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**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Hilliard's time at home tells us a great deal of his experience at war. When he compares the two worlds, his life before the war seems meaningless to him.

When he returns home, he finds that he does not fit in with life anymore, and thinks that he never will again. This is strongly conveyed in the opening of the novel. He knows nothing about normal life anymore. 'Knew everything. Nothing.

'He has found out so much about life and death, but feels that it has obliterated all that he knew to be normal. At war, Hilliard feels that he doesn't know himself anymore. He comes up against aspects of his personality that don't seem to matter anymore. There are lots of references of Hilliard's childhood.

His mind seems to move around constantly. You are given a strong sense of how his life used to be and how simple it was. Hilliard relates it to what is happening at the present time. Hilliard is unhappy when he returns home. 'He had been unhappy at home, where he could talk to no one, nobody knew, where old men aired their military opinions, where they gave dinner parties and he could not join in, only sit there, staring at them, and then down his food in disbelief. He is angry and annoyed at the way people could sit there and discuss the war as if they had been there and knew what was best.

How could they talk about it when they weren't there? He had seen people at the extremities of life and death and these people had seen nothing. Knew nothing. Hilliard has lost his fresh approach on life. He has lost his desire to see and hear everything, as he did when he was a child. This is shown by the

small things that Hilliard encounters that seem to remind him of war. He tries hard to block out the images they conjure.

This is demonstrated when Hilliard is in London. The images of commissionaires in uniform remind him of the uniform he wore. ‘..

.. Commissionaires in uniform, opening the doors of grand hotels. Uniform.

.. he had felt a tightening in his head. ‘ Hilliard doesn’t want to be reminded anymore. The separation of the two worlds is made clear when Hilliard talks about his relationship with Beth.

Her letters to him say nothing to him about life at home. Beth has moved on with her life and grown up. Hilliard doesn’t realise that this gap has occurred between them until he returns home. He feels he needs to talk to Beth, and try and reclaim some of the normality he had before the war. He finds that Beth doesn’t understand him anymore – she’s not the same person that she was. Hilliard is full of worries and anxieties and emotions.

He thinks that Beth will be the one person he can talk to. He has a vast expanse of horror behind him and no one to talk to about it. ‘ Your leg is better, isn’t it? They have said you’re really all right to go back? ‘ Oh for God’s sake, it’s not my leg, my leg’s nothing. Why do you go on about my leg? ‘ Beth doesn’t want to open herself up to him or know about the horrors of war. She has become blind to Hilliard’s world. Beth seems to have lost all her love and warmth that she and Hilliard shared.

She lives in a safe, prim world and could never realise how Hilliard really feels. ‘ Oh, well...

it's been lovely having you at home'. She is making him feel like a guest in his own house. Hilliard feels that there is nothing for him at home anymore and wants to return to the war, and be among familiar faces and with people who know what he is feeling. When Hilliard is at home, he stands back and looks at his home.

Around it, the lawns, about whose closeness of cut his father worried the gardener daily, the symmetrical flowerbeds, the perfectly pruned roses. He had been born here. The windows were tall and blank. It meant nothing to him. ' His views and perspectives on life have changed. It doesn't matter to him anymore what the garden looks like - it's not important anymore.

It's also a reflection on the neat order of his home life compared with the chaos of war. It seems that the news of the war has caused his family to panic and try and protect their own secluded little worlds. It's a defence against the awareness of the chaos of war Hilliard develops an urgency to leave his home life behind and get back to the front. This is shown in the way that Hilliard is ready to leave for London far too soon and doesn't want his mother to come with him. He wants to leave it all behind.

This urgency continues to build up when he is with his mother. ' He wanted to leave Cliff House alone, to turn the bend by the black thorn hedge and go out of their sight, he wanted to go. ' This shows us that Hilliard doesn't feel normal here anymore. His experiences of war have changed him too much. He is a different person now. Hilliard feels that he has never really known his mother, but since returning from war, he begins to see her differently.

He understands the person that she is - something he couldn't do before. He realises how beautiful she really is and why she dresses as she does. '...

for he understood, suddenly, that she was obliged to make the best of what she had, here in this dull, restricted neighbourhood, and that she was perhaps unhappy, after all, bored with herself. He saw that she was beautiful. This is showing us that Hilliard had perhaps matured since going to war and is no longer embarrassed by how his mother dresses. It also suggests to me that it seems petty and small to worry about how his mother is dressed when he has been through so much. Hilliard is angered though by his mother's lack of understanding of the war.

She's just like everyone else - she simply can't imagine what war is like. She is talking to Hilliard about Kimble's son; 'His son was killed at Mons. Do you remember Kimble's boy?' Mrs Hilliard says this as if it is a normal occurrence, which upsets Hilliard. He thought, she has told me Kimble's son was killed at Mons, and has gone on to speak of other things. Does she not know? Does she not think of it? 'Constance Hilliard cannot understand the horrors of what being killed at Mons actually means, she is ignorant of what had happened.

She's living her life in a blissful oblivion of what is happening in the world, like most of the other people in Britain, it seems. Hilliard's experience of war has left his home life completely meaningless. There is nothing left of him at his home, Cliff House. He is not the same person anymore. 'Everything he had, everything he was, stood on this quiet platform in the sunlight, a tall young

man in uniform, who had seen what he had seen, who knew - some belongings packed into a dark valise.

Nothing more. ' His experiences of war have changed him too much to reclaim his previous life. He is a different person now. He has seen life and death and been permanently changed by it.

He feels completely separated from his old life. ' He had, again, the odd sense of completeness, of holding everything to within himself, of detachment. His old life is over. On the train to London, Hilliard thinks of all the useless comments his family made to him and realises that he can't relate to them, and his family can't relate to him. It represents the shallow tone of his family, due to their lack of knowledge of war. As he leaves he feels ' a moment of singing happiness.

' It seems quite ironic but we can understand Hilliard's point of view. He has moved on from his old life. Living with the extremities of life and death has changed him. He will never be the same again. Hilliard confesses how he really feels when he returns to the front and meets Barton.

He admits that he was terrible unhappy at home. In conclusion, Hilliard had been completely changed by his experiences of war. He has seen life and death at their worst. He can never be the same again, or fit in with life at home. People at home have a total lack of understanding.

They talk about war as if they were there, and it's not a big deal. They don't know what it was really like. Hilliard does and will have to live with those images for the rest of his life.