

Havenfield Castle occupied the top of one of the tallest hills in East Durham and was visible from almost twenty miles distant in all directions. It had been built at the beginning of the 12th century by the first Lord de Bernard as a display of strength and resolve against marauding Scots. The summit had been flattened to accommodate the construction, a gigantic undertaking in its own right and a measure of how important control of these border lands had been to the security of England.

Four hundred years later it still stood foursquare against the elements. The threat of invasion from Scotland had receded with the Union of the Crowns, although it was still considered wise to keep a watch to the north, and the castle was impregnable to anything other than a long siege, betrayal, or the large cannons which were beginning to appear on the battlefields of Europe.

The main defence of the castle was a massive curtain wall with a dry moat at its base. This was constructed of local stone, nine feet thick and fifty feet in height. The perimeter measured over six hundred feet and access was available only on the south side, where a road ran up to a drawbridge guarded by a barbican. On the other side of the bridge was a central gatehouse tower containing several storeys of accommodation. The road ran through a passage beneath and passed through two sets of doors, a portcullis, and then under holes in the ceiling designed to enable defenders to drop missiles on any unwelcome intruders.

At each of the four corners of the castle stood towers, all directly connected to the walls to provide access. Three of these were modest in size but the one on the south-west was altogether more substantial. It was six stories in height and formed the donjon of Lord and Lady Barnard, containing a dining hall, a kitchen, a series of private rooms, a privy and several bed chambers.

Lady Margaret Barnard was walking the parapet of Havenfield Castle, as she did almost every morning. Five full circuits, unless weather conditions made the bare stone treacherous. Those she met ignored her, as they had learned was best to do, leaving her to her thoughts.

She entered the south-west tower and made her way up one flight of stairs to the dining room. She sat at the table and waited with her hands folded on her lap for her husband to appear. He entered several minutes later and sat at the opposite side of the table. His appearance was the signal for servants to make their way from the kitchen and their breakfast was placed in front of them. They ate silently for several minutes before he spoke.

‘What are your intentions today, my dear?’ he asked.

‘I wish to take the coach to Auckland and attend the ten o’clock service. Afterwards, I may visit Mrs Armstrong or one of the other ladies of the district. I will be back in time for supper.’

He nodded and she studied him as he considered his response. He was a good figure of a man. When he stood, he reached over six feet in height and his body, unlike that of many of his kind, had not run to fat. He took an active interest in the management of his large estates and spent much of his time either on horseback or striding across fields. His dark hair was cut short and his round face might have been called handsome had it not been for an unsettling fixity in his gaze and a tightening around the mouth that betrayed the inflexible nature of his character.

The north of England in the early 17th century was a troubled place and noblemen who could not command authority and respect did not last long. This she knew and appreciated, but that knowledge did little to quell the constant sense of apprehension that she always felt in his presence, even after three years of marriage. True, he had never misused her, but whispered stories of what

happened on his estates: beatings, evictions and other punishments ruthlessly meted out, made her aware that he was a dangerous man and one unlikely to show mercy when crossed.

‘That is good,’ he said. ‘I have arranged to call out the hunt. We will take the hounds into the hills for the day. I will arrange to be back in time to join you.’

They fell silent as they finished their meal, as they had done the day before and the day before that and almost every day since she had left her family home in Suffolk and arrived at Havenfield to be his wife.

She waited in the Inner Court for the carriage to arrive, standing next to the well which provided the water for the castle. Her dress was of white velvet, imported from Bruges as was the rage amongst the women of high standing, and she had covered it with a golden silk cloak tied about the neck which she pulled tight around her body as protection against the chill of the autumn morning.

The carriage clattered into view, pulled by two grey horses, the coachman in the box in full livery and a young pageboy, dressed in a sky-blue uniform on the footboard. She addressed him as the carriage drew to a halt in front of her and the coachman climbed to the ground to open the door.

‘There is no necessity for you to attend on me, William. You may go about your other duties.’

The boy, no more than twelve years old with a shock of dark hair and an appearance of permanent anxiety, appeared uncomfortable at her words and stuttered over his response.

‘T-T-the Master said that I should accompany you, my Lady. It was his instruction.’

She understood the boy’s apprehension. He risked being caught in a crossfire between two people who held complete power over him, a position from which there was no way to extricate himself that would end well.

She relented and said with a smile, ‘Then we must do as the Master wants.’

Relief flooded the boy’s face as the coachman opened the door of the carriage and helped her inside.

The journey to the church at Auckland took no more than thirty minutes. She emerged from the coach and dismissed the coachman and the boy, telling them to return in one hour. She looked around at the crowd milling about the entrance. The wives of the local nobility and wealthy merchants, accompanied in the most part by their husbands, had gathered to attend the service and, more importantly, to be seen in their finery. Velvet dominated in colours of red and yellow and green, but it was clear who was the centre of attention.

Conversation slowed and stopped and the crowd parted as she walked towards the door. A number of the men bowed and the women curtsied, muttering soft greetings and they looked her up and down. They saw a tall, graceful woman in the middle years of her third decade, her figure slim and not yet burdened by the strains of child-bearing. Her red hair was piled high and coiled into a chignon in the back, as was the style of the time. Her pale, oval face was not in any way classically beautiful, her nose was too large and her mouth too wide for that, but it was arresting nonetheless.

Perhaps it was the slanted eyes and high cheekbones that hinted at an exotic, foreign ancestry that made it so. She was still a stranger to them, a creature from a part of the country that few of them had visited, who generally kept herself aloof from their society but who, nevertheless, held the position of the wife of the richest and most powerful man in the county.

She stared ahead, refusing to meet the eye of those who sought her approval. She entered the vestibule and paused for a moment to allow her eyes to adjust to the sudden loss of light. She heard sounds of people shuffling into position to form a procession behind her and she smiled quietly to herself at the absurdity of it all. Then she reset her face and walked through the inner door and into the church. She paused again and looked around, taking in the pointed arches, the grand lancet windows inspired, she knew, by the great cathedral at Salisbury, and the narrow, graceful piers, built with cut stone, which allowed light to flood the building. She thought, as she had since she had first come to this place, that it was a splendid church for such a remote area. But it was not the architectural glories of the building that had caused her to stop. She was looking for something very specific and it took her no more than a few seconds to find it.

He was standing beside one of the pillars to her left, at the back of the church, where the low-bred people of the local area stood as the gentry promenaded and turned to the right to sit on the pews. She felt her breath catch as she gazed at him and she was aware that she suddenly felt a little faint.

He stood with a group of other men, and yet alone. He was of above medium height, slim but, even when standing still, he carried himself with a lithe grace and strength. His shoulders were broad, his hips narrow and he was that rarity amongst the men of England, blue eyed and fair haired. His long eyelashes and pale skin, which in many men might have given the appearance of softness, were offset by a chiseled jaw and a steadiness in his gaze. He was, she thought, the most beautiful person she had ever seen. He was younger than her, this much was obvious, perhaps by as much as half a decade, but there was no doubt in her mind that he was already a man.

He turned his face towards her and she felt the strange sensation that occurs when two people's eyes lock together and it seems for a moment like there is nobody else in the world.

With an effort of will, she turned her face away before what was happening became obvious to others and turned right. She made her way to the pew that had been reserved for her at the front of the church and sat down, her face flushed, her heart beating so fast that she feared that it might break from her chest. She took a deep breath to steady herself as the pews behind her filled and the bell began to toll.

It was over a month since she had first noticed him. She was used to being gaped at by the local peasantry, sometimes with wonder, sometimes with envy and occasionally with hatred. But she was unused to being stared at by someone who held her gaze if she looked back at them. It had happened as she passed through the nearby village and it had disconcerted her. When she had seen him a few days later at the mass, and he had stared at her again, she felt a flush of heat through her body and became aware that her nipples had hardened and become erect. The feelings had been so strange, so unusual that she had almost panicked and found herself fighting a desperate desire to turn around and run from the building. She had managed to regain her poise only with a great effort, but she had taken no interest in the service and had been distracted for the remainder of the day. That night, when her husband had come to her chamber and she had been obliged to lie still as he

took advantage of his conjugal rights, she had closed her eyes and it was the face of the man with the blue eyes that had filled her imagination.

She counted back and worked out that this was the fifth time she had seen him. She thought about the course of action on which she had decided the previous night. She knew that it was reckless and dangerous, and that part of her mind which was still capable of rational thought was screaming for her attention. But she ignored it. She knew, with certainty and without doubt, that she was in love, the wild romantic love that she had dreamed about before her advantageous, as her mother had called it, marriage; the kind that the young women of her kind spoke of behind their fans at the balls in the grand houses. There was in her a sense of euphoria which had created a heightened, exaggerated sense of possibilities and an escape, even it was only temporary, from the nightmare of her marriage.

At a signal, she stood for the first hymn, opening the book that had been left for her on the pew and the service began.

It seemed to her that it lasted forever. The sermon was dreary and it required a large effort of concentration to feign the interest that was expected of her by virtue of her station. But all tribulations come to an end and, at last, it was finished.

As the last hymn drew to its close, she sat down with the hymn book on her knee, her head bowed as though in private prayer. This was unusual and the great and the good arrayed behind her returned also to their seats, unwilling to leave until she had done so first. It took her a few seconds to realise this and she raised her hand, waving it in a gesture of dismissal. Her meaning was clear and she heard the sounds of people moving. She waited for a short period after it had finished and then surreptitiously put two fingers from her left hand under her right sleeve. She pulled out a folded paper and slipped it in between the pages of the hymn book, which she then returned to its place on the pew. She stood up and walked away from the altar, towards the door.

The church had emptied save for a few men huddled together in a group at the back, and the man, leaning against the pillar, staring at her intently. She held his gaze for no more than a second and then inclined her head backwards in the direction from which she had come. A casual observer might have missed it completely, or would have thought it to be no more than a nervous gesture, but the man knew. His shoulders stiffened as she made her way out the door and then he walked to the end pew where he knelt, his head bowed, his hands joined.

The group of men broke up and headed for the door. One of them separated from the others and slapped the kneeling man on the shoulder.

'This is a first for you, Musgrave. What have you been up to that you need to ask for forgiveness?'

Musgrave looked up and grinned. 'If I told you that, Thomas, you'd never speak to me again.'

Thomas laughed. 'I'll let you at it then. We are off to the alehouse if you want to join us later.'

'I may well do that. There is something I must deal with first however.'

He resumed his previous position and waited for the door to close. He then sat up and looked around. He appeared to be alone but, because he was essentially a cautious man, he called out.'

'Hello, is there anyone there?'

His words echoed back at him and he stood up. He walked swiftly to the top pew and found the hymn book that the woman had been using. He flicked through it and caught the paper as it fell out. He put it in his pocket and left.

It was over a month since he had first seen her, passing through the village where he had recently been appointed as schoolmaster. The horse on which she sat was over fourteen hands in height but she rode it with an ease and grace that he had never seen in any woman. She stared straight ahead but, when she passed him, she turned her head in his direction and their eyes met. It lasted for no more than a couple of seconds, but he felt in that instant as though he had been shot through by an arrow.

The moment passed and she moved on. He looked at her retreating back and tried to make sense of what had just happened but failed. It wasn't until a passer-by told him that he had better shut his mouth or the flies would get in that he recovered his composure. That night, as he tried to get to sleep, the face which filled his thoughts was hers.

The following Sunday, he had attended the service at the local church for the first time. She had been there and he had asked the questions that had enabled him to identify her. His heart sank at the news. Such a woman was beyond the reach of a simple schoolmaster but, when she was leaving the church, he took a position which placed him in front of her. He saw her look at him and was aware that her eyes had widened in recognition also.

Since then, she had attended this church every Sunday, although there were others on the vast Barnard estate to which she could have gone. And every Sunday, he made himself prominent, and every Sunday, their eyes met, if only for an instant.

Now he had in his pocket a note. His heart beat quickly and his mouth felt dry with something between excitement and fear. He hurried out of the church and turned left towards a small, dense grove of blackthorns. He slipped behind it and took the paper from his pocket. He read it once, then twice.

'There is a bower in Bucklesfordberry by the old windmill. It is my heart's delight.'

He tore the paper, rolled it into a ball and threw it in amongst the thorns. Then he slipped away, walking past the small crowd that had assembled at Lady Barnard's carriage, each desperate for her attention as the coachman held the door open for her. He did not glance at her. Neither did he look behind him for, if he had, he might have seen the figure of William come around the corner of the church and approach the blackthorns with a look of curiosity on his face as he adjusted the fly on his trousers, and reached in his arm to find the small ball of paper.

As soon as the carriage had left the village, Lady Barnard banged her cane against the roof. The coachman stopped the horses and she informed him that she'd had a change of mind. They would go to Bucklesfordberry where she would spend the afternoon. They could leave her there and return at five.

They arrived at the cottage half an hour later and the carriage left as she closed the door behind her. She removed her cloak, folded it and put it on the table in the middle of the room. Then she sat down on a chair and waited.

The coachman had decided that the road back to Havenfield would be made easier with the help of a drink. He stopped the carriage outside a roadside alehouse and disappeared inside. William knew that he would not be welcome to go with him and settled to wait, before remembering the paper in his pocket. He pulled it out and began to carefully disentangle it.

Five minutes later he was looking at the words that Lady Barnard had written and his heart was pounding out of his chest. Although he was still young and innocent of many of the ways of the world, he knew their meaning. He found himself torn by conflicting loyalties. He was page to the Lady and she had always treated him with kindness, but he was also Lord Barnard's man. To whom did he owe his allegiance?

Had he waited until the coachman returned and confided in him, all would perhaps have been well. The paper would have been cast to the wind and he would probably have received a clip around the ear with a warning to mind his own business. But the coachman was otherwise engaged and showing no signs of returning. William made up his mind and began doing his calculations.

He knew the area for which Lord Barnard and his party had departed that morning. He estimated that it was no more than five or possibly six miles away. He could probably get there in two hours if he ran across the fields. Lord Barnard would surely be grateful and thank him.

He climbed down off the carriage and, without a backward glance, began to run.

At about the same time that William was pulling the paper from his pocket, Lady Barnard heard the sounds of a horse's hooves into the courtyard behind the cottage. The sound was muffled, as though the horse was being led slowly and not ridden. She remained seated as she heard the door to the stable being opened and shortly afterwards, closed again. Then, no more than ten seconds later, she heard a knock on the back door. She stood up and took a deep breath. She ran her hands down her body and walked across the room. She opened the door and stepped back to allow Musgrave entry. She closed the door and then leaned against it as they looked at each other. They were committed now and there was little more to be said. He reached out his hand and caressed her cheek. She put up her hand to cover his and moved her face to kiss his open palm. Then she was in his arms, their bodies pressed against each other.

William was making slower progress across the fields than he had anticipated. He was finding that some of them were muddy and it wasn't always easy to find the gates. But he carried on despite the tiredness that began to drag at his legs.

He reached a river and looked up and down for a bridge. Seeing none, he looked around for somebody who might be able to tell him where one could be found. He saw a man putting a pike in the ground and uprooting potatoes in a nearby field and made his way to him.

‘Is there a bridge to get across the river?’ he asked

The man took off his cap and scratched his head as he looked at the mud-splattered vision in front of him, its hands on its knees as it gasped for breath.

‘No,’ he said slowly. ‘There was one near here until last winter but the floods took it away. The nearest one is about a mile and a half south.’

A rictus of what appeared to be pain passed across the boy’s face. ‘Is there anyone here with a boat who could take me across?’

The man shook his head. ‘It’s not worth having a boat on that river. It’s only twenty feet across.’ Then he laughed and said mockingly, ‘I suppose you could always jump in and swim across, if you could swim that is.’

The boy had regained his breath and stood upright, looking at him with something akin to murder in his eyes. Then he turned back to the river and walked to the bank. He looked at the water, paced back several steps, paused for a moment, then ran as fast as he could and leapt in. The man leaned on his pike and watched with interest as the boy struck out for the far shore. He seemed to make progress at first but then got caught by the current, which began to drag him downstream. He went under but then reappeared, his arms and legs flailing frantically, an effort which eventually began to have an effect.

It took him almost a minute to complete the crossing and he lay on the muddy bank for a further five, sucking in great gulps of air. Eventually the man saw him stand up, steady himself against a tree and stagger off into the distance. He went back to digging with a thought that he’d have a good story to tell around the family table that night.

At Bucklesfordberry the lovers lay facing each other on the bed, their bodies entwined. They kissed gently, fingers tracing patterns across each other’s skin, lost in the afterglow of something beyond their experience. It was the woman who spoke first.

‘I don’t even know your name.’

He smiled. ‘I’m known as Little Musgrave.’

She laughed softly. ‘That’s not very accurate.’

‘I am flattered. But it is because of my father. He is also a teacher and is over six feet in height. He is known as Big Musgrave and I am called Little Musgrave because of that.’

There was silence between them for a few moments and then he continued.

‘I have never known a woman respond with such passion. You have given me a gift of the most glorious experience of my life and I give you my thanks.’

She put her finger to his lips. ‘Shush my lovely man. It was you who gave wonder and delight to me. I have found today the joy of love and a happiness that my husband has never given to me, and which I feared I would never feel.’

‘Does he treat you ill?’

She shook her head. ‘Never that. But he is a cold man, without love, and he neglects me. The act of love is a duty to him. He comes to my room once a month and it is over and done in five minutes. It is as though it is a burden to him.’

She hesitated for a moment and then continued, ‘I think in truth, that he prefers the company of men. There are rumours that I have heard of a young man in Durham. Those in our society who are jealous of my husband’s wealth and would like to hurt me have made comments and innuendoes. I have ignored them but I fear that there is some truth in them.’

William was approaching exhaustion when he heard the horn. He turned towards the sound and, gathering the last of his energy, began to run towards it.

The hunting party had stopped for lunch beside an old oak wood. He burst into the middle of it and approached Lord Barnard, who was sitting on an old tree stump.

‘My Lord Barnard,’ he said, ‘I must speak to you. It is of great importance.’

Barnard looked at him coldly over the top of his cup, taking in the mud on his clothes, the water dripping from him and a large gash in one leg of his trousers.

‘It must be urgent given your state. Speak then lad,’ he said.

‘I would prefer to do so in private, My Lord. It is a matter of great delicacy.’

Barnard hesitated, then raised his voice so that the assembly could hear. ‘Leave us.’

The men looked at each other and then moved away. William waited until he thought that they were out of earshot and then began to speak.

‘I went to the church at Auckland today my Lord. I accompanied your wife as Page on the coach. I believe that she has made an assignation and, even as we speak, she lies at Bucklesfordberry in the arms of Little Musgrave, the schoolteacher.’

Barnard’s face remained impassive as he absorbed the news. Then he laid down his cup and stood up. He towered over William as he put his hands on his shoulders and stared into his eyes. When he spoke, his voice was calm, but his words sent a spasm of fear through the boy.

‘If this be true, my little Foot Page, this tale that you tell me, then all the gold in Bucklesfordberry, I will give to you. But if this is a lie, then I will hang you from the highest tree in the county.’

He released his grip on the boy and called over his steward.

‘Go saddle my swiftest horse. Tell the others to get themselves ready. Leave everything here and we will collect it later. We have little time to waste. We must ride fast and quietly. Tell the men that I do not want a sound made.’

‘Of course, my Lord. Where are we going?’

‘We are riding for Bucklesfordberry.’

Working swiftly, the party was ready to ride in less than ten minutes. They left William standing, cold and wet in the field, unimportant now and already forgotten.

Or not quite. As the horses thundered off across the fields, a rider peeled off the back and returned to the boy. He dismounted and grabbed him roughly by the hair. He put his face down close to his and snarled, 'What did you say to Barnard, you foolish boy?'

For the second time in a few minutes, William felt very afraid, but he summoned his courage.

'N-n-nothing, that is of concern to you,' he said.

The man's hand drew back and slammed into the side of William's face. He crumpled to the ground and began to cry. The man kicked him savagely in the stomach and then pulled him up by his jacket.

'Tell me what you said to him or I will beat you within an inch of your life.'

There was a horrible conviction in the man's voice which persuaded William to start talking.

'I told him that the schoolteacher, Musgrave, was at Bucklesfordberry with the lady Margaret.'

The man released his grip on the boy and studied him for a moment. Then he stood up.

'May God have mercy on you, William, for you have done an evil thing today. Run home and get rid of that suit and leave this place today. For I am sure that if you do not, you will not survive the night.'

He remounted his horse and rode away, leaving William sitting in the mud, snot and tears running down his face and terror in his heart. Eventually, he stood up and began to make his way towards his parent's home.

The man who had struck him was riding fast and thinking faster. He had known Musgrave since they were boys, and had been taught the skills of reading and writing by his father. He knew that his friend was in terrible danger, but also that attempts to warn him could imperil his own life.

He caught up with the other riders a mile from Bucklesfordberry. He didn't rejoin them but directed his horse into a copse of trees. There he paused and drew his hunting horn from his saddlebag. With a prayer to what he hoped was a God who was listening, he blew loud and shrill, the sound echoing through the valley.

It was heard by Lord Barnard and the other riders, who paused briefly and then continued riding. It was heard by Musgrave lying in the bed. He raised his head and listened, then turned to the Lady Margaret.

'That was a hunting horn and it wasn't far away. I fear that your husband and his men are close. It is time perhaps that I left.'

Margaret stretched languorously and wrapped her arms around him.

'My husband is miles away. It was probably nothing but a shepherd boy bringing his flock to the fold.'

She traced her finger down his face and said softly, 'We have searched for each other for many the long and lonesome day my love. Do not leave me now.'

He smiled and they kissed as they drifted into the soft warmth of sleep.

They were woken by the sound of somebody gently coughing. Musgrave opened his eyes and then sat up, his heart thudding in his chest. It took Margaret a few seconds to wake and when she saw what had caused him to react, she screamed.

Lord Barnard was standing at the bottom of the bed, along with half a dozen men, looking impassively at them. There was silence for no more than a few seconds and then he spoke.

'Well, Musgrave,' he said, 'how do you like my bed and my sheets? Or dare I ask you, how are you enjoying my wife?'

Musgrave knew that he was in deadly danger and felt a stab of dread tear through his body. But he was damned if he was going to allow it to show in front of these men.

'It's well I like your bed and sheets' he said. 'Although I admit that I would now prefer to be out of this house and away.'

Barnard smiled, but there was no humour in it. 'Oh, I don't think that that is going to happen Musgrave. This affront will be settled here. Now, get off that bed and put your clothes on. I will not have it said by anyone in this county that I killed a naked man.'

Musgrave hesitated and Margaret reached out to grab his arm. 'Do not leave this bed, Musgrave,' she said. 'If you do then he will surely kill you. I will put my body between him and you. He will not dare kill us both.'

'Is that how it is to be then, Musgrave?' said Barnard mockingly. 'You will try to save yourself by hiding behind a woman.'

Musgrave hesitated for a moment and then shook her free. He stood up and put on his trousers and shirt and Barnard spoke to his men.

'Clear the room of the tables and chairs. Move everything to the walls. Make a space so that we can resolve this like men.'

They did as they were told and within minutes, a large area had been cleared. While they were working, Musgrave and Barnard locked their eyes together and made no move. Then Barnard moved to the wall over the fireplace and took two swords off the wall. He ordered two of his men to grab Musgrave and move him to the centre of the floor. This they did and Barnard spoke.

'These swords were given to me by my father, and to him by his father. I will give you first choice. Which do you want?'

Musgrave gave no reply and Barnard nodded.

'I see,' he said. 'Your courage is failing you.'

He threw one of the swords across the room, where it fell at Musgrave's feet.

‘Pick it up,’ he said. ‘You have one chance of life and that is to fight. Otherwise, I will run you through and you can die like a dog.’

There was silence, as though the whole world was holding its breath and then Musgrave bent down slowly and picked up the weapon. He hefted the unfamiliar weight in his hand and then went into what seemed to be a parody of a fighting stance. Barnard grunted approvingly and took up his own position, looking at Musgrave across the point of his sword. The two men circled each other and then Musgrave rushed forward, knowing that he had one chance for survival and that was to finish this quickly.

He brought his sword down and kicked out at the same time. Barnard effortlessly parried the sword thrust but Musgrave’s foot connected with his knee and he yelled in pain. He dropped his guard and Musgrave struck again with his sword. It caught Barnard on the upper arm, cutting through the cloth of his tunic and drawing blood.

Barnard kicked out and they broke contact. He jabbed forward and Musgrave’s parry exposed his left side. Skilfully, Barnard slashed upwards, catching Musgrave on the ribs and opening him to the bone. Musgrave screamed in pain and dropped his sword.

The fight was over. Musgrave stood, his arms clutching his side and watched death approaching. Barnard stepped forward and in one swift movement, pushed the tip of his blade into Musgrave’s throat.

He was dead before his body hit the floor, blood gushing from the awful wound. The watchers said nothing as Barnard walked around the body. Then his wife spoke from the bed.

‘You were the better man, Little Musgrave. A better man than he who killed you. I will pray for your soul.’

Barnard put the point of his sword on Musgrave’s forehead.

‘How do you like him now?’ he sneered. ‘Would you kiss his cheeks and his chin now that there is no life within.’

She threw back the sheets and stood up straight and proud, naked as the day she was born, slim of hip and full breasted. Barnard’s men looked at her and there not one of them that was not filled with the same desire as had driven the man whose body now lay on the floor. She walked towards her husband.

‘It is well that I like his cheek and chin,’ she shouted. ‘It is well that I like his cold body better than I like you or any of your kind.’

The words were designed to humiliate him in front of the watching men, and he knew that the story of what had happened in this house would fill the taverns and drawing rooms of the county before the day was out. He felt a black rage fill his heart and raised the sword again.

Later, he would think that she had stepped towards him, as though welcoming the blow. He struck twice, the first through the breast, which drove her to the floor, and the second, the killing blow, to the head.

He looked around and saw the horror on the faces of the men. He pointed his sword at them.

'This is your fault. Yours. You should have stopped me. Why did you not stop me?'

But there was no answer.

'Who among you would have done any different? Who?'

Again, nobody spoke. He stared into their eyes and saw only contempt and hatred.

'Dig a grave,' he cried, 'and put the bodies in. Put the woman on top; she is of better breeding.'

The men did not move and he shouted, 'Do as I tell you. You are my men.'

It was his steward who spoke. 'We are your men no longer, Lord Bernard. What we have witnessed here was murder. There is dirty work now to be done and you must do it yourself. For you have just killed one of the finest men that ever rode a horse and the finest woman that we have ever known.'

He walked past Barnard and, one at a time, the others followed him.