Escape to PROVENCE

Maureen Emerson

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The story of Elisabeth Starr and Winifred Fortescue
and the making of the Colline des Anglais

MAUREEN EMERSON

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To Christina, Gavin and David

The Houses and their Occupants on the Rue de la Fontaine Opio

Le Castello
Elisabeth Starr
An American from Philadelphia

La Bastide
Polly Cotton
Cousin to the Marquess of Anglesey

Fort Escu
Winifred Fortescue (Peggy)
Author and widow of Sir John Fortescue

San Peyre
Charles, 6th Marquess of Anglesey

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Theodore Roosevelt Collection, Harvard College Library. By permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University (*87M-102) – Corinne Roosevelt Robinson.
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Mr Henry Sharpe – Doreathea and Bertie Landsberg at Villa Malcontenta.
Mr Charles Duff – Polly Cotton with her dog Babs; Elisabeth painting in her studio; Elisabeth in the doorway of the Bastide; Caroline Paget and Rex Whistler in Austria; cover photograph.
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Mrs Faith Grattan – E.H Shepard with his daughter Mary; Peggy Fortescue at Fort Escu; back garden of Fort Escu; salon at Fort Escu; Peggy on an English beach; Many Waters; Peggy and The Ark on Exmoor; Peggy and Dominie in 1943.
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Lady Barbara Bossom – Students of the Monkey Club picking grapes.
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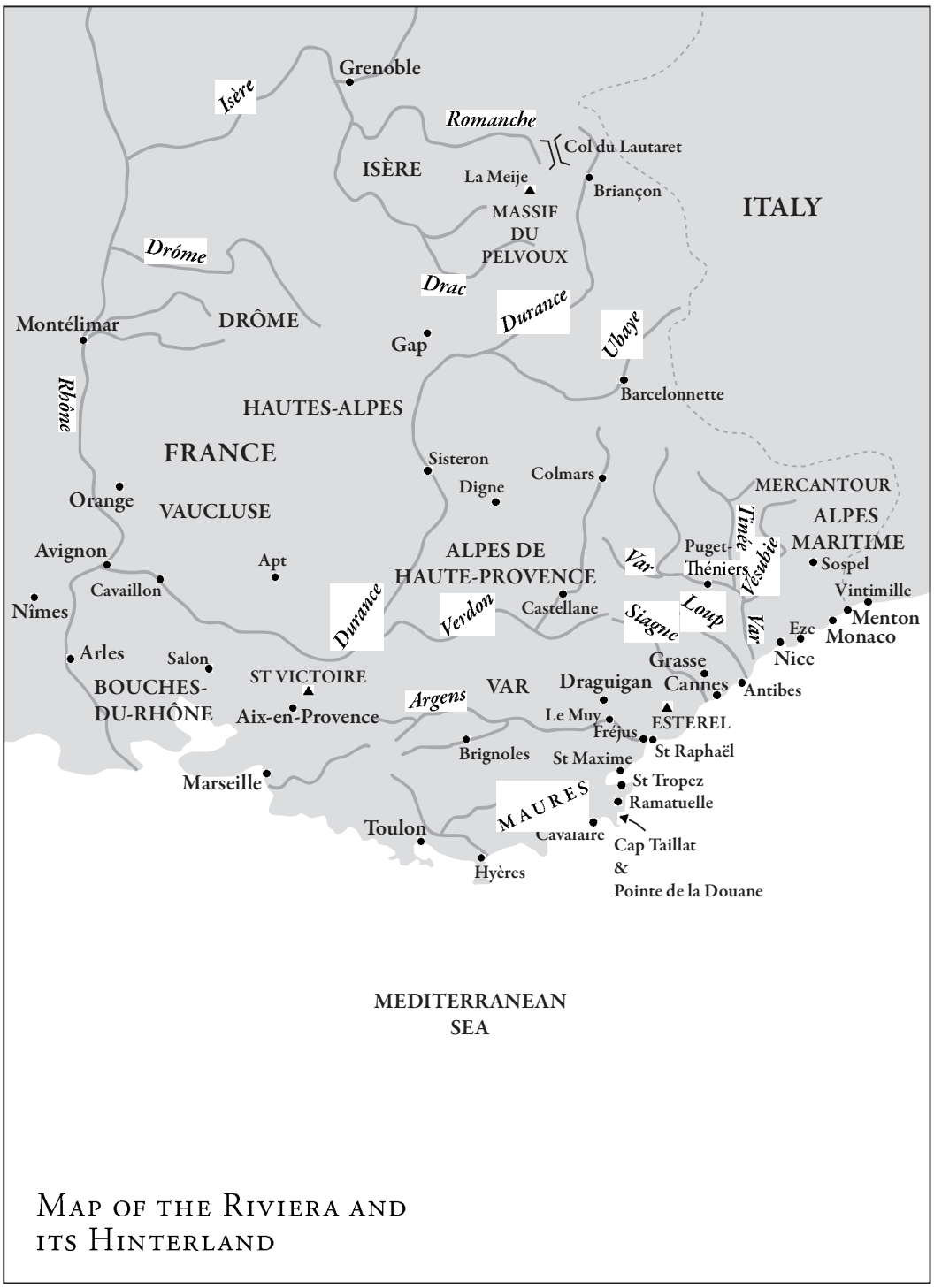
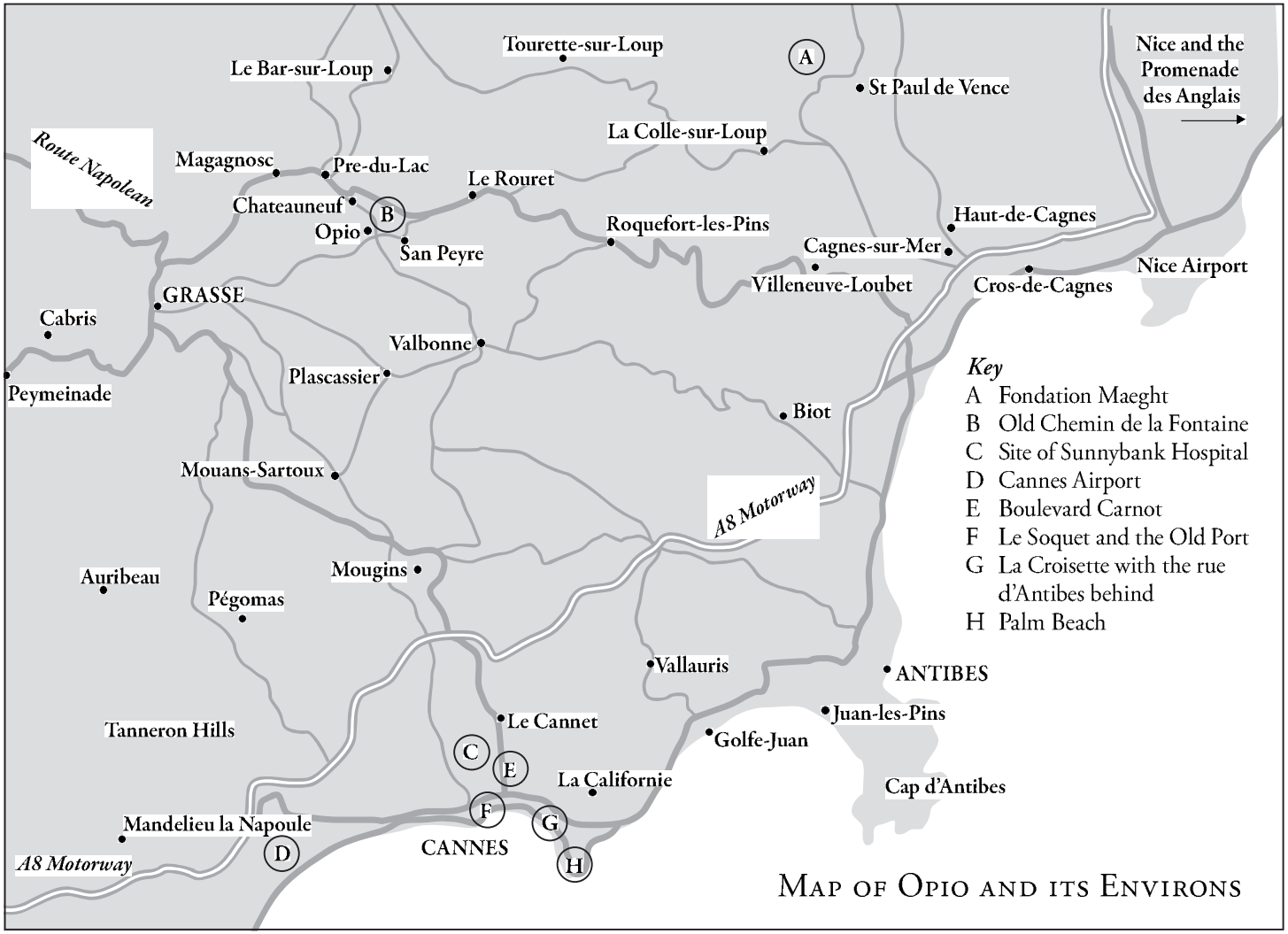


Map of the Riviera and its Hinterland



Map of Opio and its Environs

INTRODUCTION

I began to research this book in the year 2000, shortly after leaving France. Now, eight years later, my children have begun to take it seriously. I feel this is an accomplishment in its own right. When I began, we had no grandchildren, now we have four. After living in the south of France for twenty-two years, we moved our home from a small farmhouse in the Alpes Maritimes to a village house in Sussex and learnt how to live in England once again. Researching and writing wove their way through these events, driven by a determination I did not realise I was capable of. But two very resolute and unusual women were behind me all the way, and I was never allowed to slacken off for long.

Almost opposites in character, Elisabeth Starr and Winifred Fortescue (known to her friends as Peggy, the name I have used in this book) were, between them, enigmatic, dramatic, obstinate and courageous – and this is their story.

Elisabeth, from Philadelphia, and Winifred, from England, left their respective countries for quite different reasons. Elisabeth turned her back on her Philadelphian family after an unhappy childhood followed by personal tragedy. The First World War, towards which she was drawn with a sense of purpose, even relief, brought exhausting and dangerous aid work on the Western Front, followed by the decision to abandon America and make her home in France. She chose the village of Opio, in the hills above Cannes.

Winifred, with her husband Sir John Fortescue, the historian of the British Army, sought in Provence an elegance of life they could neither aspire to nor afford in England. After John's death Peggy became famous, publishing her best-seller of the 1930s, *Perfume from Provence*, followed over the years by five other autobiographical books.

The two women were brought together by a mutual desire for a close and understanding friendship and the need to keep loneliness

at bay. Peggy, no longer able to live in her married home with her 'beloved ghost' found her second home on Elisabeth's hillside in Opio. They had both chosen the hills above the coast, among wild flowers, vines and animals. Here, during the years of uneasy peace between the wars, they combined caring for their properties with spells of rustic living in the mountains of the High Alps or in remote coves by the sea – until the threat of war changed their lives for ever.

The history of the south of France is that of a succession of civilisations. Bordered by the Alps to the north and east and the Rhone to the west, Provence has been inhabited since prehistoric times. First came the Ligurians, followed by Greeks, Phoenicians and Romans. After the fall of Rome, Visigoths, Franks and Moors invaded this land where every Mediterranean race has left its footprint – not forgetting the marauding feet of barbarous pirates.

But in the nineteenth century came an invasion with a lighter touch, when the coastal region's winter warmth and beauty were discovered by the rich and noble of Britain, Russia and America. With them came the artists, attracted by the brilliant light and glowing colours, to which they did so much justice. From then on, apart from the clouds of war, there was no going back. The allure of that long stretch of coastline, gently lapped by the Mediterranean and protected by the mountain ranges of the Alpes Maritimes, still endures in spite of great change. The English call the entire coast, from Marseilles to Genoa, the Riviera, but the French prefer to call their portion the Côte d'Azur. The hills inland from the coast are the *arrière-pays* – and this is where 'Provence' begins its wide sweep across the south of France.

In spite of the new fashion for summer sunbathing before the Second World War, most visitors still went to their Riviera villas for several months in the winter season. These were holiday homes, often rented out to others. But for some the south of France became their only home and for them it was not the same.

Those few expatriates who made their permanent homes among the thyme-scented terraces and olive groves of the hills rather than the bougainvillea and citrus fruits of the coast below, grew to understand and enjoy the land and its people to a far greater extent than did those who seldom ventured into the mountains. But the coastal towns, for those who had transport, were sometimes visited and it was towards lively and elegant Cannes, rather than Antibes or faraway Nice, that

Elisabeth, Peggy and their friends gravitated to shop, visit a doctor or enjoy a meal in a good restaurant.

But this is not only the story of two expatriate women who were drawn to Provence in the first part of the twentieth century. It is also about the friends they gathered around them on their hillside, the houses they all lived in and the fate of those whose lives touched theirs. It is a book of portraits of people who lived through a particularly tense period of history. The Second World War would affect them all profoundly, first with the threat of occupation, then the fall of the south of France to the Vichy regime and finally the Italian and German Occupation. And, at the end of the tunnel, in an event that military historians seem to have taken rather lightly, there was bravery and drama in the liberation of the south of France by the Americans, the Free French and the southern Resistance fighting side by side.

As well as researching in archives and mediathéques in England, Paris and the south of France I have worked indirectly with universities and archives in the United States while researching this book. I have been lucky, many of Peggy's letters were discovered in sundry places, and in the underground muniments room of a great house lay a biographer's dream – files full of information concerning the two women and their families, including important correspondence written by Elisabeth. Peggy's family were immensely supportive, from the moment they received my first tentative letter. Another letter, to America, led Elisabeth's great niece who, although she knew little of Elisabeth's life, generously to send family albums, documents and correspondence that were of great value. I spent several happy hours in a small orchard in the south-east of England reading letters found in trunks in a Sussex barn, which had been written between members of the family Elisabeth had left far behind. Contacts and friendships that have sprung from writing this book have been a wonderful and unexpected bonus.

My own home in France was in a neighbouring village to Opio in the hills of southern France and, by coincidence, my home in Sussex is now in the next village to where Peggy spent the war years at Many Waters. But when I think of Elisabeth and Peggy, it is always on their quiet hillside in Provence, where so much happened and which the local people called La Colline des Anglais.

Part 1

An American in Provence

Chapter 1
Home

A citation of November 1919 reads: 'To Miss Starr (Elisabeth Parrish) the '*Médaille de la Reconnaissance Française*' in Silver. Voluntary nurse and member of the French War Emergency Fund. Head of Reconstruction of the Civilian Section of the Somme region. She showed proof of devotion and unflagging zeal.' The medal, which is awarded to foreigners in recognition of services to France, hangs from a sand-coloured ribbon with blue stripes. On one side is a rather craggy depiction of 'Marianne', the symbol of the Republic, and on the other a sprig of oak leaves. It would seal Elisabeth's bond with her adopted country. It was decisive, for it proved that here in France, her qualities had been recognised.

After four years spent on the edge of the battlefields of the Great War her beauty was beginning to fade. At thirty-one, constant exertion and years of wartime rations had caused her to lose weight, fined down her face and made her large dark eyes seem even larger. Her slender body was weary, but she still moved with grace and her walk was swift, covering the ground with long strides. Her 'soft, slow voice' with its Transatlantic accent, was attractive. Above all, she was enigmatic, which trait found its own admirers.

She had decided that the village of Opio, in the Alpes Maritimes, would become her home. East of the perfume town of Grasse and 17 kilometres above Cannes and Antibes, the village was, by any standards, very simple. The Castello, the ancient, stone-built house she chose, was tucked under the lee of a hill, overlooking one of the loveliest views in the south of France and surrounded by 8 hectares (about 20 acres) of land, laid down to grazing, olives and vines.

It was a Provençal winter when she signed the deeds in November 1921. When it rained the countryside became monochrome and the

dusk fell in a grey-green mist. The air was damp and smelt of pines, and the leaves of the olive trees on the hillsides flickered with delicate silver flashes in the breeze of a dying light. Hilltop towns and villages gave themselves up to the night as oil lamps were lit one by one in the tall, narrow houses, while above them the mountain ranges faded from grey to black. As the night drew in the thick walls and tiled floors of old buildings were often chillingly cold and dank, and then it was time to burn brushwood and seasoned olive logs in the stone fireplaces. Elisabeth was content then to be the only foreigner in the village (the Italian immigrants were scarcely foreign) but that was something she would gradually change.

Far below, on the glittering coast, lay the post-war reawakening of the Riviera. The life down there did not tempt her. Generally, at that time, the very rich stayed on the coast and those of slimmer means went to the hills. Elisabeth was comfortably off rather than rich and the countryside and its animals were what she needed. So it was possibly the rustic simplicity of the small village with its promise of peace, coupled with the rather haunting atmosphere of the Castello, that attracted. She intended the old, dim house to become a sanctuary for the rest of her days. She did not intend to return to America. It was all a very long way from Philadelphia.

Elisabeth Parrish Starr was born on 29 April 1889 at 1504 Walnut Avenue, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. She had been christened Elizabeth with a *z* but, as one of her gestures of defiance to her family, she would change the *z* to *s* in the French fashion, and that was the spelling she would always use. She was born, as the youngest child, into a secure and accepted family in the right kind of house, in a sought-after street, in a city where social standing and family achievement were of immense importance. Perhaps she would have been more extrovert and less enigmatic in temperament if she had been better loved as a child, but this is idle speculation, as is trying to understand the depth of the problems in the Starr household that would create the rift to come.

Elisabeth's father, Louis, was the son of Isaac Starr, a banker. His mother was a French woman, Lydia Ducoing, whose family, originally from Bordeaux, had fled the island of Santo Domingo (now Haiti) during the slave uprising of 1791. The Starrs were descended from an earlier Isaac Starr, an English Quaker, who emigrated from England and settled in Delaware in 1710. At forty, Louis Starr was one of

Philadelphia's most successful doctors. One of the first to establish paediatrics as a branch of medicine in its own right, he would become internationally acclaimed in his field.

The family of Mary Parrish, Elisabeth's pretty, spirited mother, was well-to-do and active in the Society of Friends as well as many charitable causes including education, concern for the poor and the abolition of slavery. Mary's Quaker pedigree was faultless. Her grandparents owned the houses and lands of Oxmead Farm, across the Delaware River in New Jersey, and so combined wealth with a highly developed social conscience. Dr Joseph Parrish, Elisabeth's great-grandfather, had kept one of the safe houses on the 'Underground Railroad' at his home at Mulberry Street in Philadelphia, helping slaves to escape from the South. This compassionate action, along with others of a similar nature, ensured the Parrish family became known for its high moral standing. Mary's uncle, Professor Edward Parrish, a pharmacist, invented Parrish's Food, whose ruby-red bottles gleamed in chemists windows in the United States and Europe for several generations.

William, Mary's father, a handsome man 'of generous impulses' did not go to college as did his clever brothers (all doctors or pharmacists) but became involved in property development, particularly the exclusive Riverton area of country homes on the New Jersey side of the Delaware River. The enterprise was eventually a success, but William did not live long enough to profit from it or enjoy the attractive house he had built for his family on the river bank. He died in 1863 at the age of forty-eight leaving his widow, his daughter Mary and her brothers Dillwyn and Alfred without the fortune that had been hoped for. The three children would have to make their own way in the world with more difficulty than many of their peers. They would all, during the course of their lives, leave America and make their homes in England and France.

A studio photograph, taken perhaps for Mary's engagement, shows an attractive young woman with a china-doll complexion and a fan held lightly against her cheek. She wears a flounced and pleated dress of velvet and taffeta, with deep collar and cuffs of thick white lace. The photographer has allowed himself a breath of pink colouring on her cheekbones. She is unlike her future children, who would inherit her husband's dark, Latin looks.

It was in no way extraordinary that Mary Parrish and Louis Starr

should meet, as both families were involved in the medical circles of the city and he was probably a good catch for a girl without a large dowry. Louis, as well as having a successful medical practice and academic work, became the author of respected medical books. One of his publications, *The Hygiene of the Nursery*, contains much common-sense advice on the care of young children, although such recommendations as, 'Every well-regulated house should be provided with two nurseries, one for occupation by day, the other by night,' and 'The third floor of a house being a better elevation for a day nursery, as such rooms are remote from the ordinary domestic disturbances', shows this was not a book intended for those of slender means. Mary Parrish could have done far worse.

In September 1882 the couple went to England, where Mary's two brothers, Alfred and Dillwyn Parrish, now had active business interests. Here they were married, not in a Quaker Meeting House, but in the Parish Church of Bickley in Kent. A marriage in England possibly avoided a large and costly Philadelphian wedding. Louis was thirty-three and Mary, at twenty-seven, a rather mature bride for her generation. The profession of each of their fathers is entered on their marriage certificate simply as 'Gentleman'.

For the socially ambitious, as Mary was, the main route to the high tables of the great families of Philadelphia and on to the East Coast was to discard the Quaker mantle and become Episcopalian, the American branch of the Anglican church. In his book *Philadelphia Gentlemen*, a study of the social history of Philadelphia, Digby Baltzell writes that such a conversion was typical of those hoping to move into the indigenous aristocratic elite of the city at the end of the nineteenth century. These leading families, known as 'Proper Philadelphians', were almost exclusively Anglican or Episcopalian, 'the congregation of wealth, fashion and position', although their own origins may well have been Quaker. The city was imbued with an 'edgy or complacent class consciousness, depending on where your family stood in the social structure of the town'. Mary felt her rightful place was among the Proper Philadelphians, but the Starr family were uneasy about her aspirations, foresaw problems and were later to accuse her of being their cause.

Three children were born to the Starrs: Louis junior; Dillwyn (after his Parrish uncle) and the youngest, Elisabeth. The family home was

in Rittenhouse Square, the most fashionable residential section of the city and the home of Philadelphia's 'Victorian aristocracy'. From the very first, Mary, kittenish, rather superficial and with a touch of eccentricity that would deepen as she grew older, concentrated her love and ambitions on her two sons. Her letters show she seemed to have had little interest in her only daughter and to have singled her out for indifference. It would be a long time before Elisabeth's quiet charm and dark beauty would attract admiration and love. But not, it seems, from her mother. There is a photograph of Elisabeth as a teenager, perhaps fifteen years old. She is attractive, and wears a soft hat at a rather rakish angle, perched on dark curls held back by a Gibson Girl bow. She stares straight into the camera, arms folded across her chest, perhaps to hide her hands which, like her feet, were very long. Her look is determined rather than defiant. She seems to be a girl who knows her own mind.

While the children were growing up, Louis Starr continued to establish his reputation as a medical academic and successful doctor. He needed to do so, for Mary had determined that her two sons should follow in the footsteps of other sons of Proper Philadelphians and go to the best East Coast schools and colleges. Her choice was Groton School, founded by the illustrious Endicott Peabody, loosely related to the family on Mary's side, and then Harvard. Thus a way of life was established for the couple that would carry with it the anxiety of constant money worries. Unfortunately the scholastic achievements of the Starr boys did not live up to Mary's expectations. By 1902 it was clear that neither was academic and she was forced to admit 'certainly our boys do not shine in the field of learning'. But she refused to be deflected from the course she had mapped out for them, and declared: 'Harvard must be tried for at any price.' By dint of intense private tutoring for the entrance exam, first Louis and then Dillwyn were squeezed into that most elite of colleges.

Elisabeth visited her brothers at Harvard. And there, at nineteen, petite, with upswept hair and her compelling dark eyes, she met Stewart Robinson, nephew of the President of the United States.

Chapter 2
STEWART

Stewart Robinson's mother was President Theodore Roosevelt's youngest sister, Corinne. She was as bright, energetic and intelligent as her brother. A poet, in later life she became an acclaimed public speaker and political campaigner. Not beautiful, her face nevertheless had an expression of compassion and great sweetness, borne out in her nature.

Due to the assassination of his predecessor, President William McKinley in September 1901, Theodore Roosevelt had become, at forty-three, the twenty-sixth and youngest ever President of the United States. In her book *My Philadelphia Father*, Cordelia Biddle, a Proper Philadelphian, described both her own father and Theodore as 'Products of a rough age. Surging enthusiasms, headlong championship of causes and mania for the physical. Military amateurs of the furious type, they did everything with the throttle pulled far out, they were almost belligerently Christian and American and they both began as puny little boys suffering from asthma.' This was the uncle Stewart Robinson knew and on whose country estate he spent many happy hours with his siblings.

In 1882 (the year of Louis Starr and Mary Parrish's wedding), Corinne Roosevelt married Douglas Robinson, a property developer and banker with a rather dour, reserved personality. Six years older than Corinne and successful in business, Douglas was so frequently away from home that it was she who was chiefly responsible for bringing up the family and running the houses in Orange, New Jersey; Manhattan and Herkimer in New York State. They were an amicable but not devoted couple. Four children were born: Theodore (after his uncle), Corinne (known as Corinney to distinguish her from her mother), Monroe and, in 1889, the same year as Elisabeth's birth, Corinne's precious Stewart – her 'Beloved'.

Stewart was an enchanting child, 'tow-headed, thatched-roofed

and sturdy' with an extrovert charm. The children were allowed much freedom and Stewart concocted, as his personal mode of transport, a little two-wheeled cart pulled by a Shetland pony. In this he took to the roads, roaming far and wide, escorted by his four wildly excited dogs while the son of the coachman, a boy like himself, acted as groom.

His brother Monroe had entered Harvard in 1905 and Stewart, rather young at just over seventeen but insistent on going to college as well, followed him in 1906. He overlapped Elisabeth's brother Dillwyn by two years and academically their college careers followed the same path. Dillwyn was by now a famous college football player and his social life revolved around his friends, clubs and, above all, his sporting activities. For his part Stewart, now tall and well built, threw himself whole-heartedly into hedonistic pursuits and 'was having a very good time' throughout his three years at college. He seemed quite unable to apply himself to his studies of history and economics, or to attend lectures and tutorials on anything like a regular basis. Like Dillwyn and Louis Starr Jr (who had dropped out of college after one year to go into business) he was totally un-academic, demonstrating that the tradition of shoehorning young men from good families into the top universities of the country regardless of their capabilities, caused everyone concerned – students, parents and tutors alike – anxiety and frustration. And, as with Dillwyn, admonishments for bad attendance, warnings over low marks and threats of probation followed Stewart throughout his college life. But apart from one or two low moments, he always appeared good-humoured and charming. To his sister Corinney he was tremendously lovable and the 'most delicious companion'.

It is not known exactly when Elisabeth and Stewart Robinson became engaged – certainly during his college years. Between Elisabeth and Stewart's mother, Corinne, there quickly developed a strong mother-daughter relationship. The older woman gave her the unconditional love the young girl had not received from her own mother and, always referring to herself as Elisabeth's 'Heart Mother', she became a loving substitute. There are no family records of Elisabeth's engagement to Stewart (none of her letters and few papers relating to her were kept and her photographs in the family albums are not labelled). Neither is there any remaining trace of the Starrs having met either Stewart or his parents. It seems extraordinary that Louis, and especially Mary, were not overjoyed by the engagement. This should have been the fulfilment

of Mary's social dreams, opening doors to presidential family gatherings, glittering receptions and visits to Sagamore Hill – the Roosevelt home at Oyster Bay, Long Island. Perhaps the Starrs felt Stewart was immature and 'loafing' rather than working, and generally showing a lack of responsibility. Although it seems he rarely drank to excess, they may have feared he would begin to follow in the footsteps of his brother Monroe who, although clever enough eventually to graduate from Harvard, was by now drinking enough to be cautioned by the authorities. Corinne's brother Elliott Roosevelt, Stewart's uncle and the father of Eleanor Roosevelt, was known to be an alcoholic whose behaviour caused great distress to his wife and family. But there may have been other, unexplained, reasons as to why Elisabeth was embraced so whole-heartedly by Corinne while a relationship with Elisabeth's parents seems to have been non-existent. It is also strange that the Robinsons agreed to their son's engagement to a girl who was rapidly becoming estranged from her own parents – a socially awkward situation to say the least. But Elisabeth captivated Corinne and her children, as was borne out by later events – but whether Douglas Robinson was similarly smitten is unknown.

Although he became a first-class hockey player, Stewart continued to miss lectures and his marks were consistently low. Tutors were hired, summer camps attended and simple and appealing little notes promising to do better were sent to those trying to keep him on the academic straight and narrow. During February of 1908 he was withdrawn from college for low marks – later being reinstated with cautions and conditions.

In July, in a round childlike hand, he wrote to his mother from a tutorial summer camp:

> Dearest Mother,
> You must have thought me dead or the most undutiful of sons, but this time it has really not been my fault. [He goes on to explain that they have been cut off telegraphically for two weeks and the store had run out of envelopes] ... The last two weeks have been a constant drive of work from seven in the morning until ten at night, when we go to bed feeling as if we'd been wrung through a clothes wringer. I feel rather discouraged, for in some of the tests I have not done well. This is an absolutely useless letter and

does none of the things you ask, but I am dead tired and much discouraged and not altogether happy to-night. Tomorrow night I promise to write all the things you asked about my bills etc. Goodnight, dearest Mother, there is no cause for worry.
Most affectionately,
Stewart

But there was cause for worry, for although Stewart did make an effort to improve his work, conviviality won out over study. It was now clear it had been a mistake to send him to university at such a young age when he had little interest in studying. He could have been sent to the Roosevelt ranch in Dakota, as his Uncle Theodore had been in his youth. In such an environment he might well have matured in his own time and been content and at ease, working with animals and waking each morning to an open-air country life, far from tutorials and the pressure of academia. As his brother Monroe would later write in an account of their childhood: 'When the bleak Mohawk hills were buried deep in snow, the maple-syrup tapping, the cider-drinking country parties, the dashing sleigh rides over field and furrow ... were to Freddy [Stewart] an experience of delirious joy.' But he was not, after all, the only student who was finding the discipline of college life irksome. Many men from elite families reacted in the same way, their college days proving to be by no means the most successful period of their lives.

In October Corinne, with a mixture of hope and anxiety, replied to one of Stewart's letters: 'Your little note to father was a comfort to me for it sounded manly and determined and that is what I want you to be so much. There shall not be failures this time, shall there? I feel as if I would not stand another disappointment.' He had been home for a brief visit and Corinne goes on to say how much she loves and needs him when he is not with them, for then 'I always feel as if a big piece of the sunshine of home was lacking.' His father was unwell and Corinne was worried that her husband was overworking and on the edge of a nervous breakdown: 'I want you and Monroe both to help him by not giving him anxiety of any kind.'

The events of 21 February 1909 will always remain a mystery. According to reports at the time, after attending a Saturday night party and at about 4 o'clock in the morning, Stewart toppled through

the open window of a Harvard bedroom and dropped six floors to the ground. An hour later a patrolling policeman found his young body sprawled on the pavement below. It seemed that death had been instantaneous. When Monroe identified the body it was so badly damaged it was decided his mother should not be allowed to see it. Stewart would shortly have celebrated his twentieth birthday.

The accepted reasoning, put forward by his father at the time, was that Stewart had spent the evening with friends at the A.D. (Alpha Delta) Club in Harvard Square. At the end of the evening he had crossed the street to Hampden Hall, one of the dormitory blocks, and gone to his brother's room on the sixth floor to say goodnight. It was 11.00 p.m. and, even at that late hour, Monroe was about to leave for New York. Stewart then went to bed in a room on the same floor. Friends in adjoining rooms said they 'left him sleeping soundly'. His father surmised that in the early morning Stewart, being a fiend for fresh air, had pushed a table to the window, which was 'five feet from the floor', climbed up to open it, and fell out while half-asleep.

But there was much speculation as to the cause of death of the President's nephew. Later the family put forward contrary reasons for the fall. In an interview, his sister Corinney said that Stewart had hit his head at a party earlier in the evening and been taken to his bedroom by friends:

> The window when he opened it was very low. It was one of those low windows. His friends thought that Stewart, who used to crawl from one window to another on the outside ledge and frighten the boy in the room next to his – had either done it again and lost his balance, or else he had just gotten dizzy opening the window and fallen out ... There had been no problem, no difficulties, no anything except he was very much in love with Elizabeth Starr – but that was all right, they were engaged.

In the 1980s, Stewart's nephew, the journalist Joe Alsop, would write in his memoir *I've Seen the Best of It* that Stewart was playing a game with fellow students that involved drinking while sitting on the edge of a high window-sill. Such a scene is described by Leo Tolstoy in his account of drunken dares taken during a gathering of young aristocrats in *War and Peace*.

Stewart had been under constant pressure to improve his performance since his first term and had become the subject of his father's lively exasperation, but his temperament was naturally sunny and he was loved by many. The Roosevelt and Robinson families never countenanced the possibility of suicide. The Dean of the College wrote to his parents on 1 March 1909: 'Stewart made good in his work. Exams satisfactory.' It was too late.

To Elisabeth, the prospect of never being able to discover exactly how and why Stewart fell from that window must have been agonising. According to a letter, written many years later by a distant cousin, in her distress she blamed her parents for his death. But, if this were the case, exactly why she would do so is a mystery. Maybe it was an excuse to leave a home where she was unhappy. Whatever the reason, she left almost immediately and eventually bid farewell to America to which, except for one brief visit, she would never return.

Louis Starr's role in all this is puzzling. He was described by one of his family as someone 'whom everybody loved'. But he seemed to show no love and support to Elisabeth, even during the difficult period after Stewart's death. Was he worn down by the tension between his wife and daughter? Did he feel there would be no point in taking the side of an unresponsive young girl? He may have tried and been rebuffed. As a brilliant paediatrician, one of the first in his field with an interest in child psychology, he would surely have worked hard to resolve his own domestic problems. But just as 'the shoemaker's children never have shoes' perhaps Louis, as other fathers sometimes do in such situations, simply stopped trying to mediate, gave up and accepted the situation, unhappy as it was.

Corinne was aware of the family problems, as is borne out in some lines from a poem she wrote to Elisabeth entitled 'Impotence – To Her'. (Of the four poems Corinne wrote for her, three are entitled To Her).

> Love is so strong and yet so sadly weak!
> When I behold the glory of your eyes
> Sad with the sorrow which they may not speak –
> Dim with the forfeit of their glad sunrise,
> I long to hold and fashion all the years
> Back to your birthright and away from tears

In 1915, when Elisabeth was twenty-six and had been gone for over five years, her father published a book on adolescence. Extremely frank for its time, it was written from both a practical and psychological perspective and entitled *The Adolescent Period, Its Features and Management*. In a section on 'Suicide' he begins by describing the poverty, the unhealthy and cheerless surroundings that are contributing factors to depression in the poor. As for the upper classes,

> The foolish rich have too great ease and luxury, and too much indulgence in exciting pastimes which overshadow and destroy pleasure in simple things and produce selfishness and premature weariness of living ... School life with its intellectual forcing, monotony, fear and uncertainty as to the results of examinations and of punishment in case of failure may sometimes be predisposing conditions.

It seems Louis may have made up his own mind on the reason for Stewart's death.

And as for Elisabeth – in a chapter headed 'Disturbed Mentality' from the *Adolescent Period* Louis writes, as if from personal experience:

> Another, very contented and loving as a child, experiences a complete reversal of disposition during adolescence, turning against her parents and devotedly attaching herself to some one else; becomes very unhappy and is possessed with the idea that she is being watched and persecuted and finally throws off all family ties and duties to be independent and support herself. These are suppressions of natural affection with a craving for some unrelated, or even imaginary, older person of the same sex on whom to lavish affection, and a desire to lead what is called 'one's own life', duty to family or to society having no place in certain schools of modern thought.

These are heartfelt statements, full of frustration and hurt and obviously about his daughter.

Corinne, naturally enough, never recovered from the loss of her son, in years to come dissolving into tears whenever she saw anyone who reminded her of him. Always a poet but without a great deal of

success, the tragedy prompted an outpouring of work that would be much admired – particularly by women. Distraught, she wrote several heart-wrenching poems about her grief. One of these, 'February 21st 1909', was dedicated to Stewart, recalling the day of his death:

> This was the day I died, when all Life's sun
> Was blotted out in dark and dreadful night.
> And I, who lived and laughed and loved the light,
> In one brief moment knew my race was run;
> Knew that the glory of my days was done.

And in another poem to Elisabeth, also entitled 'To Her', she wrote:

> My child in love, the beauty of your eyes
> Holds in their ardent depths a poignant pain,
> How many sad and sacramental sighs
> Breathe through their glance and wring my heart again
> What would I give could I your burden bear
> Mingled with mine; I would not sink below
> All of your grief and all of your despair
> Could I but once again transform your woe
> Into the joy whose promise fair you knew ...

Monroe, who had always considered himself the less favoured child, now had to deal with his mother's overwhelming grief for her favourite son. In a rather sad little book, dedicated to his mother and entitled *A Little Boy's Friends*, the 'Little Boy' being himself, he describes the fat little author living in the shadow of his cavalier younger brother Freddy (Stewart). He watches admiringly as the latter rides and tumbles through his childhood to the adoration of servants and family and the indulgence of his mother. When the book was published in 1926 Monroe sent a copy to Elisabeth, at her home in France, with a written dedication: 'To Dearest Elisabeth, whose care, friendship and inspiration made this little book possible. From her devoted friend. Monroe Douglas Robinson.'

In 1911, two years after Stewart's death, Louis Starr began to suffer from an acute dilatation of the heart due to overwork – 'I am never too tired to see a sick child'. He retired from his practice and related

positions in the medical world of Philadelphia, bowing out with many gestures of recognition and admiration for his 'sterling honesty of thought and speech and his loyal devotion to his friends'. In commemoration the artist Joseph DeCamp painted his portrait and the sculptor Charles Grafly created a bronze bust, both displayed in the University of Pennsylvania. His professional life had been entirely satisfactory. Although the Starrs kept the Rittenhouse Square house until at least 1917 (probably renting it out), about this time Louis and Mary began a life based in Europe. Here it was cheaper to live well than it was in America and Louis was free to indulge his hobby of painting and etching landscapes. Elisabeth inherited her father's talent, but they would never discuss or admire each other's work.

Whether the shock and abandonment of Stewart's death had made Elisabeth feel she could never completely love another man again or whether she would have become attracted to other women anyway, apart from toying with another handsome and rather wild young American male who was to cross her path, for the rest of her life her deeper emotional feelings would be directed towards her own sex.

Chapter 3
Dillwyn

By spring of 1910, Elisabeth, having left her home, was already settled with a family called Upton in Halifax, Massachusetts. Along with two Upton sisters – another Elizabeth and Lucy – she began breeding dogs. The sisters were the daughters of Edgar and Bessie Upton and it was Lucy who would become an important part of Elisabeth's life. In 1911, when she was twenty-two, Elisabeth, with Lucy, bought a house plus 8 hectares (twenty acres) at Elm Street in nearby Plympton, situated in pretty, rural countryside about 55 kilometres south of Boston. The area around the small town was true farming country in the early years of the twentieth century and it still keeps its rural traditions today, its bogginess making it ideal for the cultivation of cranberries. Here the two women founded the Plympton Green Kennels and for the next six years ran a small business breeding poultry and West Ayrshire Highland Terriers. Rearing dogs and poultry was a far cry from the social ambitions of Elisabeth's mother, but by then the influence of Mary Starr had faded well into the background. Elisabeth loved animals, so it was not such a strange occupation for her to follow – and the poultry-keeping experience would eventually be more than useful. Like her father she painted, taking up sculpture later, and perhaps took lessons here, as she would wherever the opportunity arose.

The arrangement with Lucy was not one that would have been remarked upon. At that time the concept of women living together for financial or social reasons was accepted without comment by society. Even setting up house *en amitié amoureuse*, a loving friendship, was far from being regarded as more than an arrangement of convenience. It was seen to be logical that vulnerable women, with few rights, should live in such a fashion.

Elisabeth's finances are not crystal clear. Although she was breeding and selling animals, this would not have been sufficient to support her. She would be able to buy more property, keep servants, pursue her

charitable work and exist without paid employment. She lived frugally, as was her nature, but did not go without. Did her hard-pressed father, at least initially, settle money on her? It seems such an amount as he could have afforded would scarcely have been sufficient to provide for the lifestyle she would keep until almost the end of her days. There may possibly have been other family money. But the answer almost certainly lies with Corinne Robinson. There is evidence that Corinne helped her financially with the mortgage for the Plympton property and that she made transfers to Elisabeth's bank, so one can assume she ensured the fiancée of her lost son would never be in want, and would be able to live in a fashion befitting her class. Corinne's constant devotion and support was of great, probably indispensable, value. And perhaps this involvement with the young woman who had been close to Stewart helped Corinne keep his memory alive.

During the Plympton years Elisabeth also met the self-possessed Dorothea Mauran Watts from Rhode Island. Known always to her friends of that time as Dolly, she was one of those cultivated Americans who felt as much at home on the boulevards of Paris as she did in Newport. Born in France, she was cosmopolitan, while remaining unmistakably American, for she never lost her 'Yankee personality'. Practical and outgoing, she would soon become another important person in Elisabeth's life.

Now with new friends, settled with Lucy in the countryside and admired and supported by Corinne and her family, these were surely contented years during which Elisabeth could relax and plan the future. But across the Atlantic, the countries of Europe were flexing their muscles, and in 1914 her brother Dillwyn went to war.

By October of that year Germany, Austro-Hungary and Turkey were at war with Britain, France and Russia. Italy, supposedly a signatory to a pact with the Central European powers, nevertheless in 1915 signed a secret treaty with the Allies. In Britain during the summer of 1914 thousands of young men hastened to join the volunteer army. In London, Harrods Department Store offered 'Acceptable Gifts for the Man on Service'. Wives and mothers would soon be able to choose from a 'Box of Good Cheer', 'Our Soldiers' Box' and, at twelve shillings, 'For the Dardanelles'.

The Democrat President Woodrow Wilson had instructed the American people to 'think neutral'. America was not to become

involved in the 'European War'. For an American to join up with a European army and swear allegiance to another flag meant the loss of American citizenship. The only exception to this was joining the Foreign Legion, which was regarded as neutral. This rule assuaged the German-American element, which was becoming energetically vocal.

By August 1914 Louis Starr Jr was a father of three children and struggling with a career in the cotton brokerage business in New York. Elisabeth was long gone, busy with her dogs and chickens in Massachusetts. The next few years would change all that. Lying on the sand at Long Beach near New York while reading the latest war reports, Dillwyn suddenly announced to his friends his intention of going to France. Charming, popular and held in great affection by everyone who knew him, Dillwyn was nevertheless unemployed. Now thirty and brought up as a 'gentleman', he did not seem to be able to settle on an appropriate career and there is no evidence that he ever seriously attempted to earn his living. He dabbled in apple farming in the west and later with a finance company on Wall Street but, indulged by his parents and accompanying them on their increasingly frequent visits to England and Northern France, he seemed to be drifting pleasantly through life, enjoying his sports and friendships without any particular achievement. Of a romantic attachment there was no trace.

Poor Dr Starr – with a heart condition, a failed relationship with his daughter, a struggling elder son and a second son who seemed to avoid permanent employment, he must have been prey to a fair number of anxieties. So it was perhaps with concern but also a sense of pride that Louis and Mary received Dillwyn's announcement during a Labor Day holiday at the end of August. Abandoning the pacific precepts of his Quaker antecedents, he determined to go to Europe and 'see the war'. As a first step he set sail from New York on the SS *Hamburg* – now bearing a large red cross on her side and carrying medical aid to France. Once in London he joined up with the American Volunteer Motor Ambulance Corps, founded by the archeologist Richard Norton. Posted to Boulogne, he immediately became aware of the wages of war, as he ferried the wounded, arriving by train and horse-van from the battlefields of Arras, to the nearby military hospitals.

The war brought Dillwyn's life into focus. From entries in his diaries and the accounts of friends and colleagues, it is evident he had at last found a role in life that suited him. He recounts even horrific

events in a controlled, almost matter-of-fact manner and is invariably uncomplaining, sometimes humorous, in the face of danger. The fact that so many were dying during that summer and autumn of 1914 did not seem to disturb the balanced tone of his letters, nor deter him from his ambition of getting into a proper military uniform. The repetitious ambulance work combined with periods of idleness prompted him to move on as rapidly as possible. As his father wrote in his tribute to his son, *The War Story of Dillwyn Parrish Starr,* 'He disliked the idea of being protected by a red cross on his sleeve, while so many about him were enlisted to do soldiers' work.' His two months' experience with the wounded convinced him that the German methods of making war were brutal and he came to long 'to get at them with cold steel'. Here at last was something he, sportsman-fit and used to being a team leader, could do.

The opportunity to enlist came through a friend and by early December of 1914 Dillwyn found himself back in London at Wormwood Scrubs barracks. After training he was detailed, with the rank of Petty Officer, to a 9-tonne armoured truck that carried a 3-pound gun and six men. In March of 1915, with Squadron No. 2 of the Armoured Car Division commanded by the Duke of Westminster, he left London for the front. Although Dillwyn risked losing his American citizenship, he got round the problem quite simply. In his service records, beside the line marked 'Whether of pure European descent', is written 'Canadian' followed by 'Born in Canada' (he was, of course, born in Philadelphia). As for a birth certificate, the entry reads 'Certificate not forthcoming'. This seems to have suited everyone. In his book on his son, Louis is vehemently critical of President Wilson's attitude towards the 'European War' and writes of the withholding of sympathy for the ideals of the Allies – 'a sympathy which they are very eager for here [in England] and have been justly disappointed in not receiving officially. This withholding will always be our shame. It was so little to expect, but meant so much to those who are fighting and was all they wanted from us.' Now, from their rented apartment in London, Louis began to do relief work among wounded soldiers, especially those Americans, such as Dillwyn, who had enlisted in the British Army before their own country entered the war.

Squadron No. 2 went straight into the battle of Neuve Chapelle in the middle of March. The object was to straighten out the Allied

line between Armentières and La Bassée and attempts to achieve this had already cost the lives of 8,000 men on a front of ten kilometres. Dillwyn became fascinated by the idea of trench warfare and spent his spare time walking through the dugouts as close to the firing line as possible. This is where he now longed to be.

After a short leave with his parents in London in May, he was sent with his squadron to Gallipoli. Here the Allies found themselves under siege by the Turks – a formidable enemy. Through all this there seemed to be little doubt in his mind that the virtue of the Allied cause merited the high risk of death or wounding. But he missed 'American friends' and bore the brunt of America's neutrality and its policy of not coming to the aid of the Allies: 'I am constantly in hot-water about home, as all here know I am an American. Although my commander is friendly, I sometimes get furious.'

During the following couple of months he swam every day, slept under trees in the open at night and explored the country towards the firing line on foot or on horseback. He was pragmatic about the daily realities of the stench of unburied bodies, lack of drinking water and a diet of bully beef and bacon – and always the threat from snipers and flying shrapnel. The prevailing atmosphere being now only of defeat, despair and disillusion on the part of the Allies, he was relieved when the news came that the Armoured Car Division was to be disbanded.

Louis and Mary were now almost permanently in England, staying in London hotels or with Mary's brother Alfred Parrish at Amberley in West Sussex. Meeting Dillwyn at Paddington Station as he returned on leave, Mary and Louis noticed very quickly that their son was a different man to the one they had waved off at Dover. Sunburnt and fitter than ever, he spoke little of his experiences but made no secret of his ambition to get as quickly as possible into the trenches on the Western Front. His parents made no attempt to dissuade him. With a friend, he spent a month's leave shooting and fishing on Waldorf Astor's estate in Scotland. He had made up his mind that from now on he would associate himself only with fully trained soldiers and, having made the necessary contacts, accepted a much desired commission as a 2nd Lieutenant in the Special Reserve of the Coldstream Guards.

January 1916 found Dillwyn at Victoria Barracks, Windsor. In joining the Guards he had scarcely expected the rigorous attention to minutiae in dress and carriage, drill and technical detail that ensured

the perfect discipline of a Guards officer. But, once in the embrace of the system, he took to it with enthusiasm, and a photograph taken at the end of his training shows just how effective it was. From an ordinary young soldier he had turned into a confident, moustached and burnished Guards Officer. Living, working and playing sport with men of a similar background to his own, he was completely happy. Here, being an American did not give rise to insults or argument, for his fellow officers considered him honourable to have joined the Allies on his own initiative.

He saw his parents frequently, for Louis and Mary took houses at Sunningdale in Berkshire and then in Windsor itself in order to be near him. Here they entertained his friends, but there was still no sign of any romantic episode in Dillwyn's life. He seems to have been a confirmed bachelor, valuing his social life, his extended family and remaining close to his parents. In July 1916 he set off again to war, this time from Waterloo Station in a reserved compartment, 'with a lunch table daintily set'. He had achieved his ambition – he was going to the front line.

By July 1916 the first wave of battles of the Marne, the Aisne and Ypres had come and gone, resulting in stalemate. The British professional army, all but destroyed in the first two years of the war, had been virtually replaced by volunteers. Strategy along the Western Front dictated that it would be mainly the British Army that would launch the offensive of the Battle of the Somme. It was eventually decided that 1 July 1916 should be the date that the British, with support from the over-stretched French Army, would begin the attack that was intended to reclaim captured ground and push back the German line. It was into this theatre of war that Dillwyn arrived in northern France on 14 July.

He was sent to a town called Bray, where he met some of his military friends, who gave him a warm reception, and he wrote home: 'I am sure that I am going to enjoy myself!' He sent many letters to his mother. In one, he is still having 'a very interesting time', as his part of the line is very active and 'there is a tremendous roar of guns all around us'. They are told to prepare for a counter- attack and are aware the Germans have had weeks to prepare for this, bringing up more men and guns. Ever cheerful Dillwyn asks for 'a small silver star for a field cap which you can get at Smiths in Ebury Street [London] like the one in my dress cap, only smaller'.

By 9 August he is playing 'socker' [sic] against the Grenadier Guards – 'and I don't know the first thing about it' – but manages to score the equalising goal. He asks his parents to send cigarettes: 'Woodbine and Goldflake are the best. The soldiers get paid very seldom and can't buy them. I have fifty men. Don't worry about me. At least I hope you will not because I shall be all right.'

For the rest of the month his battalion marched from point to point in the Albert region engaged in constant action and by late August, for the first time, he allows a note of trepidation to creep into his letter home:

> Have just been relieved from the front line and moved to the reserve trenches and only wish that I may never get it any worse than I have this time. There was one casualty this morning when a Sergeant got hit in the leg by shrapnel. It is the kind of wound that I am looking for. The reserve trenches where I am now are pretty rotten having been blown in some time ago. This makes things interesting.

Encountering French soldiers at close quarters he admires them as strong, fine-looking men and praises the 'great things' they are doing, and is glad he has French blood in his veins through his paternal grandmother.

In early September the order came to go to Ginchy near Lesboeufs. The battalion was detailed, along with two others, to attack and drive back the Germans at this point to straighten out the line of defence. Dillwyn was about to achieve his ambition to lead his men in a charge, for he was selected as platoon commander as 'his men would follow him anywhere'. He was poised and undaunted in the face of the task ahead and his soldiers admired and trusted him. The proposed attack, on Friday 15 September, was to go down in history for two reasons: It was to be the first time in Coldstream history that the three battalions would go into battle together and the first time tanks would be used on a battlefield. Created to counter the machine gun and barbed wire, in 1916 tanks were unstable and 'mechanically immature'. However, they were scheduled to be part of the Ginchy offensive.

The trenches to be taken stretched for several hundred metres parallel to those occupied by the Guards, and between the lines was a typically desolate scene of a shattered orchard, once full of autumn fruit

and now of blackened tree stumps. To the left was a sunken road full of German machine guns, and it was along this road that a squadron of tanks was to advance, to silence these guns and cover the Allied attack. Carrying, as always, his silver-topped cane, Dillwyn spent the moonlit night of 14 September talking quietly and cheerfully to his men and trying to catch a few moments of standing sleep, for they were packed tightly and there was no room to lie down. The orders were, once in no-man's land, to advance steadily in straight-line formation towards the enemy and to take the trenches one by one.

At dawn the battalion was taut and ready, waiting only for the tanks to come up the sunken road in a surprise manoeuvre and destroy the German machine gun emplacements there. At 6.20 the Guards were to go over the top. On the dot at 5.40 the tanks were heard to start up and advance. They rolled forward a short distance and, under heavy machine-gun fire, came to a complete stop. The soldiers, in their trench and poised for attack, realised immediately their left flank would be unprotected. Asked by his sergeant what they should do now, Dillwyn replied 'We will go on without them'. When the designated time of 6.20 arrived, crying 'Come on, 12 Platoon, come on!', he put one foot in a niche and, with his silver-topped cane in one hand and his revolver in the other, jumped over the edge into a hail of machine-gun and rifle fire from the trenches in front and the unprotected road on the left. Moving always ahead of his platoon, his men falling left and right behind him, he reached the first enemy trench, leapt on to the parapet and was spun into everlasting glory.

The news of Dillwyn's death came to Louis and Mary at Almond's Hotel in London, where they had taken rooms. Mary's sister-in-law, Kate Parrish of Amberley, recorded in her diary that 'Mary was pathetic in her grief and poor Louis like a statue, so wonderfully calm and self-contained.' Stricken as they were, there was much to do in Dillwyn's memory. There were many tributes in his honour. Letters of genuine sadness and compliment poured in from fellow officers and the men who had served with him in his various units from the time he joined up with the Allies in 1914. The Porcellian Club of Harvard sent an ambulance to France in his name; a bed at the American Military Hospital in Paris was funded in his memory; a stone bench was dedicated to him at Groton School and a plaque placed on the wall of Harvard College Library. A memorial service was held at the Holy

Trinity Church in Sloane Street, London, for the twenty-five officers of the Guards who fell in September on the Somme. But the greatest tribute of all was the memorial service for Dillwyn alone at Trinity Church, Lower Manhattan, in October. Britain was represented by the Consul-General and 'The church was packed with many hundred friends and relatives.' The accolades Dillwyn had not received in life were eagerly presented to him in death.

There is a row of memorial headstones to Dillwyn and his fellow soldiers in the beautiful Guards' cemetery at Ginchy in Northern France. In this great field each soldier has his own perfect bed of spring and summer flowers. For miles around, the rolling, silent countryside is enveloped in a peace that, sadly, passes all understanding.

Chapter 4
WOMEN IN UNIFORM

By 1916 Elisabeth had not had contact with her parents for seven years. Past grievances and the independent lifestyle she had chosen meant that reconciliation had now become impossible. But perhaps it had been Dillwyn's decision to go to France that spurred her, along with Lucy Upton and their friend Dolly Watts, to join the many American women heading for Europe as nurses and ambulance drivers, although it seems they did not leave until early 1916.

Back in 1902, when Elisabeth was thirteen, a family friend and neighbour at Rittenhouse Square, Dr J. William White, had removed her appendix and written a delightful verse about the event, 'In Memoriam Appendices':

> It has gone, it has fled, its brief life is sped
> It's defunct – which is better by far
> Than to twist and to turn, and to wriggle and squirm
> Inside of Elizabeth Starr.
> It has curled up and died, and lies on its side
> On a shelf, in a little glass jar;
> And I really must say I prefer it that way
> And so does Elizabeth Starr.

Now this same surgeon was instrumental in raising money for the Philadelphia Ward at the American 'Ambulance' at Neuilly in Paris. Virulently anti-neutral and making no secret of his scorn and anger at President Wilson's policy of appeasement of German-Americans, he wrote a *Primer of the War for Americans* that expounded his theory of necessary intervention and aid to the Allies. Agnes Repplier, in her biography *J. William White MD*, quotes a letter from White's friend, the American author Henry James, now living in Rye in the south-east of England:

> With passion I desire that those who surround you should range themselves intelligently on the side of civilization and humanity against the most monstrous menace that has ever, since the birth of time, gathered strength for an assault upon the liberties, the decencies, the pieties and fidelities, the whole liberal, genial, many-sided energy of our race.

It was in the American hospital, with which White had been so much involved, that Elisabeth, Lucy and Dolly began their work in France, donning their hospital uniform 'of snow-white, with red crosses on their breasts and a little coif on their heads, mediaeval in its effect'. The funding of the hospital ensured that its capabilities, plus scrupulous cleanliness, earned it a reputation that caused some soldiers to place a note in their pocketbooks requesting they be taken to Neuilly if they were wounded.

In the last years of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, Paris was the chosen European city for the sophisticated and well-heeled of the New World. American students at the Ecole des Beaux Arts, for example, greatly outnumbered the few Englishmen there in the early 1900s. Rome, Florence and Berlin each had its own particular culture, beauty and way of life, but France had firm historical links with the United States, was a highly civilised society and welcomed *marginales*. Prince Jean-Louis de Faucigny-Lucinge, in his autobiography *Un Gentilhomme Cosmopolite* observed '*Une certaine liberté de ton et de pensée régnait en France, comme nulle part en Europe*'. (A certain liberty of mood and thought existed in France, as in no other part of Europe).

In a more Europhile era, the American elite felt it natural to speak at least two languages, own a home on the Continent and spend part of the year across the Atlantic enjoying the culture of the Old World. And it was not irrelevant that the dollar bought an appreciable amount of francs, ensuring a comfortable standard of living at a lower cost than in the United States. As far as the social and private lives of individuals were concerned, France was a non-judgemental society and American men and women of independent means found a haven in which they could liberate inclinations unacceptable in their own country. As the century progressed Paris, particularly, became a base for many who, although they did not usually break the ties with their own countries,

found a true home from home for their artistic and other leanings.

Aid to France by American citizens was not a new phenomenon in 1914. An American colony consisting of businessmen, merchants and bankers was already well installed in Paris by 1860. Their social world revolved around the American Church in the Rue Berri or the Church of the Holy Trinity in the Avenue de l'Alma. This community provided significant aid to its adopted country during the Prussian siege of Paris in 1870, creating the first so-called 'American Ambulance' – an efficient and well-equipped military hospital. This was the brainchild of Dr Thomas W. Evans, an American dentist from Philadelphia who became the most sought-after dental practitioner in France. Evans had bought up the surplus medical equipment remaining from the American Civil War and found use for it when setting up the 'Ambulance'. His charm, good looks and excellent surgery won the affection of the Emperor Louis-Napoleon and his wife Eugénie.

An American Hospital for civilians had also opened its doors in the Rue Chauveau at Neuilly-sur-Seine in 1910 and, as soon as war was declared in August 1914, a new American 'Ambulance' was created at the nearby Lycée Pasteur to care for the victims of battle. It was from the courtyard of the Lycée that the first young ambulance drivers of the American Field Service, with their donated and converted Fords and Panhards, set off for the front. In spite of the uneasy policy of neutrality in their country, a growing number of Americans became determined to help the Allies in as many ways as possible following the outbreak of hostilities. In a programme of aid unprecedented in history, socialites, bankers, merchants and young graduates of Ivy League universities came together, turned their thoughts towards Europe, formed committees and began to pour money, equipment and themselves into the Allied cause. In 1916 a meeting was held at the Sorbonne in Paris to thank the United States for its help in France's hour of need. A telegram signed by thirty Americans, including Theodore Roosevelt, was read out: 'To the citizens of our great and dear sister Republic. It was the breath of France that gave us life. It was the idealism of France that formed our minds.' It was felt a debt was being repaid for the military aid and moral support France had given America during her War of Independence. Corinne, in a poem written in the same year, proclaimed: