew, Rivers had never thought it an odd choice, though now he wondered why it cropped up as frequently as it did. Fathers remain opaque to their sons, he thought, largely because the sons find it so hard to believe that there's anything in the father worth seeing. Until he's dead, and it's too late. Mercifully, doctors are also opaque to their patients. Unless the patient happens to be Prior.

Rivers finished undressing and got into the bath. He lay back, eyes closed, feeling the hot water start to unravel the knots in his neck and shoulders. Not that Prior was the only patient to have found him . . . Well. Rather less than opaque. He remembered John Layard, and as always the memory was painful, because his treatment of Layard had ended in failure. He told himself there was no real resemblance between Layard and Prior. What made Prior more difficult was the constant *probing*. Layard had never probed. But then Layard hadn't thought he needed to probe. Layard had thought he knew.

Lying with his eyes closed like this, Rivers could imagine himself back in St John's, hearing Layard's footsteps coming

across the court. What was it he'd said? 'I don't see you as *father*, you know.' Looking up from the rug in front of the fire. Laughing. 'More a sort of . . . *male mother*.' He *was* like Prior. The same immensely shrewd eyes. X-ray eyes. The same outrageous frankness.

Why should he remember that? It was because of that ridiculous image of the nanny goat that had flashed into his mind while Prior was butting him in the stomach. He disliked the term 'male mother'. He thought he could remember disliking it even at the time. He distrusted the implication that nurturing, even when done by a man, remains female, as if the ability was in some way borrowed, or even stolen, from women – a sort of moral equivalent of the *convade*. If that were true, then there was really very little hope.

He could see why Layard might use the term. Layard's relationship with his father had been difficult, and he was a young man, without any personal experience of fathering. Though fathering, like mothering, takes many forms beyond the biological. Rivers had often been touched by the way in which young men, some of them not yet twenty, spoke and felt like fathers to their men. Though when you looked at what they *did*. Worrying about socks, boots, blisters, food, drinks. And that perpetually harried expression of theirs. Rivers had only ever seen that look in one other place: in the passages of hospitals, on the faces of women who were bringing up large families on very low incomes, women who, in their early thirties, could easily be taken for fifty or more. It was the look of people who are totally responsible for lives they have no power to save.

One of the paradoxes of the war – one of the many – was that this most brutal of conflicts should set up a relationship between officers and men that was . . . domestic. Caring. As Rivers would undoubtedly have said, maternal. And that was only the trick the war had played. Mobilization. The Great Adventure. They'd been *mobilized* into holes in the ground. Constricted they could hardly move. And the Great Adventure – the real life equivalent of all the adventure stories devoured as boys – consisted of crouching in a dugout, waiting to be killed. The war that had promised so much in the

'manly' activity had actually delivered 'feminine' passivity, and on a scale that their mothers and sisters had scarcely known. No wonder they broke down.

In bed, he switched off the light and opened the curtains. Rain, silvery in the moonlight, streaked the glass, blurring the vista of tennis courts and trees, gathering, at the lower edge of the pane, into a long puddle that bulged and overflowed. Somebody, on the floor below, screamed. Rivers pulled the curtains to, and settled down to sleep, wishing, not for the first time, that he was young enough for France.

Sarah watched the grey trickle of tea creep up the sides of her cup. The tea-lady looked at it, doubtfully. 'That strong enough for you, love?'

'It'll do. Long as it's warm and wet.'

'My God,' Betty Hargreave said. 'Virgin's pee. I can't drink that.'

Madge nudged Sarah sharply in the ribs. 'No, well, it wouldn't be very appropriate, would it?'

'Hey up, you'll make us spill it.'

They went to the far end of the top trestle table and squeezed on to the bench. 'Come on, move your bums along,' Madge said. 'Let two little 'uns in.'

Lizzie collected her Woodbines and matches, and shuffled along. 'What happened to your young man, then, Sarah?'

'Didn't bloody show up, did he? I was sat an hour on Sunday all dolled up and nowhere to go.'

'Aw,' Lizzie said.

'Probably just as well,' said Madge. 'At least now you know what he was after.'

'I knew what he was after. I just want to know why he's not still after it.'

'Didn't get it, then?' Betty said, bringing her cup to the table.

'No, he bloody did not.'

'He was good-looking, though, wasn't he?' said Madge.

'All right, I suppose.'

Betty laughed. 'Better fish in the sea, eh, Sarah?'

'Aye, and they can stop there 'n' all. Not interested.'

A whoop of incredulity. Sarah buried her nose in her cup and then, as soon as she felt their attention had been withdrawn, looked at the window. You couldn't really see what it was like outside because the glass was frosted, but here and there raindrops clung to the panes, each with its crescent moon of

'Fine. I'm up there every day now.'

Ada had taken to selling tea to soldiers, young conscripts who did their six weeks' training in one of the local parks before being shipped out to France. The hut, which in peace time had been the boating lake ticket office, she'd turned into a small café.

'How much do you charge?'

'Fivepence.'

'My God.'

Ada shrugged. 'No competition.'

'You're a war profiteer you are, Mam. In a small way.'

'Wouldn't be small if I could get me hands on some money. You could do soup and all sorts, specially with the winter coming on. But it's the same old story. You need money to make money.'

Ada paid the bill, counting out the coppers with those thin, lined hands that Sarah could never see without pain.

'You know Billy?' Sarah asked suddenly.

'No, I don't, Sarah. I've not had the pleasure of an introduction.'

'Well if you'll just listen. If he gets slung out the hospital this time, he'll have a bit of leave, and we thought we might . . . We thought we might drop in on you.'

'Really?'

'Is that all you can say?'

'What am I supposed to say? Look, Sarah, he's an officer. What do you think he wants *you* for?'

'How should I know? Breath of fresh air, perhaps.'

'Bloody gale.'

'If he does come, you will be all right with him, won't you?'

'If he's all right with me, I'll be all right with him.' Ada slipped a penny under the saucer. 'But you're a bloody fool.'

'Why am I?'

'You know why. Next time he starts waving his old doo-lally around, you think about that pin.'

Sassoon arrived late to find Graves sitting by himself in the bar. 'Sorry I'm late.'

'That's all right. Owen was keeping me amused, but then he had to go. Somebody coming to see the printer.'

'Yes, that's right. I'd forgotten that.'

'Good game?'

'Not bad.' Sassoon detected, or thought he detected, a slight chill. 'It's the only thing that keeps me sane.'

'Last time you wrote you were complaining about playing golf with lunatics.'

'Ssh, keep your voice down. One of them's just behind you.'

Graves turned round. 'Seems fairly normal to me.'

'Oh, Anderson's all right. Throws a temper tantrum whenever he looks like losing half a crown.'

'You've been known to do *that* yourself.'

'Only because you were fooling around with a niblick instead of playing properly.' He raised a hand to summon the waiter. 'Have you had time to look at the menu?'

'I've had time to memorize it, Siegfried.'

At the table Graves said, 'What do you find to talk to Owen about? He says he doesn't play golf. And I don't suppose for a moment he hunts.'

'How acute your social perceptions are, Robert. No, I shouldn't think he'd been on a horse in his life before he joined the army. Poetry, mainly.'

'Oh, he *writes*, does he?'

'No need to say it like that. He's quite good. Matter of fact, I've got one here.' He tapped his breast pocket. 'I'll show you after lunch.'

'He struck me as being a bit shaky.'

'Did he? I don't think he is.'

'I'm just telling you how he struck me.'

'He can't be all that shaky. They're throwing him out at the end of the month. He was probably just overawed at meeting another Published Poet.'

A slight pause.

'Aren't you due to be boarded soon?'

'The end of the month.'

'Have you decided what you're going to do?'

'I've told Rivers I'll go back, *provided* the War Office gives me a written guarantee that I'll be sent back to France.'

'I wouldn't have thought you were in much of a position to *bargain*.'

'Rivers seems to think he can wangle it. He didn't say "wangle" of course.'

'So it's all over? Thank God.'

'I've told him I won't withdraw anything. And I've told him it's got to be France. I'm *not* going to let them put me behind a desk filling in forms for the rest of the war.'

'Yes, I think that's right.'

'Trouble is I don't trust them. Even Rivers. I mean, on the one hand he says there's nothing wrong with me and they'll pass me for general service overseas – there's nothing else they can do – and then in the next breath he tells me I've got a very powerful "anti-war complex". I don't even know what it means.'

'I'll tell you what it means. It means you're *obsessed*. Do you know, you never talk about the future any more? Yes, I know what you're going to say. How can you? Sass, we sat on a hill in France and we talked about the future. *We made plans*. The night before the Somme, we made plans. You couldn't do that now. A few shells, a few corpses, and you've lost heart.'

'How many corpses?'

'The point is . . .'

'The point is 102,000 last month *alone*. You're right, I am obsessed. I never forget it for a second, *and neither should you*. Robert, if you had any *real* courage you wouldn't acquiesce the way you do.'

Graves flushed with anger. 'I'm sorry you think that. I should hate to think I'm a coward. I believe in keeping my word. You agreed to serve, Siegfried. Nobody's asking you to change your opinions, or even to keep quiet about them, but you *agreed to serve*, and if you want the respect of the kind of people you're trying to influence – the Bobbies and the Tommies – you've got to be seen to *keep your word*. They won't understand if you turn round in the middle of the war and say "I'm sorry, I've changed my mind." To them, that's just bad form. They'll say you're not behaving like a gentleman – and that's the worst thing they can say about anybody.'

'Look, Robert, the people who're keeping this war going don't give a damn about the "Bobbies" and the "Tommies". And they don't let "gentlemanly behaviour" stand in the way

either when it comes to feathering their own nests.' He made a gesture of despair. 'And as for "bad form" and "gentlemanly behaviour" – that's just suicidal stupidity.'

Over coffee, the conversation changed tack.

'There's something I didn't tell you in June,' Graves said. 'Do you remember Peter?'

'I never met him.'

'No, but you remember him? You remember *about* him? Well, he was arrested. Soliciting outside the local barracks. Actually not very far away from the school.'

'Oh, Robert, I'm sorry. Why didn't you *tell* me?'

'How could I? You were in no state to think about anybody else.'

'This was in July, was it?'

'Same post I got your Declaration in.' Graves smiled. 'It was quite a morning.'

'Yes, I can imagine.'

Graves hesitated. 'It's only fair to tell you that . . . since that happened my affections have been running in more normal channels. I've been writing to a girl called Nancy Nicholson. I really think you'll like her. She's great fun. The . . . the only reason I'm telling you this is . . . I'd hate you to have any misconceptions. About me. I'd hate you to think I was homosexual *even in thought*. Even if it went no further.'

It was difficult to know what to say. 'I'm very pleased for you, Robert. About Miss Nicholson, I mean.'

'Good, that's all right, then.'

'What happened to Peter?'

'You're not going to believe this. They're sending him to Rivers.'

This was a bigger, and nastier, shock than Sassoon knew how to account for. 'Why?'

'What do you mean, "Why?"? To be cured, of course.'

Sassoon smiled faintly. 'Yes. Of course.'

The munitions factory at night looked like hell, Sarah thought, as she toiled down the muddy lane towards it, and saw the red smouldering fires reflected from a bank of low cloud, like an artificial sunset. At the gate she fell in with the other girls all

'It is,' said Sarah.

'Well, she must've got desperate, because she stuck summat up herself to bring it on. You know them wire coat hangers?'

Nods all round.

'One of them. She straightened the curved bit and -'

'We get the picture,' Sarah said.

'Yeh, well it's worse than that. Silly little cow shoved it in her bladder.'

'*Aw no.*' Madge turned away as if she were going to vomit.

'She was in agony. And you know she kept begging them not to send her to the hospital, because like she knew she hadn't come all right. But anyway the girl she's lodging with got that frightened she went and fetched the landlady. Well of course she took one look. She more or less says, "Sorry, love, you're not dying here." Took her in. And the irony of it is she's still pregnant. She looks awful.'

'You mean you've been to see her?' Sarah asked.

'Why aye. Went last night. You know, her face is all...'
Lizzie dragged her cheeks down. 'Oh, and she says the doctor didn't half railroad her. She was crying her eyes out, poor lass. He says, "You should be ashamed of yourself," he says. "It's not just an inconvenience you've got in there," he says. "It's a human being."'

Sarah and Madge were eager to know more, but the supervisor had noticed the pause in Lizzie's work and came striding towards them, though when she reached the table she found only silence and bowed heads and feverishly working fingers flicking machine-gun bullets into place inside the glittering belts.

On the night before a Board, Rivers took longer than usual over his rounds, since he knew the patients whose turn it was to be boarded would be feeling particularly tense. He was worried about Pugh, who had somehow managed to convince himself, in spite of repeated reassurances to the contrary, that he was to be sent back to France.

Sassoon, Rivers left till last, and found him lying on the bed in his new room, wrapped in his British warm coat. It was needed. The room was immediately beneath the tower and so

cold that, in winter, patients who'd sweated their way through a succession of nightmares often woke to find the bedclothes stiff with frost. Siegfried seemed to like it, though, and at least now he had the privacy he needed to work. Rivers took the only available chair, and stretched out his legs towards the empty grate. 'Well, how do you feel about tomorrow?'

'All right. Still nothing from the War Office?'

'No, I'm afraid not. You'll just have to trust us.'

'*Us?* You're sure you don't mean "them"?''

'You know I'll go on doing anything I can for you.'

'Oh, I know *that*. But the *fact* is once they've got me out of here they can do what they like. Pen-pushing in Bognor, here I come.'

Rivers hesitated. 'You sound rather down.'

'No-o. Missing Robert. Don't know why, we came quite close to quarrelling.'

'About the war?'

'I don't know what about. Except he was in a peculiar mood.' Sassoon stopped, then visibly decided to continue. 'He had a bit of bad news recently.'

Rivers was aware of more going on in this conversation than he could identify. Sassoon had been distinctly reserved with him recently. He'd noticed it yesterday evening particularly, but he'd put it down to pre-Board nerves, and the worry of not hearing from the War Office. 'From France?'

'Oh, no, something quite different. I did *ask* if he'd mind my telling you, so I'm not breaking a confidence. Friend of his - a boy he knew at school and was very fond of - in an entirely honourable, platonic *Robert-like* way - got arrested for soliciting. Outside a barracks, actually not very far away from the school. As far as I can make out, Robert feels...'
Sassoon came to a halt. 'Well. Rather as you might feel if you were... walking down a pleasant country road and suddenly a precipice opened at your feet. That's how he sees it. Devastated. Because, you see, this... this *abominable* thing must've been there all the time, and *he didn't see it*. He's very anxious to make it clear that... *he* has no such disgusting feelings himself. We-ell.'

'So you were left feeling...?'

'Like a precipice on a country road.'

'Yes.'

Sassoon looked straight at Rivers. 'Apparently he's being – the boy – sent to some psychiatrist or other.'

'Which school was this?'

'Charterhouse.'

'Ah.' Rivers looked up and found Sassoon's gaze on him.

'To be *cured*.' A slight pause. 'I suppose *cured* is the right word?'

Rivers said cautiously, 'Surely it's better for him to be sent to this psychiatrist than to go to prison?' In spite of himself he started to smile. 'Though I can see *you* might not think so.'

'He wouldn't have got prison!'

'Oh, I think he might. The number of custodial sentences is rising. I think any psychiatrist in London would tell you that.'

Sassoon looked downcast. 'I thought things were getting better.'

'I think they were. Before the war. *Slightly*. But it's not very likely, is it, that any movement towards greater tolerance would persist in wartime? After all, in war, you've got this *enormous* emphasis on love between men – comradeship – and everybody approves. But at the same time there's always this little niggle of anxiety. Is it the right *kind* of love? Well, one of the ways you make sure it's the right kind is to make it crystal clear what the penalties for the other kind are.' He looked at Sassoon. 'One of the reasons I'm so glad you've decided to go back. It's not just police activity. It's the whole atmosphere at the moment. There's an MP called Pemberton Billing. I don't know whether you've heard of him?'

Sassoon shook his head. 'I don't think so.'

'Well, he's going around London claiming to know of the existence of a German *Black Book* containing the names of 47,000 eminent people whose *private lives* make their loyalty to their country suspect.'

'Relax, Rivers. I'm not eminent.'

'No, but you're a friend of Robert Ross, and you've publicly advocated a negotiated peace. That's enough! You're *vulnerable*, Siegfried. There's no point pretending you're not.'

'And what am I supposed to do about it? Toe the line, tailor my opinions –'

'Not your opinions. I think you told me once that Robert Ross opposes the war? *In private*.'

'I wouldn't want to criticize Ross. I think I know him well enough to understand the impact those trials had on him. But what you're really saying is, if I *can't* conform in one area of life, then I *have* to conform in the others. Not just the surface things, *everything*. Even against my conscience. Well, I can't live like that.' He paused, then added, '*Nobody* should live like that.'

'You spend far too much time tilting at windmills, Siegfried. In ways which do *you* a great deal of damage – which I happen to care about – and don't do anybody else any good at all.' He hesitated, then said it anyway. 'It's time you grew up. Started living in the real world.'

That evening after dinner Rivers tried to work on a paper he was due to give to the Royal Society of Medicine in December. As he read through what he'd written, he became aware that he was being haunted by images. The man in the corridor at Queen Square, Yealland's hands, Callan's open mouth, the two figures, doctor and patient, walking up and down, in and out of the circle of light round the battery. It was unusual for Rivers to visualize as intensely as this, indeed to visualize at all, but then the whole experience, from beginning to end, had had something . . . hallucinatory about it.

Rivers left the typewriter and went to sit in his armchair by the fire. As soon as he abandoned the attempt to concentrate on the paper, he knew he was ill. He was sweating, his heart pounded, pulses all over his body throbbed, and he felt again that extraordinary sensation of blood squeezing through his veins. He thought he might have a slight temperature, but he never, as a matter of principle, took his own temperature or measured his pulse. There were depths of neuroticism to which he was not prepared to sink.

His confrontation with Yealland had exhausted him, for, however polite they had each been to each other, it *had* been a confrontation. He was too tired to go on working, but he knew if he went to bed in this state he wouldn't sleep, even if there was no disturbance from the guns. He decided to take a turn on the Heath, fetched his greatcoat from the peg and crept downstairs. Mrs Irving was a pleasant enough woman, but she was also a very lonely woman, and inclined to air her grievances about the excessive demands of Belgian refugees. He reached the bottom of the stairs, listened a moment, then quietly let himself out of the house.

He felt his way along the dark street. Shuttered windows, like blind eyes, watched from either side. It was something new this

darkness, like the deep darkness of the countryside. Even on the Heath, where normally London was spread out before you in a blaze of light, there was only darkness, and again darkness. Starlight lay on the pond, waking a dull gleam, like metal. Nothing else. He started to walk round the edge, trying to empty his mind of Queen Square, but the images floated before him like specks in the eye. Again and again he saw Callan's face, heard his voice repeating simple words, a grotesque parody of Adam naming created things. He felt pursued. There they were, the two of them, Yealland and his patient, walking up and down inside his head. Uninvited. If this was what habitual visualizers experienced, he could only say he found it most unpleasant.

He stopped and looked at the pond. He was aware of rustling, dragging footsteps. Somebody bumped into him and muttered something, but he moved away. By the time he got back to his lodgings he felt much better, well enough to greet Mrs Irving in the hall and compliment her on a more than adequate dinner.

Back in his own rooms he went straight to bed. The sheets felt cold, so cold he again wondered if he was running a temperature, but at least the palpitations and the breathlessness had gone. He thought he might manage to sleep if the Zeppelins and the guns allowed it, and indeed he did fall asleep almost as soon as he turned off the light.

He was walking down the corridor at Queen Square, an immensely long corridor which elongated as he walked along it, like a strip of elastic at full stretch. The swing doors at the far end opened and shut, flap-flapping an unnaturally long time, like the wings of an ominous bird. Clinging to the rail, the deformed man watched him approach. The eyes swivelled to follow him. The mouth opened and out of it came the words: *I am making this protest on behalf of my fellow-soldiers because I believe the war is being deliberately prolonged by those who have the power to end it.*

The words echoed along the white corridor. Abruptly the dream changed. He was in the electrical room, a pharyngeal electrode in his hand, a man's open mouth in front of him. He saw the moist, pink interior, the delicately quivering uvula, the

yellowish, grainy surface of the tongue, and the tonsils, like great swollen, blue-purple eggs. He slipped the tongue depressor in, and tried to apply the electrode, but the electrode, for some reason, wouldn't fit. He tried to force it. The man struggled and bucked beneath him, and, looking down, he saw that the object he was holding was a horse's bit. He'd already done a lot of damage. The corners of the man's mouth were raw, flecked with blood and foam, but still he went on, trying to force the bit into the mouth, until a cry from the patient woke him. He sat up, heart pounding, and realized he had himself cried out. For a second the dream was so real that he went on seeing the chair, the battery, the tortured mouth. Then, nothing. Gradually, his heart beat returned to normal, though when he got out of bed and went across to sit by the window the small effort made it pound again.

No raid tonight. It was ironic that on this one quiet night he should have woken himself up with a nightmare. As with all nightmares, the horror lingered. He was still inclined to accuse himself. That, he thought – self-reproach – had been the dominant affect. At first he was inclined to connect it with the quasi-sexual imagery of the dream, for the dream action had been both an accurate representation of Yealland's treatment and uncomfortably like an oral rape. He didn't feel, however, that the underlying conflict had been sexual.

The manifest content came from his visit to Queen Square, and was present with relatively little transformation. There was no doubt that the visit had been rife with opportunities for conflict. From the beginning he'd felt a tension between, on the one hand, his sympathy for the patients, his doubts about the quality of the treatment they were receiving, and on the other, the social and professional demands on him to be reasonably polite. As the day had gone on, this conflict had certainly deepened. Over lunch Yealland had told him about an officer patient of his who stammered badly, and whom Yealland had cured in – as usual – one session. Rivers – to his own amusement and exasperation – had responded to the story by beginning to stammer rather badly. And wherever he'd hesitated over a word, he'd sensed Yealland calculating the voltage. All nonsense of course. He'd been more amused by the situation than anything

else, but nevertheless the worsening of his stammer did point to an underlying conflict that might well find expression in a dream.

The man in the corridor with the spinal contracture seemed to represent Sassoon, since he'd quoted the Declaration, though it was difficult to imagine anybody more physically unlike Sassoon than that deformed, pseudo-dwarf. And the expression of antagonism – that certainly didn't correspond with anything in the real Sassoon's attitude towards him. But then there was no reason why it should. The dream action is the creation of the dreamer. The mood of this dream, a mood so powerful he could still not shake it off, was one of the most painful self-accusation. The man's expression need reflect no more than *his* feeling that Sassoon, perhaps, had grounds for antagonism.

He hadn't been able to see the face of the second patient, and had no clear sense of who it was. The obvious candidate was Callan, since it was Callan he'd watched being treated. And Callan had been working with horses when he became mute, which might account for the bit. And yet he was fairly certain the dream patient had not been Callan.

On the wards he'd been struck by a slight facial resemblance between Callan and Prior, who had also been mute when he arrived at Craiglockhart. He remembered an incident shortly after Prior's arrival when he'd dragged a teaspoon across the back of his throat, hoping that the choking reflex would trigger the return of speech. This did sometimes happen. He'd seen more than one patient recover his voice in that way. But he'd tried it while in a state of acute irritation with Prior, and the choking had occasioned a momentary spasm of satisfaction. Very slight, but enough to make him feel, in retrospect, discontented with his own behaviour. Mute patients *did* arouse exasperation, particularly, as with both Prior and Callan, when their satisfaction with their condition was hardly at all disguised. Perhaps the dream patient was a composite figure, part Callan, part Prior, the combination suggested by his application of a teaspoon to Prior's throat and Yealland's application of an electrode to Callan's.

But there was no comparison in the amount of pain inflicted. On the face of it he seemed to be congratulating himself on

dealing with patients more humanely than Yealland, but then why the mood of self-accusation? In the dream he stood in Yealland's place. The dream seemed to be saying, in dream language, don't flatter yourself. There *is* no distinction.

A horse's bit. Not an electrode, not a teaspoon. A bit. An instrument of control. Obviously he and Yealland were both in the business of controlling people. Each of them fitted young men back into the role of warrior, a role they had – however unconsciously – rejected. He'd found himself wondering once or twice recently what possible meaning the restoration of mental health could have in relation to his work. Normally a cure implies that the patient will no longer engage in behaviour that is clearly self-destructive. But in present circumstances, recovery meant the resumption of activities that were not merely self-destructive but positively suicidal. But then in a war nobody is a free agent. He and Yealland were both *locked in*, every bit as much as their patients were.

Bits. The scold's bridle used to silence recalcitrant women in the Middle Ages. More recently, on American slaves. And yet on the ward, listening to the list of Callan's battles, he'd felt that nothing Callan could say could have been more powerful than his silence. Later, in the electrical room, as Callan began slowly to repeat the alphabet, walking up and down with Yealland, in and out of the circle of light, Rivers had felt that he was witnessing the *silencing* of a human being. Indeed, Yealland had come very close to saying just that. 'You must speak, but I shall not listen to anything you have to say.'

Silencing, then. The task of silencing somebody, with himself in Yealland's place and an unidentified patient in the chair. It was possible to escape still, to pretend the dream accusation was general. Just as Yealland silenced the unconscious protest of *his* patients by removing the paralysis, the deafness, the blindness, the muteness that stood between them and the war, so, in an infinitely more gentle way, *he* silenced *his* patients; for the stammerings, the nightmares, the tremors, the memory lapses, of officers were just as much unwitting protest as the grosser maladies of the men.

But he didn't believe in the general accusation. He didn't believe this was what the dream was saying. Dreams were

detailed, concrete, specific: the voice of the protopathic heard at last, as one by one the higher centres of the brain closed down. And he knew who the patient in the chair was. Not Callan, not Prior. Only one man was being silenced in the way the dream indicated. He told himself that the accusation was unjust. It was Sassoon's decision to abandon the protest, not his. But that didn't work. He knew the extent of his own influence.

He went on sitting by the window as dawn grew over the Heath, and felt that he was having to appeal against conviction in a courtroom where he himself had been both judge and jury.