

# BRIDESHEAD REVISITED

The Sacred and Profane Memories of  
Captain Charles Ryder

*A NOVEL BY*

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LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY • BOSTON

1945

TO  
LAURA

*Author's Note*

I am not I; thou art not he or she;  
they are not they.

E. W.

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## *Prologue*

WHEN I reached C Company lines, which were at the top of the hill, I paused and looked back at the camp, just coming into full view below me through the grey mist of early morning. We were leaving that day. When we marched in, three months before, the place was under snow; now the first leaves of spring were unfolding. I had reflected then that, whatever scenes of desolation lay ahead of us, I never feared one more brutal than this, and I reflected now that it had no single happy memory for me.

Here love had died between me and the army.

Here the tram lines ended, so that men returning fuddled from Glasgow could doze in their seats until roused by the conductress at their journey's end. There was some way to go from the tram-stop to the camp gates; a quarter of a mile in which they could button their blouses and straighten their caps before passing the guard-room, a quarter of a mile in which concrete gave place to grass at the road's edge. This was the extreme limit of the city, a fringe of drift-wood above high-water mark. Here the close, homogeneous territory of housing estates and cinemas ended and the hinterland began.

The camp stood where, until quite lately, had been pasture and ploughland; the farm-house still stood in a fold of the hill and had served us for battalion offices; ivy still supported part of what had once been the walls of a fruit garden; half an acre of mutilated old trees behind the wash-houses survived of an orchard. The place had been marked for destruction before the army came to it. Had there been another year of peace, there

would have been no farmhouse, no wall, no apple trees. Already half a mile of concrete road lay between bare clay banks, and on either side a chequer of open ditches showed where the municipal contractors had designed a system of drainage. Another year of peace would have made the place part of the neighbouring suburb. Now the huts where we had wintered waited their turn for destruction.

Over the way, the subject of much ironical comment, half hidden even in winter by its embosoming trees, lay the municipal lunatic asylum, whose cast-iron railings and noble gates put our rough wire to shame. We could watch the madmen, on clement days, sauntering and skipping among the trim gravel walks and pleasantly planted lawns; happy collaborationists who had given up the unequal struggle, all doubts resolved, all duty done, the undisputed heirs-at-law of a century of progress, enjoying the heritage at their ease. As we marched past the men used to shout greetings to them through the railings — "Keep a bed warm for me, chum. I shan't be long" — but Hooper, my newest-joined platoon commander, grudged them their life of privilege: "Hitler would put them in a gas chamber," he said; "I reckon we can learn a thing or two from him."

Here, when we marched in at midwinter, I brought a company of strong and hopeful men; word had gone round among them, as we moved from the moors to this dockland area, that we were at last in transit for the Middle East. As the days passed and we began clearing the snow and levelling a parade ground, I saw their disappointment change to resignation. They snuffed the smell of the fried-fish shops and cocked their ears to familiar, peace-time sounds of the works' siren and the dance-hall band. On off-days they slouched now at street corners and sidled away at the approach of an officer for fear that, by saluting, they would lose face with their new mistresses. In the company office there was a crop of minor charges and requests for compassionate leave; while it was still half-light, day began with the whine of

the malingerer and the glum face and fixed eye of the man with a grievance.

And I, who by every precept should have put heart into them — how could I help them, who could so little help myself? Here the colonel under whom we had formed was promoted out of our sight and succeeded by a younger and less lovable man, cross-posted from another regiment. There were few left in the mess now of the batch of volunteers who trained together at the outbreak of war; one way and another they were nearly all gone — some had been invalided out, some promoted to other battalions, some posted to staff jobs, some had volunteered for special service, one had got himself killed on the field firing range, one had been court-martialled — and their places were taken by conscripts; the wireless played incessantly in the ante-room nowadays, and much beer was drunk before dinner; it was not as it had been.

Here at the age of thirty-nine I began to be old. I felt stiff and weary in the evenings and reluctant to go out of camp; I developed proprietary claims to certain chairs and newspapers; I regularly drank three glasses of gin before dinner, never more or less, and went to bed immediately after the nine o'clock news. I was always awake and fretful an hour before reveille.

Here my last love died. There was nothing remarkable in the manner of its death. One day, not long before this last day in camp, as I lay awake before reveille, in the Nissen hut, gazing into the complete blackness, amid the deep breathing and muttering of the four other occupants, turning over in my mind what I had to do that day — had I put in the names of two corporals for the weapon-training course? Should I again have the largest number of men overstaying their leave in the batch due back that day? Could I trust Hooper to take the candidates class out map-reading? — as I lay in that dark hour, I was aghast to realize that something within me, long sickening, had quietly died, and felt as a husband might feel, who, in the fourth year



of his marriage, suddenly knew that he had no longer any desire, or tenderness, or esteem, for a once-beloved wife; no pleasure in her company, no wish to please, no curiosity about anything she might ever do or say or think; no hope of setting things right, no self-reproach for the disaster. I knew it all, the whole drab compass of marital disillusion; we had been through it together, the army and I, from the first importunate courtship until now, when nothing remained to us except the chill bonds of law and duty and custom. I had played every scene in the domestic tragedy, had found the early tiffs become more frequent, the tears less affecting, the reconciliations less sweet, till they engendered a mood of aloofness and cool criticism, and the growing conviction that it was not myself but the loved one who was at fault. I caught the false notes in her voice and learned to listen for them apprehensively; I recognized the blank, resentful stare of incomprehension in her eyes, and the selfish, hard set of the corners of her mouth. I learned her, as one must learn a woman one has kept house with, day in, day out, for three and a half years; I learned her slatternly ways, the routine and mechanism of her charm, her jealousy and self-seeking, and her nervous trick with the fingers when she was lying. She was stripped of all enchantment now and I knew her for an uncongenial stranger to whom I had bound myself indissolubly in a moment of folly.

So, on this morning of our move, I was entirely indifferent as to our destination. I would go on with my job, but I could bring to it nothing more than acquiescence. Our orders were to entrain at 0915 hours at a near-by siding, taking in the haversack the unexpired portion of the day's ration; that was all I needed to know. The company second-in-command had gone on with a small advance party. Company stores had been packed the day before. Hooper had been detailed to inspect the lines. The company was parading at 0730 hours with their kit-bags piled before the huts. There had been many such moves since the

wildly exhilarating morning in 1940 when we had erroneously believed ourselves destined for the defence of Calais. Three or four times a year since then we had changed our location; this time our new commanding officer was making an unusual display of "security" and had even put us to the trouble of removing all distinguishing badges from our uniforms and transport. It was "valuable training in active service conditions," he said. "If I find any of these female camp followers waiting for us the other end, I'll know there's been a leakage."

The smoke from the cook-houses drifted away in the mist and the camp lay revealed as a planless maze of short-cuts, superimposed on the unfinished housing-scheme, as though disinterred at a much later date by a party of archæologists.

The Pollock diggings provide a valuable link between the citizen-slave communities of the twentieth century and the tribal anarchy which succeeded them. Here you see a people of advanced culture, capable of an elaborate draining system and the construction of permanent highways, overrun by a race of the lowest type. The measure of the newcomers may be taken by the facts that their women were devoid of all personal adornment and that the dead were removed to burying places a great distance from the settlement—a sure sign of primitive taboo. . . .

Thus, I thought, the pundits of the future might write; and, turning away, I greeted the company sergeant-major: "Has Mr. Hooper been round?"

"Haven't seen him at all this morning, sir."

We went to the dismantled company office, where I found a window newly broken since the barrack-damages book was completed. "Wind-in-the-night, sir," said the sergeant-major.

(All breakages were thus attributable, or to "Sappers'-demonstration, sir.")

Hooper appeared; he was a sallow youth with hair combed back, without parting, from his forehead, and a flat, Midland accent; he had been in the company two months.

The troops did not like Hooper because he knew too little about his work and would sometimes address them individually as "George" at stand-easies, but I had a feeling which almost amounted to affection for him, largely by reason of an incident on his first evening in mess.

The new colonel had been with us less than a week at the time and we had not yet taken his measure. He had been standing rounds of gin in the ante-room and was slightly boisterous when he first took notice of Hooper.

"That young officer is one of yours, isn't he, Ryder?" he said to me. "His hair wants cutting."

"It does, sir," I said. It did. "I'll see that it's done."

The colonel drank more gin and began to stare at Hooper, saying audibly, "My God, the officers they send us now!"

Hooper seemed to obsess the colonel that evening. After dinner he suddenly said very loudly: "In my late regiment if a young officer turned up like that, the other subalterns would bloody well have cut his hair for him."

No one showed any enthusiasm for this sport, and our lack of response seemed to inflame the colonel. "You," he said, turning to a decent boy in A Company, "go and get a pair of scissors and cut that young officer's hair for him."

"Is that an order, sir?"

"It's your commanding officer's wish and that's the best kind of order I know."

"Very good, sir."

And so, in an atmosphere of chilly embarrassment, Hooper sat in a chair while a few snips were made at the back of his head. At the beginning of the operation I left the ante-room, and later apologized to Hooper for his reception. "It's not the sort of thing that usually happens in this regiment," I said.

"Oh, no hard feelings," said Hooper. "I can take a bit of sport."

Hooper had no illusions about the army—or rather no special illusions distinguishable from the general, enveloping fog from

which he observed the universe. He had come to it reluctantly, under compulsion, after he had made every feeble effort in his power to obtain deferment. He accepted it, he said, "like the measles." Hooper was no romantic. He had not as a child ridden with Rupert's horse or sat among the camp fires at Xanthus-side; at the age when my eyes were dry to all save poetry—that stoic, red-skin interlude which our schools introduce between the fast flowing tears of the child and the man—Hooper had wept often, but never for Henry's speech on St. Crispin's Day, nor for the epitaph at Thermopylæ. The history they taught him had had few battles in it but, instead, a profusion of detail about humane legislation and recent industrial change. Gallipoli, Balaclava, Quebec, Lepanto, Bannockburn, Roncevaux, and Marathon—these, and the Battle in the West where Arthur fell, and a hundred such names whose trumpet-notes, even now in my sere and lawless state, called to me irresistibly across the intervening years with all the clarity and strength of boyhood, sounded in vain to Hooper.

He seldom complained. Though himself a man to whom one could not confidently entrust the simplest duty, he had an overmastering regard for efficiency and, drawing on his modest commercial experience, he would sometimes say of the ways of the army in pay and supply and the use of man-hours: "They couldn't get away with that in business."

He slept sound while I lay awake fretting.

In the weeks that we were together Hooper became a symbol to me of Young England, so that whenever I read some public utterance proclaiming what Youth demanded in the Future and what the world owed to Youth, I would test these general statements by substituting "Hooper" and seeing if they still seemed as plausible. Thus in the dark hour before reveille I sometimes pondered: "Hooper Rallies," "Hooper Hostels," "International Hooper Co-operation" and "the Religion of Hooper." He was the acid test of all these alloys.

So far as he had changed at all, he was less soldierly now than when he arrived from his OCTU. This morning, laden with full equipment, he looked scarcely human. He came to attention with a kind of shuffling dance-step and spread a wool-gloved palm across his forehead.

"I want to speak to Mr. Hooper, sergeant-major . . . well, where the devil have you been? I told you to inspect the lines."

"'M I late? Sorry. Had a rush getting my gear together."

"That's what you have a servant for."

"Well I suppose it is, strictly speaking. But you know how it is. He had his own stuff to do. If you get on the wrong side of these fellows they take it out of you other ways."

"Well, go and inspect the lines now."

"Rightyoh."

"And for Christ's sake don't say 'rightyoh.'"

"Sorry. I do try to remember. It just slips out."

When Hooper left the sergeant-major returned.

"C.O. just coming up the path, sir," he said.

I went out to meet him.

There were beads of moisture on the hog-bristles of his little red moustache.

"Well, everything squared up here?"

"Yes, I think so, sir."

"*Think so?* You ought to know."

His eyes fell on the broken window. "Has that been entered in the barrack-damages?"

"Not yet, sir."

"*Not yet?* I wonder when it would have been if I hadn't seen it."

He was not at ease with me, and much of his bluster rose from timidity, but I thought none the better of it for that.

He led me behind the huts to a wire fence which divided my area from the carrier-platoon's, skipped briskly over and made for an overgrown ditch and bank which had once been a field

boundary on the farm. Here he began grubbing with his walking-stick like a truffling pig and presently gave a cry of triumph. He had disclosed one of those deposits of rubbish which are dear to the private soldier's sense of order: the head of a broom, the lid of a stove, a bucket rusted through, a sock, a loaf of bread, lay under the dock and nettle among cigarette packets and empty tins.

"Look at that," said the commanding officer. "Fine impression that gives to the regiment taking over from us."

"That's bad," I said.

"It's a disgrace. See everything there is burned before you leave camp."

"Very good, sir. Sergeant-major, send over to the carrier-platoon and tell Captain Brown that the C.O. wants this ditch cleared up."

I wondered whether the colonel would take this rebuff; so did he. He stood a moment irresolutely prodding the muck in the ditch, then he turned on his heel and strode away.

"You shouldn't do it, sir," said the sergeant-major, who had been my guide and prop since I joined the company. "You shouldn't really."

"That wasn't our rubbish."

"Maybe not, sir, but you know how it is. If you get on the wrong side of senior officers they take it out of you other ways."

As we marched past the madhouse two or three elderly inmates gibbered and mouthed politely behind the railings.

"Cheeroh, chum, we'll be seeing you"; "We shan't be long now"; "Keep smiling till we meet again," the men called to them.

I was marching with Hooper at the head of the leading platoon.

"I say, any idea where we're off to?"

"None."

"D'you think it's the real thing?"

"No."

"Just a flap?"

"Yes."

"Everyone's been saying we're for it. I don't know what to think really. Seems so silly somehow, all this drill and training if we never go into action."

"I shouldn't worry. There'll be plenty for everyone in time."

"Oh, I don't want *much* you know. Just enough to say I've been in it."

A train of antiquated coaches were waiting for us at the siding; an R.T.O. was in charge; a fatigue party was loading the last of the kit-bags from the trucks to the luggage vans. In half an hour we were ready to start and in an hour we started.

My three platoon commanders and myself had a carriage to ourselves. They ate sandwiches and chocolate, smoked and slept. None of them had a book. For the first three or four hours they noted the names of the towns and leaned out of the windows when, as often happened, we stopped between stations. Later they lost interest. At midday and again at dark some tepid cocoa was ladled from a container into our mugs. The train moved slowly South through flat, drab main-line scenery.

The chief incident in the day was the C.O.'s "Order Group." We assembled in his carriage, at the summons of an orderly, and found him and the adjutant wearing their steel helmets and equipment. The first thing he said was: "This is an Order Group. I expect you to attend properly dressed. The fact that we happen to be in a train is immaterial." I thought he was going to send us back but, after glaring at us, he said: "Sit down. . . .

"The camp was left in a disgraceful condition. Wherever I went I found evidence that officers are not doing their duty. The state in which a camp is left is the best possible test of the efficiency of regimental officers. It is on such matters that the reputation of a battalion and its commander rests. And"—Did he in fact say this or am I finding words for the resentment in his voice and eye? I think he left it unsaid—"I do not intend



to have my professional reputation compromised by the slackness of a few temporary officers."

We sat with our note-books and pencils waiting to take down the details of our next jobs. A more sensitive man would have seen that he had failed to be impressive; perhaps he saw, for he added in a petulant schoolmasterish way: "All I ask is loyal co-operation."

Then he referred to his notes and read:—

"Orders.

"Information. The battalion is now in transit between location A and location B. This is a major L of C and is liable to bombing and gas attack from the enemy.

"Intention. I intend to arrive at location B.

"Method. Train will arrive at destination at approximately 2315 hours . . ." and so on.

The sting came at the end under the heading, "Administration." C Company, less one platoon, was to unload the train on arrival at the siding where three three-tonners would be available for moving all stores to a battalion dump in the new camp; work to continue until completed; the remaining platoon was to find a guard on the dump and perimeter sentries for the camp area.

"Any questions?"

"Can we have an issue of cocoa for the working party?"

"No. Any more questions?"

When I told the sergeant-major of these orders he said: "Poor old C Company struck unlucky again"; and I knew this to be a reproach for my having antagonized the commanding officer.

I told the platoon commanders.

"I say," said Hooper, "it makes it awfully awkward with the chaps. They'll be fairly browned-off. He always seems to pick on us for the dirty work."

"You'll do guard."



"Okeydoke. But I say, how am I to find the perimeter in the dark?"

Shortly after blackout we were disturbed by an orderly making his way lugubriously down the length of the train with a rattle. One of the more sophisticated sergeants called out "*Deuxième service.*"

"We are being sprayed with liquid mustard-gas," I said. "See that the windows are shut." I then wrote a neat little situation-report to say that there were no casualties and nothing had been contaminated; that men had been detained to decontaminate the outside of the coach before detraining. This seemed to satisfy the commanding officer, for we heard no more from him. After dark we all slept.

At last, very late, we came to our siding. It was part of our training in security and active service conditions that we should eschew stations and platforms. The drop from the running board to the cinder track made for disorder and breakages in the darkness.

"Fall in on the road below the embankment. C Company seem to be taking their time as usual, Captain Ryder."

"Yes sir. We're having a little difficulty with the bleach."

"Bleach?"

"For decontaminating the outside of the coaches, sir."

"Oh, very conscientious, I'm sure. Skip it and get a move on."

By now my half-awake and sulky men were clattering into shape on the road. Soon Hooper's platoon had marched off into the darkness; I found the lorries, organized lines of men to pass the stores from hand to hand down the steep bank, and, presently, as they found themselves doing something with an apparent purpose in it, they got more cheerful. I handled stores with them for the first half-hour; then broke off to meet the company second-in-command who came down with the first returning truck.

"It's not a bad camp," he reported; "big private house with