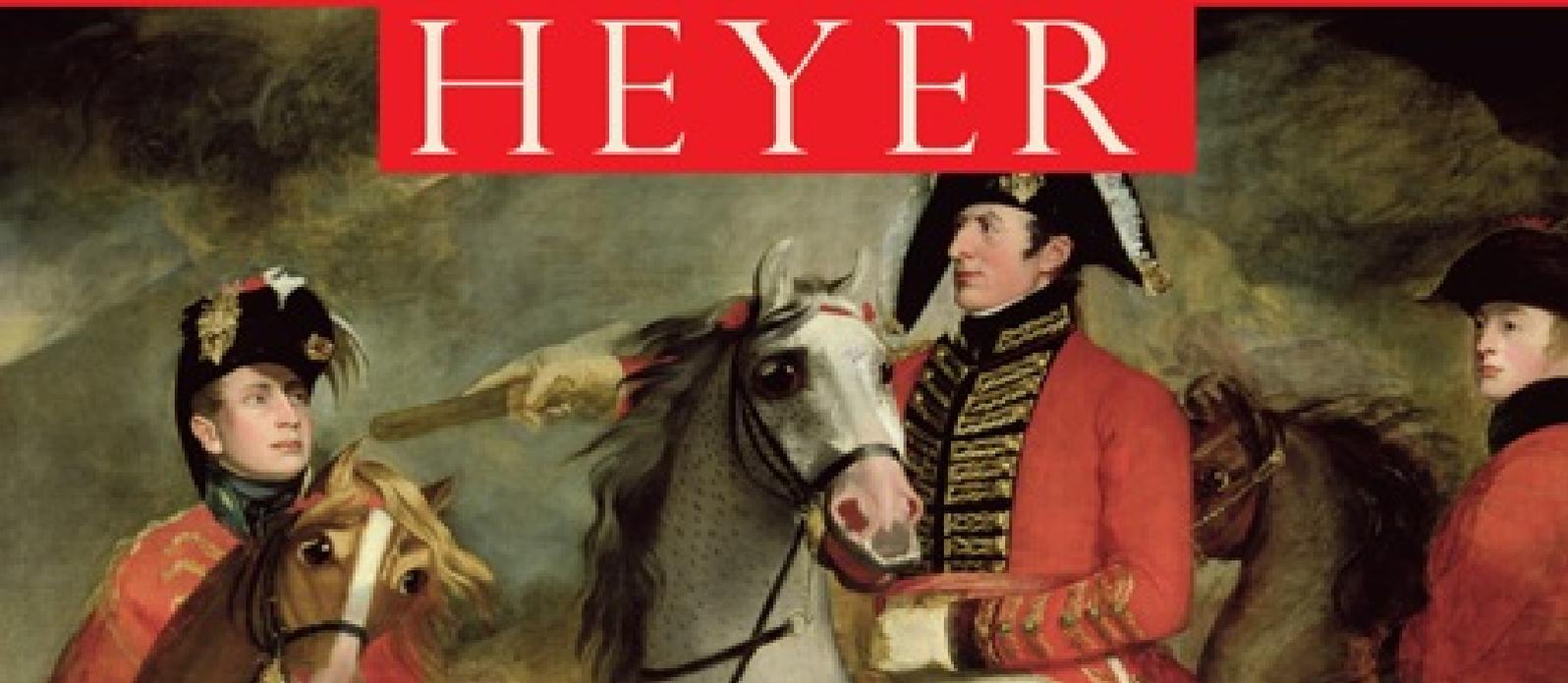
A close-up of a woman's face and upper body. She is wearing a white dress with gold embroidery on the puffed sleeves and a brown sash. The background is dark and textured.

an infamous army

A NOVEL
OF LOVE, WAR,
WELLINGTON
AND WATERLOO

"My favourite historical novelist."
—Margaret Drabble

GEORGETTE
HEYER



*an
infamous
army*

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LOVE, WAR,
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AND WATERLOO

GEORGETTE
HEYER

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'I have got an infamous army;
Very weak and ill-equipped,
And a very inexperienced staff.'
Wellington to Lt Gen Lord Stewart, G.C.B.
8th May, 1815

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 gossipmonger. '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’Arenberg’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 Prussianised 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 Wellesley's'.

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 patronising 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, match-making 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 the 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 scandalising 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,