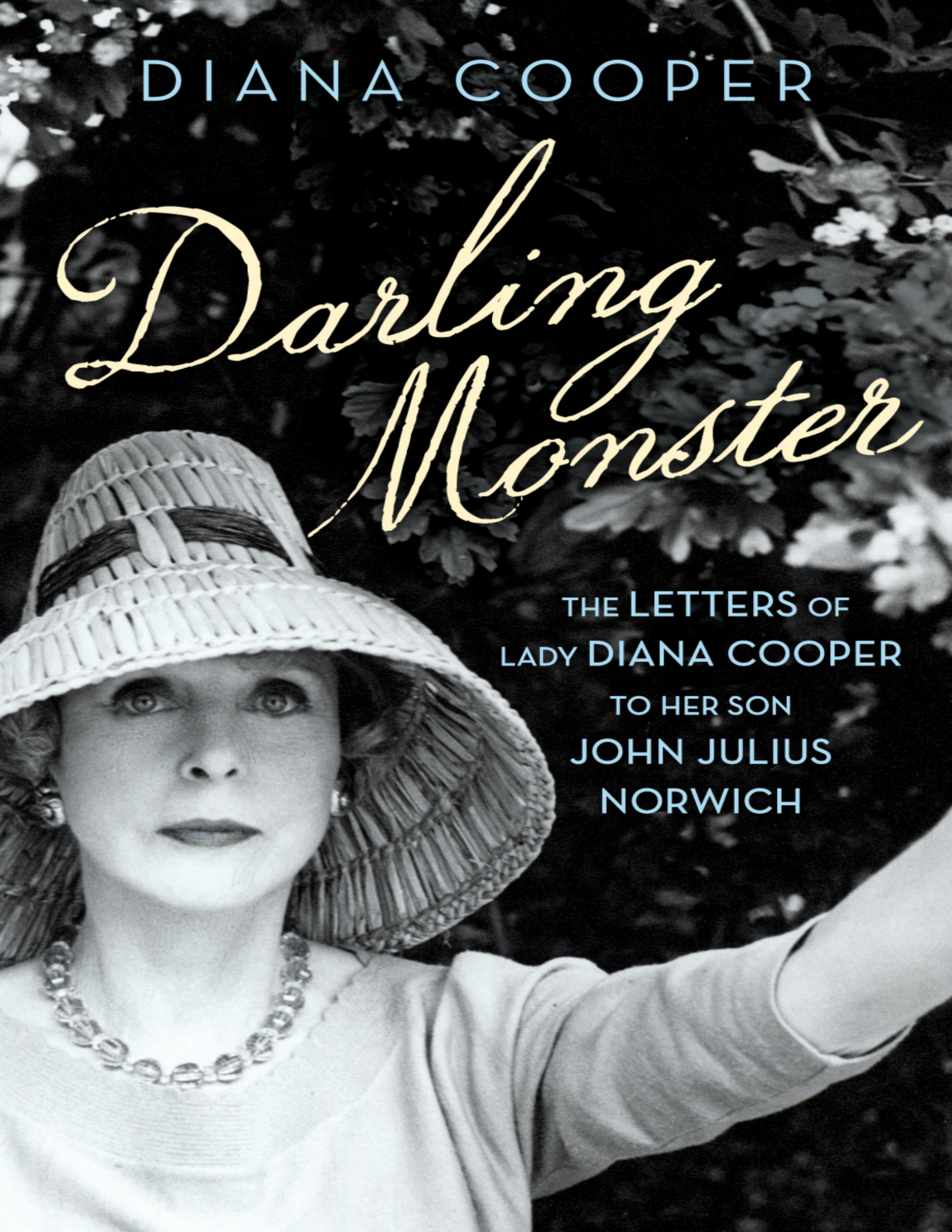
DIANA COOPER
Darling Monster
THE LETTERS OF
LADY DIANA COOPER
TO HER SON
JOHN JULIUS
NORWICH

Contents

About the Book

Lady Diana Cooper, considered the most beautiful woman of her day, was an aristocrat, a socialite, an actress of stage and early screen. She married rising political star Duff Cooper, who went on to run the controversial Ministry of Information for Churchill. This golden couple knew everyone who was anyone and sat at the very heart of British public life.

Diana's letters to her only son, John Julius Norwich, cover the period 1939 to 1952. They take us from the rumblings of war, through the Blitz, which the Coopers spent holed up in the Dorchester (because it was newer, and therefore less vulnerable, then the Ritz), to rural Sussex where we see Diana blissfully setting up a smallholding as part of the war effort. After a spell with the Free French in Algiers, Duff was appointed British Ambassador to France and the couple settled into the glorious embassy in post-Liberation Paris.

All of fashionable and powerful society is here, often in affectionate and unguarded detail, from Diana's close friends Evelyn Waugh and the Mitfords to Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh in Hollywood; from an off-duty Churchill to Roosevelt at the White House; from Edward and Wallis Simpson to the young princesses Margaret and Elizabeth.

Over and beyond all the glitz, Diana emerges in these letters as highly intelligent, funny, fiercely loyal: a woman who disliked extravagance, who was often crippingly shy, who was happiest in the countryside with her cow and goats and whose greatest love and preoccupation were her son and husband.

As a portrait of an age and some of history’s most important events, these letters are invaluable. But they also give us a vivid and touching portrait of the love between a mother and son, separated by war, oceans – and the constraints of the time they lived in.

About the Author

Lady Diana Cooper was born on August 29th, 1892, daughter ostensibly of the 8th Duke of Rutland, in fact of the Hon. Harry Cust. Defying all her mother's efforts to stop her, she became a nurse at Guy's Hospital during the First World War and married Alfred Duff Cooper, DSO, son of a surgeon from Norwich, who became one of the Second World War's key politicians. Her startling beauty resulted in her playing the lead in two silent films and then Max Reinhardt's *The Miracle*.

For the war effort, Diana converted their seaside cottage in Sussex into a small farm. In 1944, following the Liberation of Paris, the couple moved into the British Embassy, Paris. They then retired to a house at Chantilly just outside the city. After Duff's death in 1954 Diana remained there until 1960, when she moved back to London. She died in 1986.

John Julius Norwich, the only son of Diana and Duff Cooper, is the author of histories of Norman Sicily, the Republic of Venice, the Byzantine Empire, the Mediterranean and, most recently, *The Popes*. He has also written on architecture, music and the history plays of Shakespeare, and has presented some thirty historical documentaries on BBC Television.

To my grandchildren
Who would have loved their great-grandmother
As she would have loved them

Darling Monster

The Letters of Lady Diana Cooper to her son John Julius Norwich 1939–1952

Diana Cooper

Edited by
John Julius Norwich

Chatto & Windus
LONDON

Introduction

She was an inveterate letter-writer. I can see her now, sitting bolt upright in bed, cross-legged, a pad of paper balanced on her right knee, a pencil in her hand – always pencil, so as not to get ink on the sheets. Bed was the bridge, the control tower, the centre of operations. On it was the telephone, the writing paper, the addresses, the engagements. Never did I see her sitting at a desk or other table if bed was within range.

She always maintained that she could never keep a diary; it was no fun writing to herself. So she wrote to other people instead – to my father if he was away somewhere, to her old friend Conrad Russell, or to me, her son. And she told us everything that happened, writing in a style that was entirely her own – there was no way that any letter of hers could be mistaken for anyone else's. The writing was effortless; an hour would produce five or six long pages; then she would fold them rather roughly, give the envelope a quick lick, address it – still in pencil – and, as often as not, start on another.

Never did she seem remotely conscious of the fact that she was a celebrity; but a celebrity she was. First of all there was the startling beauty; second, she was a member of the high aristocracy – in those days still an advantage – born on Monday 29 August 1892 and brought up in one of England's most spectacular country houses, Belvoir Castle, as the youngest daughter of the eighth Duke of Rutland. (Her adoring public would have been horrified to learn that she was in fact the result of a long and passionate affair between the Duchess and the Hon. Harry Cust, from the

neighbouring estate at Belton.[1]) But there was more to it than that. Ever since her presentation at court in 1911, she had been the darling of the society and gossip columns; and when she married my father, Duff Cooper – a penniless commoner of whom no one had ever heard – at St Margaret's, Westminster, a body of mounted police had to be brought in to control the adoring crowds outside.

She would have married him in any event; she was to love him to distraction until the day he died. But by then marriageable young men were thin on the ground. At the outbreak of the First World War my father, as a member of the Foreign Service, had been exempt from the call-up – a fact for which I am heartily thankful, since had he not been I should almost certainly not be here today – but most of his friends had not been so lucky. So much has been written of the massacre of that war – particularly of the young officers – that it seems superfluous to add anything further; but I remember my mother telling me that by the end of 1916, with the single exception of my father, every man she had ever danced with was dead.

In December 1916 Herbert Asquith resigned as Prime Minister, to be succeeded by David Lloyd George, one of whose first actions – in view of what was becoming a serious shortage of manpower at the front – was to extend conscription to several of the 'reserved professions', including the Foreign Service. My father, who had been increasingly embarrassed by what he saw as his enforced inactivity while nearly all his contemporaries were in France, felt nothing but relief.

The training, he always maintained, was the worst part. It had been described by his friend Eddie Grant as 'being stuck in a six-foot bog, trained like an Olympian athlete and buggered about like a mulatto telegraph boy', and he hated it. He loved to tell the story of a certain evening in early July when he briefly escaped to London from his training camp at Bushey in Hertfordshire, only to discover that no one he

knew, male or female, was in town. For once, he felt genuinely depressed; there was nothing for it but to go to his club – the Junior Carlton in those days, rather than the beloved White's of his later years – and to order the best dinner he could get, washed down with a pint of champagne. From the library he took down a copy of *Through the Looking-Glass*, always one of his favourite books. 'Then,' he wrote, 'as if by enchantment my melancholy left me and I knew that I should not be unhappy again.'[2] On 27 April 1918 he left for France.

Even there, his high spirits did not desert him. 'From a comfortable dug-out' he reported to my mother that 'the horrors of war have been much exaggerated', and offered to send her a food parcel; but he soon had reason to change his mind. At 5 a.m. on 21 August he and his company went over the top in a heavy mist, and before long his platoon became separated from the rest. They reached their objective of the Arras–Albert railway line – the only platoon to do so – but immediately ran into heavy fire from a German machine-gun post. He went forward to destroy it, not knowing that all the men following him had been killed, and on his arrival – almost miraculously unscathed – shot one man and called upon the others, in what German he could still remember, to surrender. Believing themselves to be outnumbered, to his intense surprise they did; and so it happened that a callow young second lieutenant with practically no experience of battle managed to capture eighteen Germans single-handed. He was recommended for the Victoria Cross, but had to settle for the Distinguished Service Order which, particularly when awarded to a subaltern, was generally considered to be the next best thing.

Only two nights later his company attacked again. This time he described it as 'one of the most memorable moments of my life . . . a thrilling and beautiful attack, bright, bright moonlight and we guided ourselves by a star .

. . it was what the old poets said it was and the new poets say it isn't'. After one more battle 'the sun rose beautifully and the enemy fled in all directions including ours with their hands up, and one had a glorious Ironside feeling of Let God Arise and let His Enemies be Scattered. And then they came back again over the hill and one was terrified and had a ghastly feeling of God is sunk and His enemies are doing nicely.' Fortunately 'the battle rolled away'. It was his last engagement. Meanwhile my mother – much against my grandmother's wishes – the Duchess could not bear the thought of her favourite child washing the wounded and emptying bedpans – had become a nurse at Guy's Hospital. For the past year she and my father had been growing closer; only he, it seemed, could provide the strength and consolation she so desperately needed.

They were married seven months after the Armistice, on 2 June 1919. Just three years later, at the age of thirty and to the undisguised horror of her parents and their friends, she became a film star, taking the lead in two films – silent of course – for the then celebrated though now long-forgotten producer J. Stuart Blackton. In one, *The Virgin Queen*, she played Queen Elizabeth I; alas, all the prints have been lost. Of the other, a swashbuckling seventeenth-century drama called *The Glorious Adventure*, I possess a copy. It is not, I think, likely to be revived. These two films did little for my mother's reputation in London society; but they led to something far more important. They brought her to the attention of the world-famous Austrian theatre producer Max Reinhardt, who was seeking actresses for the two leading parts in his forthcoming new production of *The Miracle*. This free adaptation of a medieval miracle play had had considerable success at London's Olympia shortly before the First World War; Reinhardt now proposed to take it to New York and to give it a completely new and far more ambitious production at the Century Theater. If successful there it would tour America.

The action of *The Miracle* is set in a vast medieval abbey, which houses a convent of nuns. It also possesses a life-size statue of the Virgin and Child credited with miraculous properties. The plot, in brief, tells of a beautiful young nun who prays before the statue for her freedom – at which the Virgin slowly descends from her niche, dons the nun's habit and thenceforth takes her place, leaving the niche empty. The poor girl has gained her liberty, but her venture into the outside world proves disastrous: she is betrayed, abused, corrupted; and a year or two later she makes her way back to the abbey broken in body and spirit, a dying baby in her arms. While all the other nuns are congregated in prayer, one of their number suddenly rises from their midst, removes her habit – which she gives back to the girl – takes the baby, now dead, from her and slowly returns with it to the niche, where it becomes the Christ-child.

Reinhardt's production was a triumph. The theatre was dark for six months while it was transformed into a Gothic abbey, the bells of which rang for half an hour every evening before the performance. During the long New York run, my mother played sometimes the nun and sometimes the Virgin – the latter being by far the more taxing as she had to stand motionless in her niche, holding a heavy wooden baby, for some fifty minutes before slowly coming to life. When the run was over, she stayed on with the company for its nationwide tour of America. Later they did two more tours, the first through central Europe, the second through England and Scotland.

I have told the story of *The Miracle* at some length because it was immensely important in her life. This importance was to a large extent financial; as – in theory at least – the fifth child and third daughter of the Duke, she stood to inherit virtually nothing. She had been expected to find a rich husband; instead, she had picked a comparative pauper who had little to live on except his Foreign Office salary. They married on £1,100 a year – obviously a good

deal more than it is today, but still far from princely; and my grandmother, who had had visions of Belgravia or Mayfair, was appalled when they settled at No. 90 Gower Street, Bloomsbury.

But *The Miracle* also gave my mother something else: experience of other worlds totally foreign to her own. For what must have been a total of six or seven years she lived in the world of theatre – and not the English theatre either, but the Austrian-American-Jewish theatre, which was something quite different again. It was a milieu that she would love for the rest of her life. This explains, in the earlier years covered by these letters, the presence of the near-ubiquitous Dr Rudolf Kommer (Kaetchen) who had been Reinhardt's factotum and was to be my guardian during my wartime stay in America. On the other hand, the long enforced absences that my parents were called upon to suffer with the broad Atlantic between them could easily have destroyed their marriage, particularly in view of my father's constant infidelities. In fact it did nothing of the kind. They both saw the *Miracle* money as an investment – one that would enable my father to throw up the Foreign Office and its salary of £900 a year and launch himself into the political career on which he had set his heart.

In the letters that follow, he plays a supporting role only; yet one feels his presence all the time. Commoner he may have been, but his lineage was not altogether without distinction. He was, in fact, the great-great-grandson of King William IV, who had no fewer than nine illegitimate children by Mrs Dorothy Jordan, the leading *comédienne* of her day. One of their countless grandchildren, Lady Agnes Hay, married James, fifth Earl of Fife – curiously enough, at the British Embassy in Paris – and had four children, the youngest of whom was named Agnes like her mother.

Lady Agnes grew up to be extremely attractive but more than a little flighty, and in 1871 at the age of nineteen eloped with the young and dashing Viscount Dupplin. Two

years later she gave birth to a daughter, Marie, who married into the family of Field Marshal von Hindenburg and settled in Germany. A romantic novelist, she loved to talk about what she called ‘the Jordan blood’, and no wonder: when she was only two years old her mother eloped for the second time, on this occasion with a young man called Herbert Flower, whom she married in 1876 as soon as Lord Dupplin had been granted a divorce – on the grounds, it need hardly be said, of his wife’s adultery. The Flowers went off on a world cruise, but their idyll was to be all too short: just four years later in 1880, Herbert died at the age of twenty-seven.

Agnes was heartbroken; he was the love of her life. She herself was still only twenty-eight, but what was she to do? Her family had disowned her; she was virtually penniless; and after two elopements and a divorce not even an earl’s daughter with royal connections – her brother Alexander had married the eldest daughter of the future King Edward VII – could hope to be accepted into society. But she had never lacked spirit. In the hopes of becoming a nurse, she took a menial job in one of the major London teaching hospitals, and there, in 1882, it is said while she was scrubbing the floor, she caught the eye of one of the consulting surgeons, Dr Alfred Cooper.

Now Dr Cooper was a good deal more interesting than he sounds. Born in 1838 in Norwich to a family of lawyers, he had completed his medical studies at St Bartholomew’s in London and by the mid-1860s had built up a highly successful practice in Jermyn Street. According to the *Dictionary of National Biography*:

> Cooper, whose social qualities were linked with fine traits of character and breadth of view, gained a wide knowledge of the world, partly at courts, partly in the out-patient rooms of hospitals, and partly in the

> exercise of a branch of his profession which more than any other reveals the frailty of mankind.

It did indeed. That branch was, moreover, forked: syphilis and piles. Within a short time my grandfather and grandmother together were said to know more about the private parts of the British aristocracy than any other couple in the country. Despite this – or perhaps because of it – he quickly made his name in London society, becoming a member of all the right clubs and an ever-popular guest at dinner parties, country houses and even on grouse moors. Among his patients he numbered Edward, Prince of Wales, whom in 1874 he accompanied to St Petersburg. (From which of the above two distressing complaints His Royal Highness suffered is not known; the Palace announced at the time that Dr Cooper was treating him for a form of bronchitis – but what else could the Palace have said?) The two remained friends, and in 1901, when the prince succeeded his mother on the throne and became King Edward VII, he was to award my grandfather a knighthood in his Coronation Honours.

Dr Cooper had done well: well enough to send his only son Duff[3] – there were also three daughters – to Eton and Oxford where, according to his biographer John Charmley, ‘he trailed clouds of dissipation’, drinking, gambling and pursuing regiments of women, whom he wooed – on the whole successfully – not only by his charm and wit but also by bombarding them with sonnets, for which he had a quite extraordinary facility. These were a by-product of a genuine passion for literature, in particular poetry and nineteenth-century novels in both English and French; by the end of his life it was almost impossible to find one of these that he had not read and remembered.

After the war he did indeed give up the Foreign Office, embarking instead on a political career, in the course of which he became Secretary of State for War in 1936 and

First Lord of the Admiralty – effectively Secretary of State for the Navy – in 1937. He loved the latter post, which included the use of the Admiralty yacht, a converted destroyer called HMS *Enchantress*; but he did not enjoy it for long. At the end of August 1938 Nazi troops had begun to mass along Germany's frontier with Czechoslovakia. Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain and his Foreign Secretary Lord Halifax were prepared to see the destruction of what Chamberlain famously described as 'a far-away country' and 'people of whom we know nothing'; my father took a stronger line. He wanted us to make it absolutely clear to Hitler that if he marched into Czechoslovakia the result would be war. At first, he wrote, the alternatives seemed to be 1) peace with dishonour – allowing Hitler to take over Czechoslovakia; 2) war. But then Chamberlain made three flights to Germany to see Hitler; and when he returned after their last meeting, having accepted virtually all Hitler's demands, my father saw that there was now a third possibility staring us in the face: war with dishonour – betraying Czechoslovakia and still having to fight, since Hitler was clearly not going to be satisfied. He could bear it no longer, and on 1 October submitted his resignation.

This, then, is the background to the letters that follow. They were written over a thirteen-year period, between 1939 and 1952. When I received the first I had recently celebrated my tenth birthday; the last found me a married man with a child of my own on the way, soon to be twenty-three and to enter the Foreign Service myself. For both my mother and me, these were eventful years. Their beginning virtually coincided with the outbreak of the Second World War. For her, this was followed by a lecture tour that my father undertook in America, the London Blitz, the establishment of a smallholding farm in Sussex, a five-month posting to Singapore involving extensive tours of South-East Asia, nine months with General de Gaulle in Algiers, three years at the British Embassy in post-liberation

Paris and, finally, retirement in a house just outside Chantilly. For me, they saw my evacuation in 1940 to the United States, eighteen months' education in Toronto, a return to England in 1942 on a Royal Navy cruiser, four years at Eton, two on the lower deck of the Navy and, to finish off, three years at New College, Oxford.

During that time, my mother wrote me several hundred letters, sometimes daily, hardly ever less frequently than two or three times a week. Despite repeated injunctions to keep them carefully, I fear that the very occasional bundle has been lost – almost certainly my fault. One particularly sad casualty is that which concludes the American lecture tour in the very first chapter. But the vast majority – at least 90 per cent – have survived, and it is the best of these that you now hold in your hands. They have in some cases been slightly abridged, but only to spare the reader those paragraphs which would have bored him or her stiff, or which I myself, after so long an interval, find incomprehensible. There are, alas, far too many names. Most of them are identified in the footnotes or – also by Christian names and nicknames – in the List of Names at the end of the book. Of those which are not, some are made sufficiently clear by the context, others are too well-known to need additional explanation. The remainder are left unexplained because I have no idea who they are.

Particularly during the early years, I was a far less dutiful correspondent than she – and, as her letters make abundantly clear, she never let me forget it. ('This one only told me that your gym master had been ill.') Increasing maturity showed a welcome improvement, and by the time I reached the Navy and had a good deal of time on my hands I was writing regularly, sometimes at inordinate length. The results you have been spared; but, simply to give a taste of the two-way correspondence, one of my own letters, ruthlessly abridged, has been included as a sort of prelude to each chapter, to be ignored at will.

1 There have long been persistent rumours that another recipient of Mr Cust's attentions was a member of the domestic staff at Belton who later became the maternal grandmother of Lady Thatcher, and that our former Prime Minister is consequently my first cousin. I should dearly love to know, but have never had the courage to suggest DNA.

2 Duff Cooper, *Diaries.*

3 In later years the press tended to give him (and my mother) a hyphen, making 'Duff' part of the surname. This was unwarranted: he was christened Duff, his mother's family name. It was never my mother's and has never been mine.

1

‘Pray for Hitler’s sharks not to catch us’

USA, OCTOBER 1939–FEBRUARY 1940

Westbury Manor[1]
Brackley
Northants
February 2nd, 1940

My darling Mummy and Papa,

We are not snowed up any more, I am glad to say, but there is still a lot about.

The new music teacher, who plays the organ in church, is very nice. I have her twice a week, for half an hour, and am getting on fine.

We had films last night. One was about owls, hawks and things. It was frightfully good, showing hawks in midair, catching bones. Film No. 2 was pure humour but it kept going wrong. It was a maid who dropped all the best china, and it came to life and tortured her. I did not like it and you would have loathed it.

The master, Mr. Clinch, is an owner of performing fleas. We are going to have a demonstration this afternoon. He is also going to try to get a scout troop, and is teaching us many knots. Still, to go on with fleas. They are called performing livestock, since 'fleas' sounds too undignified. They are called Oscar and Cuthbert, and Mr. Clinch got them from the Sahara Desert.

I now know about thirty verses from Horatius.[2] *When I have learned it all, you will owe me £3 10s, since there are seventy verses.*

Lots and lots of love,
John Julius

HAVING RESIGNED FROM the Chamberlain government in October 1938, my father found himself at a loose end. When, therefore, towards the end of the year, he was invited to lecture in America, he did not turn the suggestion down flat. He replied that given the existing situation he could not possibly commit himself at that time; he might, however, be able to do so in the following year, ‘if conditions were favourable’. He was in fact fairly certain that they would not be; but the inactivity that had continued month after month in 1939 had proved almost more than he could stand. War was declared on 3 September 1939. He knew there was no hope for a ministerial post while Neville Chamberlain remained in power; at the same time he did not feel that he could leave England without the Prime Minister’s approval. On 21 September he managed an interview; but, as he noted in his diary, ‘Chamberlain merely suggested that in six weeks’ time, when “things will be getting pretty hot here”, a man of my age might be criticised for leaving the country. I said that that was my own responsibility and was a question that I could settle for myself. After some humming and hawing he said that it would be a good thing for me to go – and so I left him. I wasn’t with him for more than ten minutes and I left with a feeling of intensified dislike.’

His mission, if he went, would be clear enough. He must do his best to persuade America that the isolationist policies then being advocated by Colonel Charles Lindbergh – and a good many others in high places – would prove disastrous to both our countries. The cause of Great Britain was not everywhere popular in the United States. There was in particular a deep suspicion of the Empire; not 1 per cent of his audiences, wrote my father, believed that the Dominions were really self-governing; nor did they have any idea of the

bloodshed that was bound to follow a British withdrawal from India, which most of them wholeheartedly advocated. Above all, they had to be made to understand that the western world was fighting for its life. Without American help, the battle might well be lost.

He decided to go; my mother, as she always did, went with him; and the letters begin.

In the train to
Southampton
October 12th, 1939

Papa and I have barged and battered our way through a mob of passengers and seers-off and are at last seated (not everybody is) in a Pullman car with eggs and strawberry jam. There was a crowd of photographers hunting Papa like sleuths, but I implored them not to take us as we don't want the enemy to send a special torpedo. We gave a party last night at the Savoy and tried to forget we were going, not that I mind much except for leaving you. I'll write, no cable you as soon as I arrive in N.Y. but I don't suppose it will be for ten or twelve days. Work hard, play hard and *don't change* till I come back anyway. Be just as I left you, gay and brave and good and sensible. Don't forget that there's a war being fought and that it's *got to be won* and that your contribution towards winning it is to be better, more hardworking, more thoughtful and braver than usual . . . I love you very much.

S.S. Manhattan
Halfway over

The sea is rather Cape Wrathish[3] and I have forgotten the terror of the torpedoes in my efforts to cope with standing upright. Everybody except Papa and me is sleeping five and six in a cabin on cots like you slept on in the *Enchantress* and all the big saloons are dormitories of fifty unfortunates all sicking together. We have a film every afternoon and we have to go and sit on our places two hours before it starts. The news that you will delight in is that we shall actually see the World's Fair.[4] I'll send you pictures and details. The deck is black with children which makes me want you very much. They play a nice dart game on deck which I'll send you for Christmas if I can get it over.

We get very little English news. What comes through is on a radio at its most confused and raucous worst. I'm trying to remember what Belvoir was like when I was half your age, with no taps, no electric light, no motors, but instead lamp-men and water-men carrying gigantic cans. Drives in the afternoon with Grandpapa in a big landau with a big fat coachman on the box driving a pair of spanking horses and a footman in a long coat and top hat who leapt down and opened a gate and scrambled up to the box again and did nothing else in life. If I can put it all together and make it interesting enough I might make a radio talk in America, and make some money to give to the Red Cross. I'll stop now and add a bit more to this letter before we land.

Saturday. We are due to land tomorrow. It got lovely and calm again yesterday and there was a good film called *Stanley and Livingstone*[5] and in the evening we gave a dinner party of two other people . . .

Shall hope to see old Kaetchen at 9 a.m. tomorrow morning. I shall be happy to arrive, the perils of the

sea behind us for a bit. I shall be thinking about you all the time and longing for letters, nothing too silly to tell me about, remember that as I shall be hungry for news of you – air raid warnings, outings with Nanny.

October 27th, 1939
New York

I've been to the World's Fair for the first time – not, you will be sorry to hear, to the Amusement Park. I go there tomorrow, but I've been inside the Perisphere. It's that large globe one sees in the pictures. One goes in the door at the foot of the pyramid and there's a blue-lit, rather sinister moving staircase which shoots you off into the inside of the globe on to a revolving platform that carries you round the circle while you look down upon the city of the future – done like panoramas are done. The dome above you looks just like the real sky and changes to night and stars and the model city lights up. I did the English Pavilion – good but dull – and the French one – good and exciting – and the Russian one, immense and made of marble and showing with tremendous pride things the U.S.S.R. has made and invented and developed since their new regime – all the things we've had for years, such as an underground railway. The Exhibition doesn't look half as lovely as the Paris one – fountains much less good, but one doesn't get so tired as there are little motors and little chairs a man pushes you in. I saw too a room of *minute* babies in incubators. That was fascinating, and you would have very much liked the Palace of Health, with transparent men with pulsating kidneys and brains, etc. I'll write you about the Amusements next time.

It seems dreadful being so far from you and the family and unhappy England. No news from anyone yet, only stories of Germany's hatred of England. It makes one desperately sad. Here the cry is 'Keep out of the war'. A few years ago America passed a law called the Neutrality Act which meant that they might not *sell* any armaments or aeroplanes or oil or steel to countries that were at war. Now there is a big fight going on because Roosevelt, the President, wants to repeal that law, to tear it up and allow any nation at war to buy what they want, as long as they can fetch it in their own ships and pay cash down for it. ('Cash and Carry' it's called.) He wants this because he is very pro-England and France, and he knows that the repeal of the law would advantage us, who have ships and money and the command of the seas. So we must pray that the President pulls it off, and now you know what the Repeal of the Neutrality Act is, or you ought to if you're not a tiny idiot or if I am incapable of making myself clear. We are going to Washington next week and I hope to see my darling President in his White House.

Goodbye, my beloved. Don't forget to say your prayers at night under the clothes – you needn't kneel if the other boys don't, but say them please.

British Embassy
Washington D.C.
November 3rd, 1939

You will be very sorry to hear that I never again got to the Fair. I'd promised myself two days – the last two before the Fair closed – to do all the parachutes and heart-stoppers. And on those two days the heavens opened and torrential rains that drowned everything, and now it's shut till next year and it's

just too bad. We came to Washington D.C. yesterday to see our Ambassador there, Lord Lothian, and this evening – great excitement – we are to go to the White House and see the President, so I won't finish this letter till later so that I can tell you what he is like. I've always loved him as you know, but he is unpopular with the very rich because he taxes them mercilessly and a good job too. He's very pro-Ally and does not really think that America should be an 'isolationist' country that takes no part in the rest of the world's troubles. He would like to come to our help and has already done so by getting the Neutrality Law repealed (it was done yesterday just as we arrived, by a big majority of votes). So now we can buy all the arms we can pay for from the U.S.A. and so can France, and Hitler won't like it one little bit. That will do for my lecture bit of this letter.

Papa makes his first lecture next Monday at Columbia University – that's New York – and three days later he makes one in New Jumper – I mean New Jersey, which is the next state. Papa has gone very American – he has given up carrying a stick or umbrella, he is very energetic and full of hustle as though he thought 'time was money'. He speaks through his nose and soon he will be wearing pince-nezes and smoking a cheroot, and may even grow a little goatee beard. I'm going out now to the Capitol and to look at a colossal Abraham Lincoln made of marble sitting in a chair. I pray every night that you are happy and well. By the time you get this there will be only about three weeks more of school. Perhaps you'll be preparing a play. I haven't heard a word of you yet.

Saturday 4th. Well, the White House was a big success. Mr. President was gleeful over his repeal and didn't pretend to be neutral at all. I was a bit nervous

and didn’t do very well with him, but he did very well with me. If his legs had not been paralysed he’d have danced a war dance. Before the tea with the President we went to see the Hoover Institute of Criminal Investigation.[6] You would so have loved it. When the gangsters and racketeers were at their worst and the kidnappers, Mr. Hoover was put in charge of the Police Department and made the ‘G-men’. (G stands for Government.) They are a severely trained body of men who know the law, who are husky and strong, and who are taught to shoot straight and carry guns. The result has been miraculous. The headquarters are at Washington and there you can see all the relics of the gangsters, their blood-stained bits, their death masks, their sawn-off shotguns, notes written by kidnapped children, millions of indexed fingerprints. To finish up you are taken to the shooting gallery where you are first shown how the different kinds of machine-guns and repeaters of all sorts are operated with tracer bullets that show in the dark, and then you can try them yourself on the target of a life-sized man. I did pretty well and kept my riddled man for you. I’ll send it if I can.

On to Williamsburg today to see what a colonial town in Virginia in the time of Queen Anne looks like. They have restored it to look exactly as it did. New York next day.

Kiluna Farm,
Manhasset, Long Island
November 12th, 1939

This letter will probably get to you before the last one I wrote you about Washington because I’m giving it to Ronnie Tree who leaves on the Clipper[7] tomorrow.

It’s a month since I left, and I haven’t had a letter from anyone except Conrad,[8] and one from Hutchie[9] by air. I really can’t wait to hear something of you. Tomorrow we are off to the Southern States for ten days and there will be seven lectures and seven or eight nights in the train. When we get back to N.Y. we shall be wrecks. I spend half my day at the washing basin scrubbing Papa’s socks and drawers and pyjamas and handkerchiefs, and the other half ironing them and perpetually burning them. You will say why don’t you send them to a laundry. The answer is that everything in this country is so expensive that it hurts my sensitive Scotch soul, and what Papa flings away on tips and leaving money about, and not taking the trouble to learn the currency and so giving 50 cents instead of 10 cents, I try to make up for by pathetic economies. We had a very successful lecture at Summit, New Jersey, the state on the other side of the Hudson river from N.Y. They’ve built a splendid tunnel, bigger and better and faster and generally more impressive than the Mersey Tunnel. We had dinner before the speech with an old American family, good and noble and high-principled and delightful. Grace before our dinner which was at half-past six. We had to eat the food though I wanted to regurgitate. I thought of you. Papa likes a drink before a lecture, but this home disapproved of anything but water!

This home, which belongs to Mr. Paley, the President of the Columbia Broadcasting, has too much alcohol on the other hand. Result – I’ve got a headache today and wish that I was back with the fine American middle-class family in spite of their abstinence.

I enclose the man I shot at in the Criminal Investigation Department with a hand machine-gun.

My Washington letter will explain.

British Embassy
Washington
November 19th, 1939

At last I've got a scrubby little letter from you dated 29 October. You are the nastiest little pig I know and I despise the school for not urging you to be a little less beastly. Do you realise that you let eighteen days pass without giving your poor frightened exiled mother a thought? Please, darling horror, don't do it again. Write as often as you can. It's so sad waiting for letters that don't come and are not even written.

I'm writing on very thin loo paper because airmail is so expensive and it goes by weight. Papa and I spend every night in the train, Papa up above monkeywise. He's more like a monkey than I was because up above there is a criss-cross arrangement of green tape like a cage to keep him from being shot out. Most nights he lectures and yesterday at Pittsburgh, a huge town where they make steel (their Sheffield) he had to speak for an hour at 10 a.m. They gave him in return a large ivory penknife with the giver's name which happened to be Duff engraved upon it. I should claim it from him when we get home. He's more likely to cut himself than you are. It's hot as summer and Washington is all avenues of trees and spaces and big beautifully designed offices for Government. Tonight it's the train again for Charlotte, N. Carolina, and the next night train again to New York, three days break and off to Canada. I love my darling boy. Don't treat me so badly again or I'll have your lights and liver when I get home.