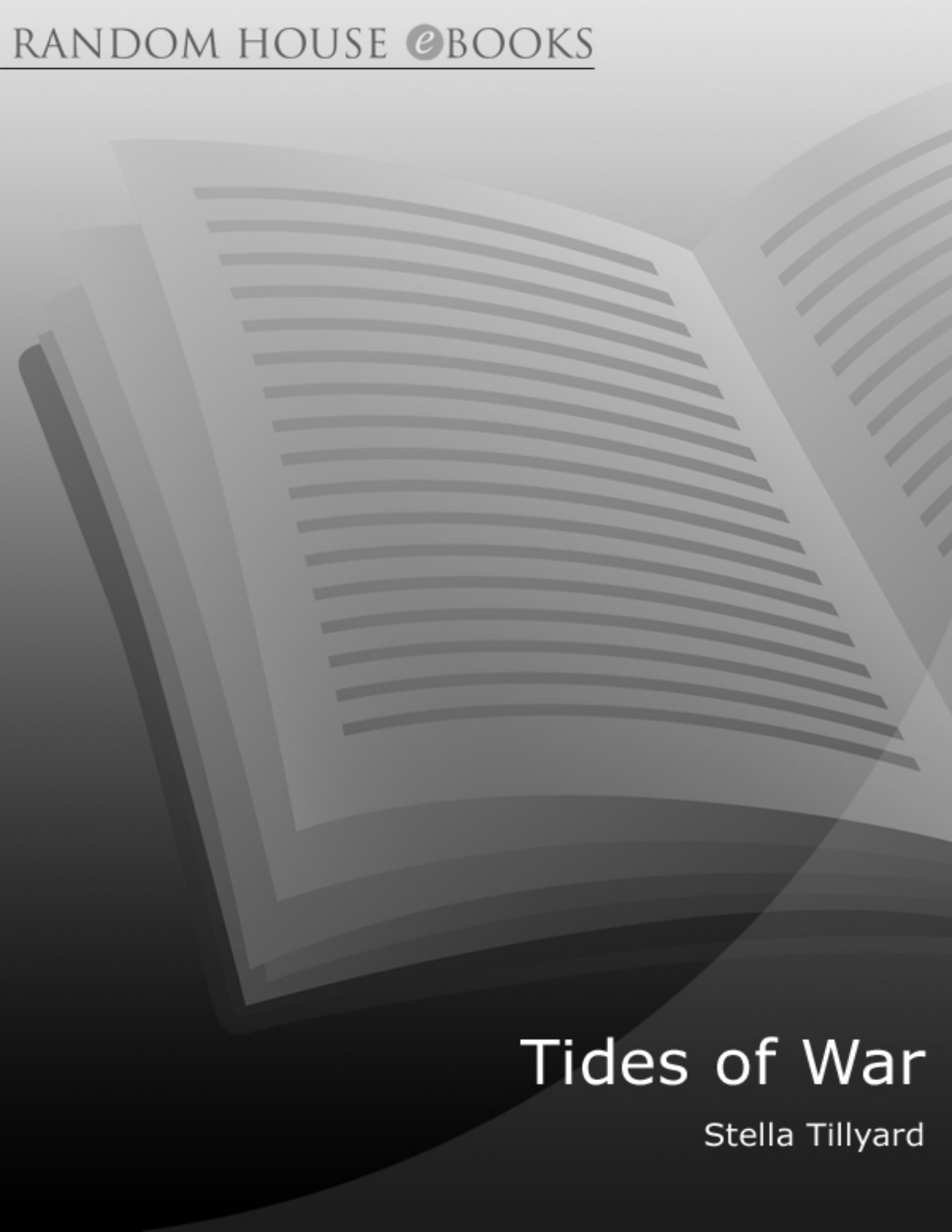


RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS



Tides of War

Stella Tillyard

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Acknowledgements

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About the Author

Stella Tillyard's books include *Aristocrats: Caroline, Emily, Louisa and Sarah Lennox, 1740-1832*; *Citizen Lord: Edward Fitzgerald, 1763-1798*, and most recently *A Royal Affair: George III and his Troublesome Siblings*. She has lived in the USA and Italy and now lives in London.

Also by Stella Tillyard

The Impact of Modernism

*Aristocrats: Caroline, Emily, Louisa and Sarah Lennox
1740-1832*

Citizen Lord: Edward Fitzgerald 1763-1798

Aristocrats: An Illustrated Companion

A Royal Affair: George III and His Troublesome Siblings



Dramatis Personae

* denotes historical figure.

HARRIET RAVEN, née Guest, b. 1792.

JAMES RAVEN, Captain, 9th Regiment of Foot, the East Norfolk Regiment, b. 1788, her husband.

MAJOR GEORGE YALLOP, Major, 9th Foot, b. 1764.

DOROTHY YALLOP, b. 1765, his wife.

THOMAS ORDE, servant to Captain Raven, b. 1787.

MARY ORDE, his wife, b. 1787.

NELSON ORDE, their son, b. 1807.

DAVID MCBRIDE, surgeon of the 9th Foot, b. 1788, Bushey, Herts; educated Edinburgh University.

*ARTHUR WELLESLEY, Lord Wellington, b. Dublin, 1769, 3rd son of Garret Wesley, 2nd Earl of Mornington, Professor of Music, Trinity College, Dublin. Spent early life at Dangan Castle, County Meath. Educated at local school in Trim, County Meath, and Eton College. Joined army aged 17; proposed to Kitty Pakenham, 1793, and was rejected. Went out to India, made fortune and reputation at the Battle of Assaye, knighted, returned 1805. Proposed to Kitty and was accepted. Married April 1806. April 1807 became Chief Secretary to the Lord Lieutenant in Dublin; lived Phoenix Park. Commander-in-Chief of the British army in the

Peninsula April 1809, and successively Viscount, Earl and Duke of Wellington. Returned to England briefly after the abdication of Napoleon, summer 1814, then proceeded to the Congress of Vienna and, after Napoleon's escape from Elba in January 1815, to Waterloo. Returned to England summer 1815. Entered the government 1818, and bought Apsley House, Hyde Park, from his brother Richard. Prime Minister 1828. Supported Catholic Emancipation, 1829; opposed Parliamentary reform; resigned 1830.

*KITTY, LADY WELLINGTON, b. 1772. Born Catherine Pakenham, at Pakenham Hall, Co. Westmeath, Ireland, daughter of 2nd Baron Longford. Married Sir Arthur Wellesley, Dublin 1806. Lived briefly in Dublin, then moved to London, first to no. 11 Harley Street then to 4 Hamilton Place, Piccadilly.

*HON. ARTHUR WELLESLEY, b. 1807.

*HON. CHARLES WELLESLEY, b. 1808.

*ARTHUR FREESE, b. India, 1802, son of Wellington's mistress, Mrs Freese. Adopted by the Wellesleys, 1807.

*GERALD VALERIAN WELLESLEY, b. 1809, son of Arthur's brother Henry. Adopted, 1809.

*EDWARD PAKENHAM, General, b. 1778, Kitty's brother and Arthur's brother-in-law, known as Ned. Killed at New Orleans, in command of the British army, Jan. 1815.

ELIZA FITZWILLIAM, a woman about town.

HON. ROBERT HEATON, b. 1771, Florence, Italy, a gentleman volunteer, or amateur. Racket, his dog.

ANNE COBBOLD, née Guest, b. 1758, Harriet's aunt.

*FREDERICK WINSOR. Born Friedrich Albrecht Winzer, Brunswick, Germany. Lived Berlin, Paris, before arriving in London c.1803. Founder of the National Light and Heat Company, subsequently the Gas Light and Coke Company. Conceived and executed the idea of a central gas plant and a distribution system via underground pipes. Granted charter 1812. Removed from day-to-day running of the company winter 1813/14. Left London for Paris, Jan. 1815.

The Gas Light and Coke Company expanded rapidly to become the biggest supplier of coal gas – or town gas as it was popularly called – in the country. It was nationalised with the rest of the gas industry in 1948, and became part of the Gas Board.

*NATHAN MAYER ROTHSCHILD, b. Frankfurt, 1777, in the kingdom of Hesse, 3rd son of Mayer Amschel Rothschild, 1743–1812. Settled in Manchester 1799, and London, 1806. Lived at 2 New Court, Bishopsgate, from 1810. Spoke a heavily accented English all his life. Cotton trader and then banker, who, with his four brothers, Jakob, Calmann, Amschel and Salomon, provided the specie to pay for the running of Wellington's army 1814–15, and then organised a series of huge loans to Allied powers. Refused a knighthood, 1815. In 1816 bought country house at Stamford Hill in Middlesex; 1826 moved to 107 Piccadilly; 1835 bought Gunnersbury Park, Ealing, former home of Princess Amelia, daughter of King George II.

*HANNAH ROTHSCHILD, née Barent Cohen, b. 1783, his wife.

*JOHN CHARLES HERRIES, b. London, 1778, Treasury official, commissary-in-chief to the British army. Studied banking on the continent; lived 21 Cadogan Place, Kensington.

*WILLIAM HERSCHEL, b. Friedrich Wilhelm Herschel, Hanover, 1738, astronomer who in 1781 discovered a new

planet in the solar system. Named by him the Georgium Sidus after the reigning monarch, it is now called Uranus.

*HON. CHARLES STEWART, b. 1778, Dublin, half-brother to Earl of Castlereagh. As Lieutenant-Colonel of 5th Royal Irish Dragoons fought and routed disorganised Irish rebels at the Battle of New Ross, 1798. General; Adjutant-General in the Peninsula from 1809.

*LORD FITZROY SOMERSET, Field Marshal, b. 1788, aide-de-camp and then military secretary to the Duke of Wellington. Created 1st Baron Raglan; became infamous for his part in the Charge of the Light Brigade in the Crimean War, 1854-5.

*DR JAMES MCGRIGOR, b. 1771, Surgeon General to Lord Wellington's army in the Peninsula.

*COLONEL GEORGE MURRAY, b. 1772. Quartermaster General.

*ROBERT HUGH KENNEDY, b. 1772, General; commissary general in the Peninsula, 1810-14.

*SIR THOMAS PICTON, b. 1758, General. Wounded in the escalade at Badajoz. Killed at Waterloo.

*ROWLAND HILL, b. 1772, General, second-in-command in the Peninsula.

CAMILLE FLORENS, b. 1780, a hostess in Seville, daughter of Eugene O'Donnell, Irishman, b. 1750, Kildare, Ireland.

*FRANCISCO JOSÉ DE GOYA Y LUCIENTES, b. 1746, Spanish painter. Painted Duke of Wellington in Madrid, summer 1812. Infra-red photographs of this painting, now in Apsley House, London, reveal two earlier figures underneath the portrait of Wellington, thought to be Joseph Bonaparte and

Manuel de Godoy, Prime Minister of Spain until 1808. Goya's portraits of the Spanish royal family and Godoy are now in the Museo del Prado, Madrid. While working in Madrid he also produced his series of etchings of the war, *Los Desastres*, 1812-15.

*HENRY, 3rd EARL BATHURST, b. 1762, from June 1812 Secretary of State for War and the Colonies in Lord Liverpool's government.

*SIR MOSES MONTEFIORE, b. 1784, stockbroker and philanthropist. Married Judith Barent Cohen, June 1812. Lived no. 4 New Court. Captain, 3rd Surrey Local Militia 1810-14. Founded Imperial Continental Gas Association and Alliance Life Assurance Company. Retired from active business 1824 to devote himself to good works.

Sally Laird, 1956-2010, friend and storyteller

Tides of War



Stella Tillyard

Chatto & Windus
LONDON

Part One



Suffolk, London and Spain; February 1812

‘Now, what am I looking for?’

Harriet scanned the stoppered phials on the shelves, putting a finger to the label of each one. Some of the bottles were dusty, some had marks of recent use. In her father’s day the laboratory never had this abandoned look. Sir William Guest’s large cabinet stood by the door, its drawers open. Delicate instruments, magnets, loose nails and coils of wire lay jumbled inside. Larger pieces of apparatus and machines were grouped without order against the end wall.

In the middle of the room, its chimney built out through the ceiling, the iron stove sat on a square of delft tiles. As a girl Harriet used to rub the soot off the warm tiles while they waited for an experiment to take, and absorb herself in the story each might tell, a labourer in a heavy smock, a milkmaid with her pail, the blue bridge where they met over a white canal. Black grains of soot coated the tiles now, and a displaced group of bottles with round shoulders and cork stoppers stood on the workbench nearby. In one a lump of yellow phosphorus, Harriet’s favourite, lay in water. Ease it out into the air and it would burst into flame.

‘Nothing is where it should be.’

Harriet wiped her dirty hands on her apron and pushed a lock of hair under the scarf tied round her head. Her hair refused to stay put; her forehead was covered in an arc of dust where she swept it away. She quickened her search, darted along the shelves and read each label.

'Oh, woe is me, t'have seen what I have seen, see what I see.' She put her hands up to her face.

'*Hamlet*, Act 3, Scene 1,' she said under her breath, and turned to the door. No, there was nobody there; she was alone.

'Ah here, here.'

She took a slender bottle, rubbed it off on her apron and read her father's hand. 'Nitrous acid. Strong.' Further along she found the sulphuric acid.

'I can be quick; besides, it is done in a moment.'

It only took a second to unhook a cup from the underside of the nearest shelf with one hand, and with the other pull open a drawer and rummage for the old silver spoon.

'The last thing: oil of turpentine.'

She found the bottle, tipped a spoonful of the thickened turpentine into the shallow cup and set it down on the hearth by the stove. A stick and string she needed next, and to be careful when she mixed the acids. The world receded.

Harriet loved this experiment for its simplicity and noise, the leap of fire and the sudden creation of a new compound in the flames. Her father told her that he often performed it for her mother, to lift her from melancholy. But that was before Harriet was born.

She remembered her father, his white hair disordered, a hessian apron round his waist and his shirt open at the neck. No matter that they were alone together and at home, Sir William always wore his clothes as if someone might arrive at any moment. How many afternoons they sat in there, with the laboratory full of silence from the park and a gentle hiss from the stove. As darkness gathered, the panel of mica windows on the front of the stove glowed redder. Harriet could see herself, too, hair tied back, her own apron a copy of his. She sat thin and taut on a high

stool, proud to hold the scissors to cut litmus paper, or lift a delicate retort over a flame.

“’Tis time I should inform thee further,” Sir William would say, and wait for Harriet to add: *‘Tempest, Act 1, Scene 2.’*

Each time they began a new experiment, her father consulted his Accum or his Parkes, the pages of books discoloured with drops of the liquids they made and mixed. He read out what they needed to find, and Harriet ran along the shelves, levered down bottles and phials with two hands or crossed to the cabinet to pull string and nails, a ruler or a measuring spoon from the drawers. With her breath held in, careful not to drop anything, she placed each tool or ingredient on the workbench to make the orderly row as her father had showed her. The longer the line grew the happier she felt. When an experiment was done, they put the bottles back and walked hand in hand to the drawing room and tea. Harriet could still hear her father’s voice, with its note of apology, and, in her own chatter, the burden of dissolving it.

Now, she laid a glass phial at the end of a wooden stick and tied them together with several turns of good hemp string. Then she poured in a few inches of sulphuric acid and added in the clear nitrous acid. Her task now was to pour the mixture into the cup of turpentine. She leaned over the hearth, concentrated. When the acid hit the warm turpentine the sudden combustion might throw the liquid fire straight up. Again she heard her father’s voice.

‘Stand aside, Harry. Watch for the moment when the new compound releases the heat. Are you ready?’

‘Ready.’

‘*Midsummer Night’s Dream, Act 3, Scene 1,*’ he said, and they laughed together, her father with a sideways glance at the hearth, while she flung her hands onto her knees and leaned forward to catch his eye.

She began to turn the stick in her hand, filled with the calm that the laboratory brought her. She had come in to allay her fears and walk along the shelves. It was an afterthought, or an involuntary movement, that had led from that to Parkes's manual and its well-used section of practical proofs.

'Harriet!'

The door swung open. Harriet stood by the hearth, the long wooden rod in her hands, about to pour.

'James!'

She turned towards him, her eyes on his face, and forgot everything. The acids fell onto the hearth, some into the cup, some onto the tiles. In the sudden explosion of flame drops of turpentine jumped up and caught fire. Tongues of flame fell onto the tiles and the floor and burned there, blue and noisy.

'There, no harm done,' Harriet said, and pushed her hair out of her face. Now, here was James, in a new white cambric shirt and pressed dress trousers, his hair wet.

'What are you doing?'

'I thought I might come in for a few minutes.' She looked up at her husband, a look of self-containment on her face, a kind of retreat.

'Have you forgotten that we begin in less than an hour?'

Harriet ran towards him.

'Oh, darling James, no. That is why I came.'

James took a step back and put his hands out towards her. Harriet glanced at her dusty apron and the acid burn on her gown. She ran to look in the mirror, a mottled glass oval that she and her father had silvered years ago. It was pitted black where the silvering had been too thin and reminded Harriet that when their experiments had gone wrong, as they often did, she would hug her father tightly to make up for something more than an incorrect mix of chemicals and compounds.

In the eaten silver surface Harriet saw that streaks of dust and soot ran down her cheeks. Fire singed the hem of her old day dress.

‘I can get it all off. My gown is brushed and ready.’

James smiled suddenly. A note of warmth was added to his measured, even voice, so that it dropped down a tone to become soft and humorous.

‘Dear girl; dearest Harry. You are absurd. We leave for the Peninsula tomorrow. Major Yallop is already here; Dorothy Yallop and David McBride, too. I had thought to take them over to the hotel in half an hour. What is to be done with you?’

Harriet looked at James, at the breadth of his shoulders and the strong push of his calves against the backs of his trousers. Desire flashed up her body like the twist of a fish underwater.

‘I shall wash and be down directly.’

‘Nonsense, Harry.’

Tears stood in Harriet’s eyes.

‘Do not say so, James. I have been dressing myself for years. I do not take the hours that other women do.’

James Raven’s features shifted, as if it was the first time he had caught the beauty and oddity of Harriet’s features.

‘I tell you what. I’ll go back up and ask Mrs Yallop if she will help you to dress. I shall not say anything to the others. I think that will be best.’

Harriet ran down the corridor that connected the laboratory to the main house. She pulled her scarf off as she went and dashed a sooty hand across her eyes. James watched her heavy hair fall down her back. It would be a considerable labour to brush, pull up, tie back and set with ropes of pearls. Harriet would be late, even in Dorothy’s hands. How was it, he asked himself again, that his fellow officers, and even the men, used to a punctual life of rules and self-reliance, made such an exception for her, shrugged their shoulders and smiled.

Why should he ask? He was one of them himself. From the first time he saw her, outlined against the light from the long windows in her father's drawing room, her narrow face turned to the park outside, he knew he would have to campaign for her attention. There was something about her then, and still now, that was irretrievable. It was nothing she kept apart or hid; but rather as if, long ago, something had dropped deep into her and left no trace, no ripples on the surface, but stayed there, tantalising and out of reach. In all her high spirits, her enthusiasm, and her affection, she was beyond him, a step ahead, or just round the corner.

He had joined the army four years before with the usual portmanteau of dreams: to distinguish himself, serve his king and win promotion. Napoleon had marched across Spain in 1807, invaded Portugal and then turned his attention to his Spanish ally. The British army, under Sir Arthur Wellesley, helped the Portuguese see off the French, but Wellesley was then recalled and Napoleon picked off the Spanish armies one by one. By the end of 1808, when James embarked for Spain, Napoleon had forced the Spanish king to abdicate in favour of his son, confined them both in France and installed his brother Joseph Bonaparte in Madrid instead.

James had landed in Santander as autumn turned to winter, and joined the rest of the 9th Foot with Sir John Moore's small army outside Salamanca. General Moore had been left to command the rump of the British army in the Peninsula and James arrived at the moment when Moore, without reinforcements, could no longer contain Marshal Soult's well-fed French force. He ordered his army to retreat to Astorga and then make for the coast and the British fleet.

Soult's army had pursued Moore's ragged troops all across the top of Spain. In the snow-covered mountains of Galicia the French picked off dozens of British stragglers as a tawny lion pulls down gazelles from the edge of a moving

herd. Cold and bad lungs did for hundreds of others. Men lay down on the iced verges and waited to die or to be taken prisoner. The retreat lasted three weeks, night merging into bitter day. Only the bones of Moore's small force were left at the end, men who had stripped themselves into marching automatons and hurled their illusions one by one onto thorny gorse at the roadside.

Sometimes a party of them, officers and men who could still bear the sight of one another, laid ambushes for the French vanguard. In the high mountains above Astorga, where their army split in two to make the journey to the coast faster and confuse the enemy, James knew that he, a soldier who had bought his sword in Jermyn Street and his commission for an inflated price, had become a killer. When he faced the Frenchman, looked into his light blue eyes and saw fear slide into them, he saw himself suspended above life like a bird of prey.

Yet he felt nothing; or only a kind of vibration, a thrum of blood such as a hawk might experience as it waited for the moment to lower its head and dive. Then the moment of thrust, intense as an explosion. With that James was certain that he had reached what lay like lava at the bottom of every man; but afterwards, when he sat round the fire back with the division, there was nothing to say about it. The moment had gone from him, its legacy only a mind picked empty the way that carrion strip a carcass to leave a skeleton white against the green.

His senior officer, Major Yallop, had merely nodded at him, and slugged an extra tot of brandy in his tea. The next day the retreat went on. The regiment was sleepless, the men irritable and petty. They jostled for the best bivouacs at night, quarrelled over sticks for fires and twists of tea. With the French at its back the army became a rabble; but James did not dwell on the brutality. All along the way the lightness accompanied him. He forgot about Lady Lavington and the drawing-room life in London he left

when he bought his commission. Like the others who survived the march he learned to ignore the rain that drove at his face as he rode and soaked through the seams of his gabardine. He came to appreciate the dry humour of his men, their fortitude and acceptance, the way they never dwelt on friends who became too sick to go on and fell back towards the baggage train and the advancing French.

They had reached Corunna before the fleet, and the French were upon them by the time the transports got into the harbour. There was only time to put the sick and wounded on board before they had to turn and fight, but James welcomed the battle. Wounded in the shoulder at the end of the day, after their commander Moore was killed, he was mentioned in General Anderson's dispatches and promoted to Captain.

The next day, with Soult's army beaten back and the British saved, James boarded a worn-out ship of the line. He disembarked at Portsmouth to the approbation of a sombre crowd. The newspapers excoriated Sir John Moore and described his officers as the bravest of men. By the time he reached Suffolk to convalesce he had grown tired of women who touched his bandaged arm, called him a hero and implied that they would be glad to know how such a man conducted himself on softer ground.

When he was introduced to Harriet at dinner in her father's house, she had challenged rather than invited him.

'Captain Raven, you are welcome. But in your regimental jacket? What happened to the notion that "we are but warriors for the working day"?'

At least he had recognised the line: Shakespeare, though he had not admitted it. But he acknowledged the absurdity. In the early years of the war men changed into everyday dress as soon as they disembarked. Today their jackets were everywhere, drops of scarlet all along the streets.

When Lord Nelson was still alive, a sea captain had been the thing. Now that Arthur Wellesley was back as Lord Wellington and Commander-in-Chief in the Peninsula, army officers were the fashion. With his imperious manner and polished boots, the General was a man to rival Bonaparte at last. The shimmer of war accompanied James down the street and into every room. Yet he knew himself to be a killer in a red coat. War was his companion; it lived under his skin. Women sensed its presence; they offered it, as much as him, the softness of their naked bodies. Harriet appeared to ask what else there was.

He had stood back when he first observed her, walked to the supper table and watched as other men tried to catch her attention. To be sure she was Sir William Guest's daughter, and Sir William was a gentleman, despite the reputation for oddity his interest in science had given him, with a long lineage. But it was not Harriet's prospects, merely, that drew admirers. Neither was it Harriet's beauty, for she could never be described as beautiful, or even pretty. She was too thin and quick, her face narrow and long, her hair always on the point of escape. No, it was something else; around her, the men were like anglers who crowded a river bank, cast their lines into the water, came up with nothing, and cast again.

After that day the simple life war offered him was not enough. He came back to Suffolk at every opportunity, and approached Harriet with care. At first, for every step he took towards her she had taken two steps back. He learned what it was to be the pursuer, though it was always she who determined, by a gesture, a laugh, a question, how far he might advance.

James found, in the end, that it was best simply to be discovered at Beccles Hall in conversation with Harriet's father. Sir William welcomed him into his house, and seemed to help James in his pursuit. When they talked Harriet often came into the library, seated herself at a

distance and then joined in. If the talk interested her she would move to a closer chair and then throw herself on the sofa next to James or her father, forgetful of everything else. Then James might ask her to show him something outside; the large lens telescope in the observatory on the lawn, or the experiments Sir William conducted with different soil types and seeds. Over the weeks, when he was with Harriet alone, James began to add into the conversation a compliment on her dress or the grey of her eyes. She never showed she noticed such remarks, and James began to think that she had no grasp of his intentions or the state of enchantment she had thrown upon him. Then one day out in the park she said as if it had just occurred to her.

‘The colour of an eye I believe to be like that of our hair, a pigment which fades with the years. Yours, for instance, appear to be of the purest blue, unmixed with any other colour.’

‘Indeed.’ James let the conversation run. He loved to listen, not just to Harriet’s words but to the sound of her voice, which had a depth and certainty unexpected in so slight a form.

‘It is difficult for me to be sure, however, since my vantage point is so far beneath you. If you were to lie flat on the lawn and let the sun shine slantwise into them, I might see better if their blue lies on another tint.’

‘You tease me, Harry.’

‘I wish to conduct an investigation. Lie down.’

James lay down and opened his eyes as much as he could in the evening sun.

‘Quite blue; cobalt, or cerulean.’

Harriet leaned over him. She took her bonnet off; her hair fell across his face.

‘You make a fool of me, then.’

‘Perhaps.’

Harriet came so close that he could no longer see her face; just feel her breath and warmth, and the moment when her lips touched his. He stayed as still as he could bear to be, and then felt with wonder the entry of her tongue into his mouth.

‘Is that an investigation also?’

‘In a manner of speaking.’

‘What manner, Harriet? You must know why I come to your father’s house.’

Harriet stood up and threw her bonnet so it skimmed over the grass like a loaded plate. She followed its path as if nothing else interested her.

‘In the manner that, if we wish to mix two compounds to create a new one and have never done so before, we begin with a very small quantity by way of a proof.’

‘A proof?’

‘That we reach the result we had hoped for.’

James jumped up in a bound and looked down at her.

‘And did you, Harry?’

‘I think so.’

‘Then do it again.’

Harriet came closer. To his delight and amazement she began to unbutton his coat. Her body was hot against his. He wanted to reach down, ease her backwards and put his hands tight over her breasts; but he stood motionless, afraid to make any move that might stop her. When his coat was open Harriet ran her hands round his back, and kissed him again, as if she had been kissing him all her life or as if they were lovers already and she knew everything that he did.

Yet even now, more than a year later, and a month after their wedding, he wasn’t at all sure he had got her. He was leaving for the Peninsula again, with a secondment to Headquarters, he thought as he walked up the corridor to the library, and Harriet was still at it, that disappearing act of hers.

Once she said to him, 'You do not know me, James. There are things in me that I cannot think about.'

'There are those things in all of us, Harry. Any man who has been in war knows that.'

She had smiled then, and fallen silent. He did not pursue the conversation; from his own case he knew what he said to be true. At other times she was more simply elusive. 'I'll run upstairs for it', she might say of something she had forgotten, and turn away from him. Half an hour later he would find her under the covers with a book, or in the laboratory, as he had today, covered in soot, when their guests were to arrive any moment.

'Ah, Dorothy,' James said when he opened the library door, 'Harriet is a little late. She would be so happy if you might help her. Just to clasp her jewels and so on.'

'The poor thing. She is unhappy, no doubt, at your departure and forgot herself.' Mrs Yallop looked delighted. 'I could use an iron myself, and a pier-glass. I have quite a surprise for you all.'

She nodded at her husband. David McBride, the new regimental surgeon, who was seated next to the Major, saw Yallop blush and concentrate his gaze on the tips of his polished boots.

'My *pièce de résistance*, I think you would call it. In honour of the regiment.'

Dorothy Yallop pressed her shawl and set the iron down flat on the hearth. Behind her through the window the River Waveney spilled out into the meadows and caught the last of the light from the bleached winter sky. A rising breeze moved through the naked willow branches; snow was on the way from the west. In the darkness the current of war came upriver on the evening tide, pushed unnoticed into every rivulet and stream, and seeped into the frosted ground.

‘Now, how are you placed, my dear?’

Mrs Yallop considered the young woman in front of her who jumped from foot to foot in the cold while she washed herself. Harriet Raven was eager for life. She might feel the parting acutely but would not suffer for long, would learn how to put the pain at a distance. Mrs Yallop had heard that Sir William had brought his daughter up alone, that Lady Guest had disappeared, had been odd, too, in her way; but many officers’ wives had endured childhoods of hardship. It was good drill for the job, the Major always said, and after twenty-five years of service, there was not much that George could not tell you about life in the army.

‘Look at me, Mrs Yallop. I ran into the laboratory to forget what was happening, and made everything worse.’

‘Nonsense, there is plenty of time. We will have you right in a moment. I have dressed more quickly and in many a worse place I can tell you. Try a frigate in the harbour at Messina, or a bordello in Lisbon.’

Half an hour later Harriet was ready. Her mother’s diamonds, set in gold, hung around her neck. Mrs Yallop had brushed her hair and tied it with a loop of pearls, and Harriet stood, quite composed, in her blue gown.

‘And now for my masterpiece.’

Mrs Yallop unwound a small, carefully wrapped bundle that she laid like an offering in Harriet’s lap.

‘What is it? A new creation, I hope.’

‘A novelty, certainly. I made it myself. Here is Britannia, our badge; to this side of her, “9th Foot”, and there, to the other, “East Norfolk”.’

A fat Britannia, embroidered in white and blue, sat with her left hand at rest on a shield. In her right hand she held a sturdy stick stripped from a living tree and sewn onto the backing cloth. Tawny feathers encircled her like the laurels of a victor. Were they pheasant, Harriet wondered, or something more domestic?

‘And what do we do with it?’

'Do not tease me, young lady. It will sit beautifully.'

Mrs Yallop lifted her handiwork to her head and tied it with a bow behind. Wiry tufts of hair lay flattened on her forehead.

'I consider it to have an eastern effect that recalls the Major's service overseas.'

'Oh, it is marvellous. You have quite restored my good humour.'

'My dear.' Mrs Yallop tested her headdress for security. 'You take this all too seriously. Tomorrow they leave; I have known an overseas campaign to last a year or two. The Major admires Napoleon and does not believe he will surrender the Peninsula lightly.'

'I know you are right; but I find it hard to be light-hearted. It is shocking to say, and do forgive me, but if my father had not died I should have been married much longer and this parting might be easier.'

'No, my dear. You may be wife, mother, daughter or sister; the misery is the same. Who knows, we may never see them again. It does not do at all to dwell upon it. After the first time, you learn to endure with good humour.'

But Harriet was sure that Dorothy had no idea of her feeling for James. In the nights after her father's death and the postponement of their wedding, the thought of James took her breath away even when grief gripped her; one animal passion vied with another and life got the better of annihilation. Though they had finally married last month those few weeks were scarcely time to learn to live together. Now James could only say he would come back to her, and she could only say she would wait.

Then she was afraid. Suppose, as the months went by, James faded? Suppose he became a kind of ghost, a shadow so indistinct that another man might interpose himself in the space between them? Worse, she might wish one to.

'Mrs Yallop, I will try to endure. But what if I forget him?'

'And fall in love with another man?'

'Not in love; but one might become lonely.'

A keen look crossed Mrs Yallop's face.

'It is easily dealt with. Do not pretend it does not happen. I have experienced it myself, although one must never speak of it; a blow that comes down just like that. You must hold your nerve. Do nothing and it will go away. In a few months you will be as you were before, and the better for it, I assure you. There is nothing to worry about if you love your husband as I see you do.'

Harriet heard a knock at the door. Here he was, then, come to take her downstairs and to the hotel in the square, where the officers of the 9th had assembled in farewell. A vibrant picture of James, tall, fair and muscular, came complete into her mind, like a gloved and golden Florentine on a white horse. She turned to greet him. It was not James who stood there, but Dr McBride, ponderous and solid as a seal, with his hands behind his back and his topcoat made lopsided by a book in one pocket.

'Oh, Dr McBride.'

David McBride watched Harriet's eyes darken and narrow in disappointment. He stood in the doorway a moment and examined her the way he hoped a physician might study a patient. He looked at her mouth, thin and red, the lips slightly parted; her eyes, grey, or perhaps greyish blue; her slight form; her bosom, surprisingly full, its curves just visible above the lace of her gown. He coughed, and Harriet looked at him as if trying to get him into focus. But this examination, for such a thing he permitted himself, did not describe her. No medical man could find it satisfactory, he thought. For a start it stopped somewhere above the waist, and he felt it inappropriate, even for a man of science, to drop his eyes further. But, more than that, the words in his head pinned things down, made a report in fixed ink and lines, and the fact was Harriet Raven was a person of movement, of an upward tilt

of the chin, and sudden deep laughter. Not one of her features was of the best. Her mouth for instance – he gazed at it without emotion – was too wide to be pretty; it curled up at the ends in a way that defied nature.

Dr McBride sighed heavily and shifted his shoulders inside his ugly topcoat. Harriet looked at him with amusement; the best way to approach James's friend was to joke with him.

“Now sits the wind fair?”, Dr McBride?’

‘A westerly, I believe. It should run us down the Channel and into the Bay of Biscay in no time.’ He coughed again, ‘*Henry V*, Act 2 –’

Harriet laughed, and David added to his description of her features the fact that when she did so two creases framed her mouth in the way that commas surround speech. How did she guess he liked to be teased?

‘You know the source of my nonsense. How is that?’

‘I attended the medical school at Edinburgh. In Scotland, and away from home, winter stretches out. I lodged with my grandfather and read a good deal at night.’ He looked at his shoes and then back up at her. ‘You never know when you might need words to put life at a bearable distance.’

‘You do not need a book now, Dr McBride. Mrs Yallop here counsels us to be cheerful. We shall simply dance and say farewell.’

David held out his arm. Harriet slipped her hand through it.

‘Lead on,’ she said, and smiled at him as if he was not there.

Dorothy Yallop advanced into the ballroom of the Grand Hotel in Bungay with a buoyant shake of her head.

‘The waltz! Gentlemen, I ask you to put away your swords and dance.’