



## Author's Note

In writing this story I have realized an ambition which, though I fear it may have been presumptuous, I could not resist attempting. Apart from the epic nature of the subject, the spectre of Thackeray must loom over anyone wishing to tackle the battle of Waterloo. It would not allow me to set pen to paper until I banished it, at last, with the reflection that no one, after all, would judge a minor poet by Shakespeare's standard of excellence. I should add, perhaps, that it is many years since I read *Vanity Fair*; and although I have encroached on Thackeray's preserves, at least I have stolen nothing from him.

With regard to the Bibliography published at the end of this book, to obviate the necessity of appending a somewhat tedious list of authorities, I have limited it to those works which, in writing a novel, and not a history, I have found most useful. Works dealing with the purely tactical aspect of the campaign have been omitted; so too have many minor accounts; and a host of biographies, memoirs, and periodicals which, though not primarily concerned with any of the personages figuring in this story, contained, here and there, stray items of information about them. It will further be seen that, with the exception of Houssaye, no French authorities have been given: the French point of view was not relevant to my purpose. On the other hand, certain works have been included which, though they do not deal with the Waterloo campaign, were invaluable for the light they throw on Wellington's character, and the customs obtaining in his army.

Wherever possible, I have allowed the Duke to speak for himself, borrowing freely from the twelve volumes of his Despatches. If it should be objected that I should not have made him say in 1815 what he wrote in 1808, or said many years after Waterloo, I can only hope that, since his own words, whether spoken or written, were so infinitely superior to any which I could have put into his mouth, I may be pardoned for the occasional chronological inexactitudes thus entailed.

GEORGETTE HEYER

# One

The youthful gentleman in the scarlet coat with blue facings and gold lace, who was seated in the window of Lady Worth's drawing-room, idly looking down into the street, ceased for a moment to pay any attention to the conversation that was in progress. Among the passers-by, a Bruxelloise in a black mantilla had caught his eye. She was lovely enough to be watched the whole way down the street. Besides, the conversation in the salon was very dull: just the same stuff that was being said all over Brussels.

'I own, one can be more comfortable now that Lord Hill is here, but I wish the Duke would come!'

The Bruxelloise had cast a roguish dark eye up at the window as she passed; the gentleman in scarlet did not even hear this remark, delivered by Lady Worth in an anxious tone which made her morning visitors look grave for a minute.

The Earl of Worth said dryly: 'To be sure, my love: so do we all.'

Georgiana Lennox, who was seated on the sofa with her hands clasped on top of her muff, subscribed to her hostess's sentiments with a sigh, but smiled at the Earl's words, and reminded him that there was one person at least in Brussels who did not wish for the Duke's arrival. 'My dear sir, the Prince is in the most dreadful huff! No other word for it! Only fancy! He scolded me for wanting the Duke to make haste – as though I could not trust *him* to account for Bonaparte, if you please!'

'How awkward for you!' said Lady Worth. 'What did you say?'

‘Oh, I said nothing that was not true, I assure you! I like the Prince very well, but it is a little too much to suppose that a mere boy is capable of taking the field against Bonaparte. Why, what experience has he had? I might as well consider my brother March a fit commander. Indeed, he was on the Duke’s Staff for longer than the Prince.’

‘Is it true that the Prince and his father don’t agree?’ asked Sir Peregrine Taverner, a fair young man in a blue coat with very large silver buttons. ‘I heard —’

A plump gentleman of cheerful and inquisitive mien broke into the conversation with all the air of an incorrigible gossip-monger. ‘Quite true! The Prince is all for the English, of course, and that don’t suit Frog’s notions at all. Frog, you know, is what I call the King. I believe it to be a fact that the Prince is much easier in English or French than he is in Dutch! I heard that there was a capital quarrel the other day, which ended with the Prince telling Frog in good round terms that if he hadn’t wished him to make his friends among the English he shouldn’t have had him reared in England, or have sent him out to learn his soldiering in the Peninsula. Off he went, leaving Papa and Brother Fred without a word to say, and of course poured out the whole story to Colborne. I daresay Colborne don’t care how soon he goes back to his regiment. I would not be Orange’s military secretary for something!’

The Bruxelloise had passed from Lord Hay’s range of vision; there was nothing left to look at but the pointed gables and nankeen-yellow front of a house on the opposite side of the street. Lord Hay, overhearing the last remark, turned his head, and asked innocently: ‘Oh, did Sir John tell you so, Mr Creevey?’

An involuntary smile flickered on Judith Worth’s lips; the curled ostrich plumes in Lady Georgiana’s hat quivered; she raised her muff to her face. The company was allowed a moment to reflect upon the imaginary spectacle of more than six feet of taciturnity in the handsome shape of Sir John Colborne, Colonel of the Fighting 52nd, unburdening his soul to Mr Creevey.

Mr Creevey was not in the least abashed. He shook a finger at

the young Guardsman, and replied with a knowing look: ‘Oh, you must not think I am going to divulge *all* the sources of my information, Lord Hay!’

‘I like the Prince of Orange,’ declared Hay. ‘He’s a rattling good fellow.’

‘Oh, as to that – !’

Lady Worth, aware that Mr Creevey’s opinion of the Prince would hardly please Lord Hay, intervened with the observation that his brother, Prince Frederick, seemed to be a fine young man.

‘Stiff as a poker,’ said Hay. ‘Prussian style. They call him the Stabs-Captain.’

‘He’s nice enough to look at,’ conceded Lady Georgiana, adjusting the folds of her olive-brown pelisse. ‘But he’s only eighteen, and can’t signify.’

‘Georgy!’ protested Hay.

She laughed. ‘Well, but you don’t signify either, Hay: you know you don’t! You are just a boy.’

‘Wait until we go into action!’

‘Certainly, yes! You will perform prodigies, and be mentioned in despatches, I have no doubt at all. I daresay the Duke will write of you in the most glowing terms. “General Maitland’s ADC, Ensign Lord Hay –”’

There was a general laugh.

‘“I have every reason to be satisfied with the conduct of Ensign Lord Hay,”’ said Hay in a prim voice. ‘Old Hookey writing in glowing terms! That’s good!’

‘Hush, now! I won’t hear a word against the Duke. He is quite the greatest man in the world.’

It was not to be expected that Mr Creevey, a confirmed Whig, could allow this generous estimate to pass unchallenged. Under cover of the noise of cheerful argument, Sir Peregrine Taverner moved to where his brother-in-law stood in front of the fire, and said in a low voice: ‘I suppose you don’t know when the Duke is expected in Brussels, Worth?’

‘No, how should I?’ replied Worth in his cool way.

‘I thought you might have heard from your brother.’

‘Your sister had a letter from him a week ago, but he did not know when he wrote when the Duke would be free to leave Vienna.’

‘He ought to be here. However, I’m told that since Lord Hill came out the Prince has not been talking any more of invading France. I suppose it’s true he was sent to keep the Prince quiet?’

‘I expect your information is quite as good as mine, my dear Peregrine.’

Sir Peregrine Taverner had attained the mature age of twenty-three, had been three years married, and two years out of the Earl of Worth’s guardianship, and was, besides, the father of a pair of hopeful children, but he still stood a little in awe of his brother-in-law. He accepted the snub with a sigh, and merely said: ‘One can’t help feeling anxious, you know. After all, Worth, I’m a family man now.’

The Earl smiled. ‘Very true.’

‘I don’t think, if I had known Boney would get away from Elba, I should have taken a house in Brussels at all. You must admit it is not a comfortable situation for a civilian to be in.’ He ended on a slightly disconsolate note, his gaze wandering to the scarlet splendour of Lord Hay.

‘In fact,’ said the Earl, ‘you would like very much to buy yourself a pair of colours.’

Sir Peregrine grinned sheepishly. ‘Well, yes, I would. One feels confoundedly out of it. At least, I daresay you don’t, because you are a military man yourself.’

‘My dear Perry, I sold out years ago!’ The Earl turned away from his young relative as he spoke, for Lady Georgiana had got up to take her leave.

Beside Judith Worth’s golden magnificence, Lady Georgiana seemed very tiny. She submitted to having her pelisse buttoned close to her throat by her tall friend, for even on this 4th day of April the weather still remained chilly; stood on tiptoe to kiss Judith’s cheek; promised herself the pleasure of meeting her at Lady Charlotte Greville’s that evening; and went off under Hay’s

escort to join her mother, the Duchess of Richmond, at the Marquis d'Assche's house at the corner of the Park.

Since Mr Creevey showed no immediate disposition to go away, Lady Worth sat down again, and made kind enquiries after his wife and stepdaughters. One of the Misses Ord, he confided, had become engaged to be married. Lady Worth exclaimed suitably, and Mr Creevey, beaming all over his kindly face, disclosed the name of the fortunate man. It was Hamilton; yes, Major Andrew Hamilton, of the Adjutant-General's Staff: an excellent fellow! Between themselves, Hamilton kept him pretty well informed of what was going on. He got all the news from France, but under pledge of strict secrecy. Lady Worth would understand that his lips were sealed. 'And you too,' he added, fixing his penetrating gaze upon her, 'I daresay *you* have information for your private ear, eh?'

'I?' said Lady Worth. 'My dear Mr Creevey, none in the world! What can you be thinking of?'

He looked arch. 'Come, come, isn't Colonel Audley with the Great Man?'

'My brother-in-law! Yes, certainly he is in Vienna, but I assure you he doesn't tell me any secrets. We don't even know when we may expect to see him here.'

He was disappointed, for news, titbits of scandal, interesting confidences whispered behind sheltering hands, were the breath of life to him. However, since there was nothing to be learned from his hostess, he had to content himself with settling down to what he called a comfortable prose with her. He had already told her, upon his first coming into her salon, of a singular occurrence, but he could not resist adverting to it again: it was so very remarkable. Sir Peregrine had not been present when he had first related the circumstance, so he nodded to him and said: 'You will have heard of the new arrivals, I daresay. I was telling your good sister about them.'

'The King?' said Peregrine. 'The French King, I mean? Is he really coming to Brussels? I did hear a rumour, but someone said it was no such thing.'



‘Oh, the King!’ Mr Creevey waved his Sacred Majesty aside with one plump hand. ‘I was not referring to him – though I have reason to believe he will remain in Ghent for the present. Paltry fellow, ain’t he? No, no something a little more singular – or so it seemed to me. Three of Boney’s old Marshals, no less! I had the good fortune to see them all arrive, not ten days ago. There was Marmont, who went to the Hôtel d’Angleterre; Berthier, to the Duc d’Aremberg’s; and Victor – now where do you suppose? Why, to the Hôtel Wellington, of all places in the world!’

‘How ironic!’ remarked Worth, who had come back into the room from seeing his other guests off. ‘Is it true, or just one of your stories, Creevey?’

‘No, no, I promise you it’s quite true! I knew you would enjoy the joke.’

Lady Worth, who had accorded the tale at this second hearing no more than a polite smile, said in a reflective tone: ‘It is certainly very odd to think of Marmont in particular being in the English camp.’

‘The Allied camp, my love,’ corrected the Earl, with a sardonic smile.

‘Well, yes,’ she admitted, ‘but you know I can’t bring myself to believe that the Dutch–Belgian troops count for much, while as for the Prussians, the only one I have laid eyes on is General Röder, and – well – !’ She made an expressive gesture. ‘He is always so stiff, and takes such stupid offence at trifles, that it puts me out of all patience with him.’

‘Yes, *he* will never do for the Duke,’ agreed Mr Creevey. ‘Hamilton was telling me there is no dealing with him at all. He thinks himself insulted if any of our officers remain seated in his presence. Such stuff! A man who sets so much store by all that ceremonious nonsense won’t do for the Duke’s Headquarters. They couldn’t have made a worse choice of Commissioner. There’s another man, too, who they say will never do for the Duke.’ He nodded, and pronounced: ‘Our respected Quartermaster-General!’

‘Oh, poor Sir Hudson Lowe! He is very stiff also,’ said Lady

Worth. 'People say he is an efficient officer, however.'

'I daresay he may be, but you know how it is with these fellows who have served with the Prussians: there's no doing anything with them. Well, no doubt we shall see some changes when the Beau arrives from Vienna.'

'If only he would arrive! It is very uncomfortable with him so far away. One cannot help feeling uneasy. Now that all communication with Paris has been stopped, war seems so very close. Then Lord Fitzroy Somerset and all the Embassy people being refused passports to come across the frontier, and having to embark from Dieppe! When our Chargé d'Affaires is treated like that it is very bad, you must allow.'

'Yes,' interjected Peregrine, 'and the best of our troops being in America! That is what is so shocking! I don't see how any of them can be brought back in time to be of the least use. When I saw the Prince he was in expectation of war breaking out at any moment.'

'No chance of that, I assure you. Young Frog don't know what he's talking about. Meanwhile, we have some very fine regiments quartered here, you know.'

'We have some very young and inexperienced troops,' said Worth. 'Happily, the cavalry did not go to America.'

'Of course, you were a hussar yourself, but you must know very well there's no sense in cavalry without infantry,' replied Peregrine knowledgeably. 'Only to think of all the Peninsular veterans shipped off to that curst American war! Nothing was ever so badly contrived.'

'It is easy to be wise after the event, my dear Perry.'

Lady Worth, who had listened to many such discussions, interposed to give the conversation a turn towards less controversial subjects. She was assisted very readily by Mr Creevey, who had some entertaining scandal to relate, and for the remainder of his visit nothing was talked of but social topics.

Of these there were many, since Brussels overflowed with English visitors. The English had been confined to their own island for so long that upon the Emperor Napoleon's abdication

and retirement to Elba they had flocked abroad. The presence of an Army of Occupation in the Low Countries made Brussels a desirable goal. Several provident Mamas conveyed marriageable daughters across the Channel in the wake of the Guards, while pleasure-seeking ladies such as Caroline Lamb and Lady Vidal packed up their most daring gauzes and established their courts in houses hired for an indefinite term in the best part of Brussels.

The presence of the Guards was not, of course, the only attraction offered by Brussels. Mr Creevey, for instance, had brought his good lady to a snug little apartment in the Rue du Musée for her health's sake. Others had come to take part in the festivities attendant upon the long-exiled William of Orange's instatement as King of the Netherlands.

This gentleman, whom Mr Creevey and his friends called the Frog, had been well known in London; and his elder son, the Hereditary Prince of Orange, was a hopeful young man of engaging manners, and a reputation for dashing gallantry in the field, who had lately enjoyed a brief engagement to the Princess Charlotte of Wales. The breaking off of the engagement by that strong-minded damsel, though it had made his Highness appear a trifle ridiculous in English eyes, and had afforded huge gratification to Mr Creevey and his friends, did not seem to have cast any sort of cloud over the Prince's spirits. It was felt that gaiety would attend his footsteps; nor were the seekers after pleasure destined to be disappointed. Within its old ramparts, Brussels became the centre of all that was fashionable and light hearted. King William, a somewhat uninspiring figure, was proclaimed with due pomp at Brussels, and if his new subjects, who had been quite content under the Bonapartist régime, regarded with misgiving their fusion with their Dutch neighbours, this was not allowed to appear upon the surface. The Hereditary Prince, who spoke English and French better than his native tongue, and who announced himself quite incapable of supporting the rigours of life at The Hague, achieved a certain amount of popularity which might have been more lasting had

he not let it plainly be seen that although he liked his father's Belgian subjects better than his Dutch ones, he preferred the English to them all. The truth was, he was never seen but in the society of his English friends, a circumstance which had caused so much annoyance to be felt that the one man who was known to have influence over him was petitioned to write exhorting him to more diplomatic behaviour. It was a chill December day when M. Fagel brought his Highness a letter from the English Ambassador in Paris, and there was nothing in the austere contents of the missive to make the day seem warmer. A letter of reproof from his Grace the Duke of Wellington, however politely worded it might be, was never likely to produce in the recipient any other sensation than that of having been plunged into unpleasantly cold water. The Prince, with some bitter animadversions upon tale-bearers in general, and his father in particular, sat down to write a promise to his mentor of exemplary conduct, and proceeded thereafter to fulfil it by entering heart and soul into the social life of Brussels.

But except for a strong Bonapartist faction the Bruxellois also liked the English. Gold flowed from careless English fingers into Belgian pockets; English visitors were making Brussels the gayest town in Europe, and the Bruxellois welcomed them with open arms. They would welcome the Duke of Wellington too when at last he should arrive. He had been received with enormous enthusiasm a year before, when he had visited Belgium on his way to Paris. He was Europe's great man, and the Bruxellois had accorded him an almost hysterical reception, even cheering two very youthful and self-conscious aides-de-camp of his who had occupied his box at the opera one evening. There had been a mistake, of course, but it showed the goodwill of the Bruxellois. The Bonapartists naturally could not be expected to share in these transports, but it was decidedly not the moment for a Bonapartist to proclaim himself, and these gentry had to be content with holding aloof from the many fêtes, and pinning their secret faith to the Emperor's star.

The news of Napoleon's landing in the south of France had

had a momentarily sobering effect upon the merry-makers, but in spite of rumours and alarms the theatre parties, the concerts, and the balls had still gone on, and only a few prudent souls had left Brussels.

There was, however, a general feeling of uneasiness. Vienna, where the Duke of Wellington was attending the Congress, was a long way from Brussels, and whatever the Prince of Orange's personal daring might be it was not felt that two years spent in the Peninsula as one of the Duke's aides-de-camp were enough to qualify a young gentleman not yet twenty-four for the command of an army to be pitted against Napoleon Bonaparte. Indeed, the Prince's first impetuous actions, and the somewhat indiscreet language he held, alarmed serious people not a little. The Prince entertained no doubt of being able to account for Bonaparte; he talked of invading France at the head of the Allied troops; wrote imperative demands to England for more men and more munitions; invited General Kleist to march his Prussians along the Meuse to effect a junction with him; and showed himself in general to be so magnificently oblivious of the fact that England was not at war with France, that the embarrassed Government in some haste despatched Lieutenant-General Lord Hill to explain the peculiar delicacy of the situation to him.

The choice of mentor was a happy one. A trifle elated, the Prince of Orange was in a brittle mood, ready to resent the least interference in his authority. General Clinton, whom he disliked, and Sir Hudson Lowe, whom he thought a Prussianized martinet, found themselves unable to influence his judgment, and succeeded only in offending. But no one had ever been known to take offence at Daddy Hill. He arrived in Brussels looking more like a country squire than a distinguished general, and took the jealous young commander gently in hand. The anxious breathed again; the Prince of Orange might be in a little huff at the prospect of being soon relieved of his command, but he was no longer refractory, and was soon able to write to Lord Bathurst, in London, announcing the gratifying intelligence that although it would have been mortifying to him to give up his

command to anyone else, to the Duke he could do it with pleasure; and could even engage to serve him with as great a zeal as when he had been his aide-de-camp.

*'I shall never forget that period of my life,'* wrote the Prince, forgetting his injuries in a burst of enthusiasm. *'I owe everything to it; and if I now may hope to be of use to my country it is to the experience I acquired under him that I have to attribute it.'*

Such a frame of mind augured well for the future; but the task of controlling the Prince's martial activities continued to be a difficult one. The British Ambassador to The Hague transferred his establishment to Brussels with the principal motive of assisting Lord Hill in his duty, and found it so arduous that he more than once wrote to the Duke to tell him how necessary was his presence in Brussels. *'You will see that I have spared no efforts to keep the Prince quiet,'* wrote Sir Charles Stuart in his plain style . . . *'Under these circumstances I leave you to judge of the extreme importance we all attach to your early arrival.'*

Meanwhile, though the Congress at Vienna might declare Napoleon to be *hors la loi*, every day saw French Royalists hurrying a little ignominiously over the frontier. Louis XVIII, yet another of Europe's uninspiring monarchs, removed his Court from Paris to Ghent, and placidly explained that he had been all the while impelled, in France, to employ untrustworthy persons because none whom he could trust were fit to be employed. Certainly it did not seem as though anyone except his nephew, the Duc d'Angoulême, had made the least push to be of use in the late crisis. That gentleman had raised a mixed force at Nîmes, and was skirmishing in the south of France, egged on by a masterful wife. His brother, the Duc de Berri, who had accompanied his uncle into Belgium, found less dangerous employment in holding slightly farcical reviews of the handful of Royalist troops under his command at Alost.

These proceedings were not comforting to the anxious, but the proximity of the Prussian Army was more reassuring. But as General Kleist's notions of feeding this Army consisted very simply of causing it to subsist upon the country in which it was

quartered, the King of the Netherlands, who held quite different views on the subject, and was besides on bad terms with his wife's Prussian relatives, refused to permit of its crossing the Meuse. This not unnaturally led to a good deal of bad feeling.

*'Your Lordship's presence is extremely necessary to combine the measures of the heterogeneous force which is destined to defend this country,'* wrote Sir Charles Stuart to the Duke, with diplomatic restraint.

Everyone agreed that the Duke's presence was necessary; everyone was sure that once he was in command all the disputes and the difficulties would be immediately settled, even Mr Creevey, who had not been used to set much store by any of 'those damned Wellesleys'.

It was wonderful what a change was gradually coming over Mr Creevey's opinions; extraordinary to hear him advert to the Duke's past victories in Spain, just as though he had never declared them to have been grossly exaggerated. He was still a little patronizing about the Duke, but he was going to feel very much safer, tied as he was to Brussels by an ailing wife, when the Duke was at the head of the Army.

But he thought it very strange that Worth should have had no news from his brother in Vienna. Probe as he might, nothing could be elicited. Colonel Audley had not mentioned the subject of his Chief's coming.

Mr Creevey was forced to go away unsatisfied. Sir Peregrine lingered. 'I must say, I agree with him, that it's odd of Charles not to have told you when he expects to be here,' he complained.

'My dear Perry, I daresay he might not know,' said Lady Worth.

'Well, when one considers that he has been on the Duke's personal staff since he went back to the Peninsula after your marriage in August of 1812 it seems quite extraordinary he should be so little in Wellington's confidence,' said Sir Peregrine.

His sister drew her worktable towards her, and began to occupy herself with a piece of embroidery. 'Perhaps the Duke himself is uncertain. Depend upon it, he will be here soon

enough. It is very worrying, but he must know what he is about.'

He took a turn about the room. 'I wish I knew what I should do!' he exclaimed presently. 'It's all very well for you to laugh, Judith, but it's curst awkward! Of course, if I were a single man I should join as a volunteer. However, that won't do.'

'No, indeed!' said Judith, rather startled.

'Worth, what do you mean to do? Do you stay?'

'Oh, I think so!' replied the Earl.

Sir Peregrine's brow lightened. 'Oh! Well, if you judge it to be safe – I don't suppose you would keep Judith and the child here if you did not?'

'I don't suppose I should,' agreed the Earl.

'What does Harriet wish to do?' enquired Lady Worth.

'Oh, if it can be considered safe for the children, she don't wish to go!' Sir Peregrine caught sight of his reflection in the mirror over the fireplace, and gave the starched folds of his cravat a dissatisfied twitch. Before his marriage he had aspired to dizzy heights of dandyism, and although he now lived for the greater part of the year on his estates in Yorkshire, he was still inclined to spend much thought and time on his dress. 'This new man of mine is no good at all!' he said, with some annoyance. 'Just look at my cravat!'

'Is that really necessary!' said the Earl. 'For the past hour I have been at considerable pains not to look at it.'

A grin dispersed Sir Peregrine's worried frown. 'Oh, be damned to you, Worth! I'll tell you what it is, you did a great deal for me when I was your ward, but if you had taught me the way you have of tying your cravats I should have been more grateful than ever I was for any of the rest of the curst interfering things you did.'

'Very handsomely put, Perry. But the art is inborn, and can't be taught.'

Sir Peregrine made a derisive sound, and, abandoning the attempt to improve the set of his cravat, turned from the mirror. He glanced down at his sister, tranquilly sewing, and said in a



burst of confidence: 'You know, I can't help being worried. I don't want to run home, but the thing is that Harriet is in a delicate situation again.'

'Good God, already?' exclaimed Judith.

'Yes, and you see what an anxious position it puts me in. I would not have her upset for the world. However, it seems certain Boney can't move against us yet. I shall wait until the Duke comes before I decide. That will be best.'

The Earl agreed to it with a solemnity only belied by the quivering of a muscle at the corner of his mouth. Sir Peregrine adjured him to let him have any reliable news he might chance to hear and took himself off, his mind apparently relieved of its care.

His sister was left to enjoy a laugh at his expense. 'Julian, I think you must have taken leave of your senses when you permitted Perry to marry Harriet! Two children, and another expected! It is quite absurd! He is only a child himself.'

'Very true, but you should consider that if he were not married we should have him enlisting as a volunteer.'

The thought sobered her. She put down her embroidery. 'I suppose we should.' She hesitated, her fine blue eyes raised to Worth's face. 'Well, Julian, our morning visitors have all talked a great deal, but you have said nothing.'

'I was under the impression that I said everything that was civil.'

'Just so, and nothing to the point. I wish you will tell me what you think. Do we stay?'

'Not if you wish to go home, my dear.'

She shook her head. 'You are to be the judge. I don't care for myself, but there is little Julian to be recollected, you know.'

'I don't forget him. Antwerp is, after all, comfortably close. But if you choose I will convey you both to England.'

She cast him a shrewd look. 'You are extremely obliging, sir! Thank you, I know you a little too well to accept that offer. You would no sooner have set me down in England than you would return here, odious wretch!'

He laughed. 'To tell you the truth, Judith, I think it will be interesting to be in Brussels this spring.'

'Yes,' she agreed. 'But what will happen?'

'I know no more than the next man.'

'I suppose war is certain? Will the Duke be a match for Bonaparte, do you think?'

'That is what we are going to see, my dear.'

'Everyone speaks as though his arrival will make all quite safe – indeed, I do myself – but though he was so successful in Spain he has never fought against Bonaparte himself, has he?'

'A circumstance which makes the situation of even more interest,' said Worth.

'Well!' She resumed her stitching. 'You are very cool. We shall stay then. Indeed, I should be very sorry to go just when Charles is to join us.'

The Earl put up his quizzing-glass. 'Ah! May I inquire, my love, whether you are making plans for Charles's future welfare?'

Down went the embroidery; her ladyship raised an indignant rueful pair of eyes to his face. 'You are the most odious man that I have ever met!' she declared. 'Of course I don't make plans for Charles! It sounds like some horrid, matchmaking Mama. How in the world did you guess?'

'Some explanation of your extreme kindness towards Miss Devenish seemed to be called for. That was the likeliest that presented itself to me.'

'Well, but don't you think her a charming girl, Julian?'

'I daresay. You know my taste runs to Amazons.'

Her ladyship ignored this with obvious dignity. 'She is extremely pretty, with such obliging manners, and a general sweetness of disposition which makes me feel her to be so very eligible.'

'I will allow all that to be true.'

'You are thinking of Mr Fisher. I know the evils of her situation, but recollect that Mr Fisher is her uncle only by marriage! He is a little vulgar perhaps – well, very vulgar, if you like! – but I am sure a kind, worthy man who has treated her

quite as though she were his own daughter, and will leave the whole of his fortune to her.'

'That certainly is a consideration,' said Worth.

'Her own birth, though not noble, is perfectly respectable, you know. Her family is an old one – but it does not signify talking, after all! Charles will make his own choice.'

'Just what I was about to remark, my dear.'

'Don't alarm yourself! I have no notion of throwing poor Lucy at his head, I assure you. But I shall own myself surprised if he does not take a liking to her.'

'I perceive,' said the Earl, faintly amused, 'that life in Brussels is going to be even more interesting than I had expected.'

## Two

When Judith, on setting out for Lady Charlotte Greville's evening party, desired Worth to direct the coachman to call at Mr Fisher's for the purpose of picking up Miss Devenish, she could not help looking a little conscious. She avoided his ironic gaze, but when he settled himself beside her, and the carriage moved forward over the pavé, said defensively: 'Really, it is not remarkable that I should take Lucy with me.'

'Certainly not,' agreed Worth. 'I made no remark.'

'Mrs Fisher does not like to go into company, you know, and the poor child would be very dull if no one offered to escort her.'

'Very true.'

Judith cast a smouldering glance at his profile. 'I do not think,' she said, 'that I have ever met so provoking a person as you.'

He smiled, but said nothing, and upon the carriage's drawing up presently in front of a respectable-looking house in one of the quiet streets off the Place Royale, got down to hand his wife's protégée into the carriage.

She did not keep him waiting for many seconds, but came out of the house, escorted by her uncle, a little stout man of cheerful vulgarity who bowed very low to the Earl, and uttered profuse thanks and protestations. He was answered with the cool civility of a stranger, but Lady Worth, leaning forward, said everything that was kind, enquired after Mrs Fisher, who had lately been confined to the house by a feverish cold, and engaged herself to take good care of Miss Devenish.

‘Your ladyship is never backward in any attention – most flattering distinction! I am all obligation!’ he said, bowing to her. ‘It is just as it should be, for I’m sure Lucy is fit to move in the first circles – ay, and to make a good match into the bargain, eh, Lucy? Ah, she don’t like me to quiz her about it: she is blushing, I daresay, only it is too dark to see.’

Judith could not but feel a little vexation that he should expose himself so to Worth, but she passed it off with tact. Miss Devenish was handed into the carriage, the Earl followed her, and in a moment they were off, leaving Mr Fisher bowing farewell upon the pavement.

‘Dear Lady Worth, this is very kind of you!’ said Miss Devenish, in a pretty, low voice. ‘My aunt desired her compliments. I did not keep you waiting, I hope?’

‘No, indeed. I only hope it won’t prove an insipid evening. I believe there may be dancing, and I suppose all the world and his wife will be there.’

It certainly seemed so. When they arrived, Lady Charlotte’s salons were already crowded. The English predominated, but there were any number of distinguished foreigners present. Here and there were to be seen the blue of a Dutch uniform, and the smart rifle-green of a Belgian dragoon; and everywhere you should chance to look you might be sure of encountering the sight of scarlet: vivid splashes of scarlet, throwing into insignificance all the ladies’ pale muslins, and every civilian gentleman’s more sober coat. Civilian gentlemen were plainly at a discount, and the young lady who could not show at least one scarlet uniform enslaved was unhappy indeed. Wits and savants went by the board; the crowd was thickest about Lord Hill, who had dropped in for half an hour. His round face wore its usual placid smile; he was replying with inexhaustible patience and good humour to the anxious inquiries of the females clustering round him. Dear Lord Hill! So kind, so dependable! He was not like the Duke, of course, but one need not pack one’s trunks and order the horses to be put to for an instant flight to Antwerp while he was there to pledge one his word the Corsican Monster was still in Paris.

He had just reassured the Annesley sisters, two ethereal blondes, whose very ringlets were appealing. When Worth's party came into the room, they had moved away from Lord Hill, and were standing near the door, a lovely fragile pair, so like, so dotingly fond!

They were both married, the younger, Catharine, being one of the season's brides, with a most unexceptionable young husband to her credit, Lord John Somerset, temporarily attached to the Prince of Orange's personal staff. It was strange that Catharine, decidedly her sister's inferior in beauty and brain, should have done so much better for herself in the marriage market. Poor Frances, with her infinite capacity for hero-worship, had made but a sad business of it after all, for a less inspiring figure than her tow-headed, chattering, awkward Mr Webster would have been hard to find. You could hardly blame her for having fallen so deeply in love with Lord Byron. Quite an *affaire* that had been, while it lasted. Happily that had not been for very long – though long enough, if Catharine's indiscreet tongue were to be trusted, to enable her to secure one of the poet's precious locks of hair. That was more than Caro Lamb could boast of, poor soul.

She too was in Brussels, quite scandalizing the old-fashioned with her gossamer gauzes, always damped to make them cling close to her limbs, generally dropping off one thin shoulder, and allowing the interested an intimate view of her shape. Old Lady Mount Norris was ready to stake her reputation on Caroline's wearing under her gauze dresses not a stitch of clothing beyond an Invisible Petticoat. Well, her own daughter might possess a lock of Byron's hair, but one was able to thank God she did not flaunt herself abroad next door to naked.

Lord Byron was not in Brussels. Perhaps he was too taken up with that queer, serious bride of his; perhaps he knew that even a poet as beautiful and as sinister as himself would not make much of a mark in Brussels on the eve of war.

His marriage had been a great shock to Caro Lamb, said the gossipers. Poor thing, one was truly sorry for her, however

ridiculous she might have made herself. It was quite her own fault that she now looked so haggard. She was unbecomingly thin too; every lady was agreed on that. Sprite? Ariel? Well, one had always thought such nicknames absurd; one really never had admired her. Only gentlemen were sometimes so silly!

There were quite a number of gentlemen round Lady Caroline, all being regrettably silly. A murmur from Miss Devenish reached Lady Worth's ears: 'Oh! she's so lovely! I like just to look at her!'

Judith hoped that she was not uncharitable, but had no wish to exchange more than a smile and a bow with Lady Caroline. One was not a prude, but really that lilac gauze was perfectly transparent! And if it came to loveliness, Judith considered her protégée quite as well worth looking at as any lady in the room. If her eyelashes were not as long and curling as Lady Frances Webster's the eyes themselves were decidedly more brilliant, and of such a dove-like softness! Her shape, though she might conceal it with discretion, was quite as good as Caro Lamb's; and her glossy brown curls were certainly thicker than Caroline's short feathery ringlets. Above all, her expression was charming, her smile so spontaneous, the look of grave reflection in her eye so particularly becoming! She dressed, moreover, with great propriety of taste, expensively but never extravagantly. Any man might congratulate himself on acquiring such a bride.

These reflections were interrupted by the necessity of exchanging civilities with the Marquise d'Assche. Judith turned from her presently to find Miss Devenish waiting to engage her attention.

'Dear Lady Worth,' said Miss Devenish, 'you know everyone, I believe. Only tell me who is that beautiful creature come into the room with Lady Vidal. Is it very wrong? – I could not but gasp and think to myself: "Oh, if I had but that hair!" Everyone is cast into the shade!'

'Good gracious, whom in the world can you have seen?' said Judith, smiling with a little amusement. However, when her eyes followed the direction of Miss Devenish's worshipful gaze, the

smile quickly faded. ‘Good God!’ she said. ‘I had no idea that she was back in Brussels! Well, Lucy, if you are looking at the lady with the head of hair like my best copper coalscuttle, let me tell you that she is none other than Barbara Childe.’

‘Lady Barbara!’ breathed Miss Devenish. ‘I wondered – You must know that I never till now set eyes on her. Yes, one can see the likeness: she is a little like her brother, Lord Vidal, is she not?’

‘More like Lord George, I should say. You do not know him: a wild young man, I am afraid; very like his sister.’

Miss Devenish made no reply to this observation, her attention remaining fixed upon the two ladies who had come into the salon.

The elder, Lady Vidal, was a handsome brunette, whose air, dress, and deportment all proclaimed the lady of fashion. She was accompanied by her husband, the Marquis of Vidal, a fleshy man, with a shock of reddish hair, a permanent crease between thick, sandy brows, and a rather pouting mouth.

Beside Lady Vidal, and with her hand lightly resting on the arm of an officer in Dutch–Belgian uniform, stood the object of Miss Devenish’s eager scrutiny.

Lady Barbara Childe was no longer in the first flush of her youth. She was twenty-five years old, and had been three years a widow. Having married to oblige her family at the age of seventeen, she had had the good fortune to lose a husband three times as old as herself within five years of having married him. Her mourning had been of the most perfunctory: indeed, she was thought to have grieved more over the death of her father, an expensive nobleman of selfish habits, and an unsavoury reputation. But the truth was she did not grieve much over anyone. She was heartless.

It was the decision of all who knew her, and of many who did not. No one could deny her beauty, or her charm, but both were acknowledged to be deadly. Her conquests were innumerable; men fell so desperately in love with her that they became wan with desire, and very often did extremely foolish things when they discovered that she did not care the snap of her fingers for



them. Young Mr Vane had actually drunk himself to death; and poor Sir Henry Drew had bought himself a pair of colours and gone off to the Peninsula with the declared intention of being killed, which he very soon was; while, more shocking than all the rest, Bab had allowed her destructive green eyes to drift towards Philip Darcy, with the result that poor dear Marianne, who had been his faithful wife for ten years, now sat weeping at home, quite neglected.

It was a mystery to the ladies what the gentlemen found so alluring in those green eyes, with their deceptive look of candour. For green they were, let who would call them blue. Bab had only to put on a green dress for there to be no doubt at all about it. They were set under most delicately arched brows, and were fringed by lashes which had obviously been darkened. That outrageously burnished head of hair might be natural, but those black lashes undoubtedly were not. Nor, agreed the waspish, was that lovely complexion. In fact, the Lady Barbara Childe, beyond all other iniquities, painted her face.

It became apparent to those who were gazing at her that the Lady Barbara had not, on this night of April, stopped at that. One foot was thrust a little forward from under the frills of a yellow-spangled gown, and it was seen that the Lady Barbara, wearing Grecian sandals, had painted her toenails gold.

Miss Devenish was heard to give a gasp. Lady Sarah Lennox, on the arm of General Maitland, said: 'Gracious, only look at Bab's feet! She learned that trick in Paris, of course.'

'Dashing, by Jove!' said the General appreciatively.

'Very, very fast!' said Lady Sarah. 'Shocking!'

It was not the least part of Barbara's charm that having arrayed herself in a startling costume she contrived thereafter to seem wholly unconscious of the appearance she presented. She was never seen to pat her curls into place, or to cast an anxious glance towards the mirror. No less a personage than Mr Brummell had taught her this magnificent unconcern. 'Once having assured yourself that your dress is perfect in every detail,' had pronounced that oracle, 'you must not give it another

thought. No one, I fancy, has ever seen me finger my cravat, twitch at the lapels of my coat, or smooth creases from my sleeve.'

So the Lady Barbara, in a shimmering golden gown of spangles which clung to her tall shape as though it had been moulded to it, with her gold toenails, and her cluster of red curls threaded with a golden fillet, was apparently quite oblivious of being the most daringly dressed lady in the room. Fifty pairs of eyes were fixed upon her, some in patent disapproval, some in equally patent admiration, and she did not betray by as much as a flicker of an eyelid that she was aware of being a cynosure. That dreadfully disarming smile of hers swept across her face, and she moved towards Lady Worth, and held out her hand, saying in her oddly boyish voice: 'How do you do? Is your little boy well?'

In spite of the fact that Judith had been by no means pleased, three months before, to see her infant son entranced by the Lady Barbara's charms, this speech could not but gratify her. 'Very well, thank you,' she replied. 'Have you been back in Brussels long?'

'No, two days only.'

'I did not know you had the intention of returning.'

'Oh – ! London was confoundedly flat,' said Bab carelessly.

Miss Devenish, who had never before heard such a mannish expression on a lady's lips, stared. Lady Barbara glanced down at her from her graceful height, and then looked at Judith, her brows asking a question. A little unwillingly – but, after all, it was not likely that Bab would waste more than two minutes of her time on little Lucy Devenish – Judith made the necessary introduction. The smile and the hand were bestowed; Barbara made a movement with her fan, including in the group the officer on whose arm she had entered the salon. 'Lady Worth, do you know M. le Capitaine Comte de Lavissee?'

'I believe we have met,' acknowledged Judith, devoutly hoping that Brussels' most notorious rake would not take one of his dangerous fancies to the damsel in her charge.

However, the Captain Count's dark eyes betrayed no more than a fleeting interest in Miss Devenish, and before any introduction could be made a young gentleman with embryonic whiskers, and a sandy head at lamentable difference with his scarlet dress coat, joined them.

'Hallo, Bab!' said Lord Harry Alastair. 'Servant, Lady Worth! Miss Devenish, do you know they are dancing in the other room? May I have the honour?'

Judith, smiling a gracious permission, could not but feel that the path of a chaperon was a hard one. The reputation of the Alastairs, from Dominic, Duke of Avon, down to his granddaughter, Barbara, was not such as to lead a conscientious duenna to observe with pleasure her charge being borne off by any one of them. She comforted herself with the reflection that Lord Harry, an eighteen-year-old Ensign, could hardly be considered dangerous. Had it been Lord George, now! But Lord George, happily, was not in Belgium.

By the time Lord Harry had escorted Miss Devenish to the ballroom, the inevitable crowd had gathered round his sister. Lady Worth escaped from it, but not before she had been asked (inevitably, she thought) for news from Vienna.

Rumours and counter-rumours were as usual being circulated; the English in Brussels seemed to be poised for flight; and the only thing that would infallibly reassure the timorous was the certain news of the Duke's arrival.

It was easy to see what Brussels would make of him when he did come. 'The pedestal is ready for the hero,' said Judith, with rather a provocative smile. 'And *we* are all ready to kneel and worship at the base. I hope he may be worthy of our admiration.'

General Maitland, to whom she had addressed this remark, said: 'Do you know him, Lady Worth?'

'I have not that pleasure. Pray do not mention it, but I have never so much as laid eyes on him. Is it not shocking?'

'Oh!' said the General.

She raised her brows. 'What am I to understand by that, if you please? Shall I be disappointed? I warn you, I expect a demi-god!'

‘Demi-god,’ repeated the General, stroking one beautiful whisker. ‘Well, I don’t know. Shouldn’t have called him so myself.’

‘Ah, I am to be disappointed! I feared as much.’

‘No – no,’ said the General. ‘Not disappointed. He is a very able commander.’

‘That sounds a little flat, I confess. Is it only the ladies who worship him? Do not his soldiers?’

‘Oh no, nothing like that!’ said the General, relieved to be able to answer a plain question. ‘I believe they rather like him than not: they like to see his hook nose among them at any rate; but they don’t worship him. Don’t think he’d care for it if they did.’

She was interested. ‘You present me with a new picture, General. My brother-in-law is quite devoted to him, I believe.’

‘Audley? Well, he’s one of his family, you see.’ He observed a bewildered look on her face, and added: ‘On his staff, I should say. That’s another matter altogether. His staff know him better than the rest of us.’

‘This is more promising. He is unapproachable. A demi-god should certainly be so.’

He laughed suddenly. ‘No, no, *you* won’t find him unapproachable, Lady Worth, I pledge you my word!’

Their conversation was interrupted by Sarah and Georgiana Lennox, who came up to them with their arms entwined. The General greeted the elder sister with such a warm smile that Lady Worth was satisfied that rumour had not lied about his purpose of re-marriage. Lady Sarah went off on his arm; Georgiana remained beside Judith, watching the shifting crowd for a few moments. She presently said in rather a thoughtful voice: ‘Do you see that Bab Childe is back?’

‘Yes, I have been speaking to her.’

‘I must say, I wish she had stayed away,’ confided Georgiana. ‘It is the oddest thing, because, for myself, I don’t dislike her, but wherever she is there is always some horrid trouble, or unhappiness. Even Mama, who is never silly, is a little afraid she

may cast her eyes in March's direction. Of course, we don't breathe a word of such a thing at home, but it's perfectly true.'

'What, that your brother —'

'Oh no, no, but that Mama fears he *might!* One can't blame her. There does seem to be something about Bab which drives quite sensible men distracted. Dreadful, isn't it?'

'I think it is.'

'Yes, so do I,' said Georgiana regretfully. 'I wish I had it.'

Judith could not help laughing, but she assured her vivacious young friend that she was very well as she was. 'All the nicest men pay their court to Georgy,' she said. 'It is men like the Comte de Lavissee who run after Lady Barbara.'

'Yes,' sighed Georgiana, looking pensively in the direction of the Count. 'Very true. Of course one would not wish to be admired by such a person.'

This sentiment was echoed by the Lady Barbara's brother, much later in the evening. As his carriage conveyed him and his ladies home to the Rue Ducale he said in a peevish tone that he wondered Bab could bear to have that foreign fellow for ever at her elbow.

She only laughed, but his wife, who had been yawning in her corner of the carriage, said sharply: 'If you mean Lavissee, I am sure I don't know why you should. I only wish Bab may not play fast and loose with him. I believe he is extremely rich.'

This argument was one that could not but appeal to the Marquis. He was silent for a few moments, but presently said: 'I don't know about that, but I can tell you his reputation doesn't bear looking into.'

'If it comes to that, Bab's own reputation is not above reproach!'

Another gurgle of laughter came from the opposite corner of the carriage. The Marquis said severely: 'It's all very well to laugh. No doubt it amuses you to make your name a byword. For my part, I have had enough of your scandals.'

'Oh, pray spare us a homily!' said his wife, yawning again.

'Don't be anxious, Vidal! They're laying odds against Lavissee's

staying the course for more than a month.'

The carriage passed over an uneven stretch of pavé. Unpleasantly jolted, the Marquis said angrily: 'Upon my word! Do you like to have your name bandied about? Your affairs made the subject of bets?'

'I don't care,' replied Barbara indifferently. 'No, I think I like it.'

'You're shameless! Who told you this?'

'Harry.'

'I might have known it! Pretty news to recount to his sister!'

'Oh lord, why shouldn't he?' said Lady Vidal. 'You'll be a bigger fool than I take you for, Bab, if you let Lavissee slip through your fingers.'

'I don't let them slip,' retorted Barbara. 'I drop them. I daresay I shall drop him too.'

'Be careful he doesn't drop you!' said her ladyship.

The carriage had drawn up before one of the large houses in the Rue Ducale, facing the Park. As the footman opened the door, Barbara murmured: 'Oh no, do you think he will? That would be interesting.'

Her sister-in-law forbore to answer this, but, alighting from the carriage, passed into the house. Barbara followed her, but paused only to say goodnight before picking up her candle and going upstairs to her bedroom.

She had not, however, seen the last of Lady Vidal, who came tapping on her door half an hour later, and entered with the air of one who proposed to remain some while. Barbara was seated before the mirror, her flaming head rising out of the foam of sea-green gauze which constituted her dressing-gown. 'Oh, what the deuce, Gussie?' she said.

'Send your girl away: I want to talk to you,' commanded Augusta, settling herself in the most comfortable chair in the room.

Barbara gave an impatient sigh, but obeyed. As the door closed behind the maid, she said: 'Well, what is it? Are you going to urge me to marry Etienne? I wish you may not put yourself to so much trouble.'

‘You might do worse,’ said Augusta.

‘To be sure I might. We are agreed, then.’

‘You know, you should be thinking seriously of marriage. You’re twenty-five, my dear.’

‘Ah, marriage is a bore!’

‘If you mean husbands are bores, I’m sure I heartily agree with you,’ responded Augusta. ‘They have to be endured for the sake of the blessings attached to them. Single, one has neither standing nor consequence.’

‘I’ll tell you what, Gussie: the best is to be a widow – a dashing widow!’

‘So you may think while you still possess pretensions to beauty. No longer, I assure you. As for “dashing”, that brings me to another thing I had to say. I believe I’m no prude, but those gilded toenails of yours are the outside of enough, Bab.’

Barbara lifted a fold of the gauze to observe her bare feet. ‘Pretty, aren’t they?’

‘Vidal informs me he has seen none but French women (and those of a certain class) with painted nails.’

‘Oh, famous!’

Barbara seemed to be so genuinely delighted by this piece of news that Lady Vidal thought it wiser to leave the subject. ‘That’s as may be. What is more important is what you mean to do with your future. If you take my advice, you’ll marry Lavissee.’

‘No, he would be the devil of a husband.’

‘And you the devil of a wife, my dear.’

‘True. I will live and die a widow.’

‘Pray don’t talk such stuff to me!’ said Augusta tartly. ‘If you let slip all opportunities of getting a husband I shall think you are a great fool.’

Barbara laughed, and getting up from the stool before her dressing table, strolled across the room to a small cupboard and opened it. ‘Very well! Let us look about us! Shall I set my cap at dear Gordon? I could fancy him, I believe.’

‘Sir Alexander? Don’t be absurd! A boy!’

Barbara had taken a medicine bottle from the cupboard and

was measuring some of its contents into a glass. She paused, and wrinkled her brow. 'General Maitland? That would be suitable: he is a widower.'

'He is as good as promised to Sarah Lennox.'

'That's no objection – if I want him. No, I don't think I do. I'll tell you what, Gussie, I'll have the Adjutant-General!'

'Good God, that would not last long! They call him the Fire-eater. You would be for ever quarrelling. I wish you would be serious! You need not marry a soldier, after all.'

'Yes, yes, if I marry it must be a soldier. I am quite determined. The Army is all the rage. And when have I ever been behind the mode? Consider, too, the range of possibilities! Only think of the Guards positively massed in the neighbourhood. I have only to drive to Enghien to find an eligible *parti*. The cavalry, too! All the Household Troops are under orders to sail, and I had always a liking for a well set-up Life Guardsman.'

'That means we shall have George here, I suppose,' said Augusta, without any appearance of gratification.

'Yes, but never mind that! What do you say to a gallant hussar? The 10th are coming out and they wear such charming clothes! I have had a riding dress made à la hussar, in the palest green, all frogged and laced with silver. Ravishing!'

'You will set the town by the ears!'

'Who cares?'

'*You* may not, but it is not very agreeable for us. I wish you would consider me a little before you put Vidal out of temper.'

Barbara came back into the middle of the room, holding the glass containing her potion. 'Where's the use? If I don't, George will. Vidal is such a dull dog!'

Augusta gave a laugh. 'I had rather have him than George, at all events. What are you taking there?'

'Only my laudanum drops,' replied Barbara, tossing off the mixture.

'Well, I take them myself, but I have the excuse of nervous headaches. *You* never had such a thing in your life. If you would be less restless –'



‘Well, I won’t, I can’t! This is nothing: it helps me to sleep. Who was the demure lass dancing with Harry? She came with Lady Worth, I think.’

‘Oh, that chit! She’s of no account; I can’t conceive what should possess Lady Worth to take her under her wing. There is an uncle, or some such thing. A very vulgar person, connected with Trade. Of course, if Harry is to lose his head in that direction it will be only what one might have expected, but I must say I think we might be spared that at least. I can tell you this, if you and your brothers create any odious scandals, Vidal will insist on returning to England. He is of two minds now.’

‘Why? Is he afraid of me, or only of Boney?’

‘Both, I daresay. I have no notion of staying here if Bonaparte does march on Brussels, as they all say he will. And if I go you must also.’

Barbara shed her sea-green wrap and got into bed. The light of the candles beside her had the effect of making her eyes and hair glow vividly. ‘Don’t think it! I shall stay. A war will be exciting. I like that!’

‘You can scarcely remain alone in Brussels!’

Barbara snuggled down among a superfluity of pillows. ‘Who lives will see!’

‘I should not care to do so in your situation.’

A gleam shot into the half-closed eyes; they looked sideways at Augusta. ‘Dearest Gussie! So respectable!’ Barbara murmured.

## Three

Lady Worth walked into her breakfast-parlour on the morning of April 5th, to find that she was not, as she had supposed, the first to enter it. A cocked hat had been tossed on to a chair, and a gentleman in the white net pantaloons and blue frock-coat of a staff officer was sitting on the floor, busily engaged in making paper boats for Lord Temperley. Lord Temperley was standing beside him, a stern frown on his countenance betokening the rapt interest of a young gentleman just two years old.

‘Well!’ cried Judith.

The staff officer looked quickly up, and jumped to his feet. He was a man in the mid-thirties, with smiling grey eyes, and a mobile, well-shaped mouth.

Lady Worth seized him by both hands. ‘My dear Charles! of all the delightful surprises! But when did you arrive? How pleased I am to see you! Have you breakfasted? Where is your baggage?’

Colonel Audley responded to this welcome by putting an arm round his sister-in-law’s waist and kissing her cheek. ‘No need to ask you how you do: you look famous! I got in last night, too late to knock you up.’

‘How can you be so absurd? Don’t tell me you put up at an hôtel!’

‘No, at the Duke’s.’

‘He is here too? Really in Brussels at last?’

‘Why certainly! We are all of us here – the Duke, Fremantle,

young Lennox, and your humble servant.’ A tug at his sash recalled his attention to his nephew. ‘Sir! I beg pardon! The boat – of course!’

The boat was soon finished, and put into his lordship’s fat little hand. Prompted by his Mama, he uttered a laconic word of thanks, and was borne off by his nurse.

Colonel Audley readjusted his sash. ‘I must tell you that I find my nephew improved out of all recognition, Judith. When I last had the pleasure of meeting him, he covered me with confusion by bursting into a howl of dismay. But nothing could have been more gentlemanlike than his reception of me today.’

She smiled. ‘I hope it may be true. He is not always so, I confess. To my mind he is excessively like his father in his dislike of strangers. Worth, of course, would have you believe quite otherwise. Sit down, and let me give you some coffee. Have you seen Worth yet?’

‘Not a sign of him. Tell me all the news! What has been happening here? How do you go on?’

‘But my dear Charles, *I* have no news! It is to you that we look for that. Don’t you know that for weeks past we have been positively hanging upon your arrival, eagerly searching your wretchedly brief letters for the least grain of interesting intelligence?’

He looked surprised, and a little amused. ‘What in the world would you have me tell you? I had thought the deliberations of the Congress were pretty well known.’

‘Charles!’ said her ladyship, in a despairing voice, ‘you have been at the very hub of the world, surrounded by Emperors and Statesmen, and you ask me what I would have you tell me!’

‘Oh, I can tell you a deal about the Emperors,’ offered the Colonel. ‘Alexander, now, is – let us say – a trifle difficult.’

He was interrupted. ‘Tell me immediately what you have been doing!’ commanded Judith.

‘Dancing,’ he replied.

‘Dancing!’

‘And dining.’

‘You are most provoking. Are you pledged to secrecy? If so, of course I won’t ask you any awkward questions.’

‘Not in the least,’ said the Colonel cheerfully. ‘Life in Vienna was one long ball. I have been devoting a great part of my time to the quadrille. *L’Eté, la Poule, la grande ronde* – I have all the steps, I assure you.’

‘You must be a very odd sort of an aide-de-camp!’ she remarked. ‘Does not the Duke object?’

‘Object?’ said the Colonel. ‘Of course not! He likes it. William Lennox would tell you that the excellence of his *pas de zéphyr* is the only thing that has more than once saved him from reprimand.’

‘But seriously, Charles –?’

‘On my honour!’

She was quite dumbfounded by this unexpected light cast upon the proceedings at Vienna, but before she could express her astonishment her husband came into the room, and the subject was forgotten in the greeting between the brothers, and the exchange of questions.

‘You have been travelling fast,’ the Earl said, as he presently took his seat at the table. ‘Stuart spoke of the Duke’s still being in Vienna only the other day.’

‘Yes, shockingly fast. We even had to stop for lard to grease the wheels. But with such a shriek going up for the Beau from here, what did you expect?’ said the Colonel, with a twinkle. ‘Anyone would imagine Boney to be only a day’s march off from the noise you have been making.’

The Earl smiled, but merely said: ‘Are you rejoining the Regiment, or do you remain on the Staff?’

‘Oh, all of us old hands remain, except perhaps March, who will probably stay with the Prince of Orange. Lennox goes back to his regiment, of course. He is only a youngster, and the Beau wants his old officers with him. What about my horses, Worth? You had my letter?’

‘Yes, and wrote immediately to England. Jackson has procured you three good hunters, and there is a bay mare I bought for you last week.’

‘Good!’ said the Colonel. ‘I shall probably get forage allowance for four horses. Tell me how you have been going on here! Who’s this fellow, Hudson Lowe, who knows all there is to be known about handling armies?’

‘Oh, you’ve seen him already, have you? I suppose you know he is your Quartermaster-General? Whether he will deal with the Duke is a question yet to be decided.’

‘My dear fellow, it was decided within five minutes of his presenting himself this morning,’ said the Colonel, passing his cup and saucer to Lady Worth. ‘I left him instructing the Beau, and talking about his experience. Old Hookey as stiff as a poker, and glaring at him, with one of his crashing snubs just ripe to be delivered. I slipped away. Fremantle’s on duty, poor devil!’

‘Crashing snubs? Is the Duke a bad-tempered man?’ enquired Judith. ‘That must be a sad blow to us all!’

‘Oh no, I wouldn’t call him *bad-tempered!*’ replied the Colonel. ‘He gets peevish, you know – a trifle crusty, when things don’t go just as he wishes. I wish they may get Murray back from America in time to take this fellow Lowe’s place: we can’t have him putting old Hookey out every day of the week: comes too hard on the wretched staff.’

Judith gave him back his cup and saucer. ‘But, Charles, this is shocking! You depict a cross, querulous person, and we have been expecting a demi-god.’

‘Demi-god! Well, so he is, the instant he goes into action,’ said the Colonel. He drank his coffee, and said, ‘Who is here, Worth? Any troops arrived yet from England?’

‘Very few. We have really only the remains of Graham’s detachment still, the same that Orange has had under his command the whole winter. There are the 1st Guards, the Coldstream, and the 3rd Scots; all 2nd battalions. The 52nd is here, a part of the 95th – but you must know the regiments as well as I do! There’s no English cavalry at all, only that of the German Legion.’

The Colonel nodded. ‘They’ll come.’

‘Under Combermere?’

‘Oh, surely! We can’t do without old Stapleton Cotton’s long face among us. But tell me! who are all these schoolboys on the staff, and where did they spring from? Scarcely a name one knows on the Quartermaster-General’s staff, or the Adjutant-General’s either, for that matter!’

‘I thought myself there were a number of remarkably inexperienced young gentlemen calling themselves Deputy-Assistants – but when the Duke takes a lad of fifteen into his family one is left to suppose he likes a staff just out of the nursery. By the by, I suppose you know you have arrived in time to assist at festivities at the Hôtel de Ville tonight? There’s to be a fête in honour of the King and Queen of the Netherlands. Does the Duke go?’

‘Oh yes, we always go to fêtes!’ replied the Colonel. ‘What is it to be? Dancing, supper – the usual thing? That reminds me: I must have some new boots. Is there anyone in the town who can be trusted to make me a pair of hessians?’

This question led to a discussion of the shops in Brussels, and the more pressing needs of an officer on the Duke of Wellington’s staff. These seemed to consist mostly of articles of wearing apparel suitable for galas, and Lady Worth was left presently to reflect on the incomprehensibility of the male sex, which, upon the eve of war, was apparently concerned solely with the price of silver lace, and the cut of a hessian boot.

The Colonel had declared his dress clothes to be worn to rags, but when he presented himself in readiness to set forth to the Hôtel de Ville that evening his sister-in-law had no fault to find with his appearance beyond regretting, with a sigh, that his present occupation made the wearing of his hussar uniform ineligible. Nothing could have been better than the set of his coat across his shoulders, nothing more resplendent than his fringed sash, nothing more effulgent than his hessians with their swinging tassels. The Colonel was blessed with a good leg, and had nothing to fear from sheathing it in a skin-tight net pantaloon. His curling brown locks had been brushed into a state of pleasing disorder, known as the style *au coup de vent*; his

whiskers were neatly trimmed; he carried his cocked hat under one arm; and altogether presented to his sister-in-law's critical gaze a very handsome picture.

That he was quite unaware of it naturally did not detract from his charm. Judith, observing him with a little complacency, decided that if Miss Devenish failed to succumb to the twinkle in the Colonel's open grey eyes, or to the attraction of his easy, frank manners, she must be hard indeed to please.

Miss Devenish would be present this evening, Judith having been at considerable pains to procure invitation tickets for her and for Mrs Fisher.

The Earl of Worth's small party arrived at the Hôtel de Ville shortly after eight o'clock, to find a long line of carriages setting down their burdens one after another, and the interior of the building already teeming with guests. The ante-rooms were crowded, and (said Colonel Audley) as hot as any in Vienna; and her ladyship, having had her train of lilac crape twice trodden on, was very glad to pass into the ballroom. Here matters were a little better, the room being of huge proportions. Down one side of it were tall windows, with statues on pedestals set in each, while on the opposite side were corresponding embrasures, each one curtained, and emblazoned with the letter W in a scroll.

A great many of the guests were of Belgian or of Dutch nationality, but Lady Worth soon discovered English acquaintances among them, and was presently busy presenting Colonel Audley to those who had not yet met him, or recalling him to the remembrances of those who had. She did not perceive Miss Devenish in the room, but since she had taken up a position near the main entrance, she had little doubt of observing her arrival. Meanwhile, Colonel Audley remained beside her, and might have continued shaking hands, greeting old friends, and being made known to smiling strangers for any length of time, had not an interruption occurred which immediately attracted the attention of everyone present.

A pronounced stir was taking place in the ante-room; a loud, whooping laugh was heard, and the next moment a well-made