

2

Through the archway beneath Cromwell's Tower at the centre of Haver House, Nigel Chatfield could see his relatives standing around his aunt's freshly dug grave, singing hymns. He was enraged. The execution of Aunt Margaret was supposed to bring the rest of the community back in line after Mark and his followers had escaped. But not only had his subjects disobeyed two of his decrees — banning religion and walking on the grass in Lawn Court — they had dug the grave in the middle of his precious bowling green. And Mark had left him that impertinent note warning him that he would return one day, and hold Nigel accountable for his dictatorship.

He hated these relatives of his, but as the Chatfield blood line seemed the only one to have survived the pandemic that had swept the globe three and a half years previously, he had no choice but to make the most of them. As long as he kept them scared, they made good enough servants.

The fifteen adults and twelve children gathered around the grave were lost in their own grief. Their faces were strained and white. Most

of the women and children were crying. The four adult males — the brothers Duncan and Cameron Steed, and their cousins Paul Grey and Warren Dalton — were fighting to hold back their own tears. An hour earlier, their anger at the execution of their aunt had fortified them. They had ignored Nigel's demands to stop singing hymns and he had hurried from the courtyard with his sons Jasper and Damian at his heels. They had also ignored the threat of his other surviving son, Greg, standing machine gun at the ready on the parapet above. They had continued singing their hymns as they pushed the cart containing Aunt Margaret's decapitated body through the archway beneath Cromwell's Tower to Lawn Court, where they had dug a grave and lowered her body into the earth with due reverence.

The singing petered out as the mourners saw Nigel and his sons approaching.

'What do you think you're doing?' yelled Nigel, his bald head thrust aggressively forward on his bull-like neck, his thumbs stuck in the belt strapping his corpulent belly.

No one answered. Nigel's three sons stood menacingly beside him, their long blond hair swirling about their shoulders. The eldest, Jasper, had a neat moustache and an athletic figure, most closely justifying the title of knight and the address of 'Sir' that Nigel insisted his relatives use when speaking to his sons. The less impressive Damian tugged at his goatee beard, and the youngest — the overweight Greg — scratched the straggly clumps of hair dotting his chin.

'I said, what do you think you're doing?' Nigel yelled again.

The bravest, the former barrister Diana Morgan, opened her mouth to speak. But she was also the most astute. She appeared to change her mind and remained silent.

Everyone looked at red-haired Duncan Steed. But Duncan looked frightened, though not as frightened as Paul Grey. The nervous facial tic Paul had developed since living at Haver was so severe that it seemed he would be unable to speak coherently even if he had found the courage to do so.

'We are celebrating the life of my mother.' Warren Dalton spoke up, but softly. Nigel was surprised. Warren had always been an insignificant figure in the community, a man living in the shadow of

his cousins, content to remain in the background and keep himself out of trouble. Somewhere he had found the strength to speak, as if some of his mother's spirit had been transferred to him with her death.

Warren's bravery encouraged his cousin, the bespectacled Cameron Steed, to speak also. 'Who you murdered,' he accused Nigel.

'Who *Damian* murdered,' corrected Warren.

Damian withdrew his pistol from his holster and pointed it wildly at Warren's head.

'Who you murdered,' Warren repeated.

His courage seemed to be infectious. 'Sir Damian murdered Great-Aunt Margaret,' shouted the tiny figure of his great-niece Mary-Claire Grey from the back of the crowd. The seven-year-old girl, a stocky little thing with dark, close-cropped hair and a cheeky face, had also been blessed with the old lady's strength of mind.

Buoyed up by his granddaughter's outburst, Paul tried to nod his head in agreement, but with his head jerking so vigorously, Nigel and his sons failed to notice.

'All of you — get back to your quarters,' Nigel said firmly.

Duncan was the first to move off.

'No,' Warren said resolutely. 'This is my mother's funeral.'

'That's right,' agreed Cameron.

There was a muted murmur of agreement from Cameron's adult daughters Rebecca and Kimberley, who were standing immediately behind him. Fearing their father was losing control, Jasper and Greg drew their pistols.

'Do as you're told — go back to your quarters!' yelled Damian.

The captive members of the Chatfield family knew Damian was unpredictable. They all despised him. They all feared him. With the exception of Warren, Cameron and little Mary-Claire, they began to shuffle away.

'Things can't go back to the way they were,' Warren said defiantly. 'It's time for a new beginning. Like Mark said before he and the others escaped, we deserve democracy.'

The remainder of the community turned and began to edge back.

‘Deserve? You *deserve*?’ ranted Nigel.

‘That’s right,’ Cameron insisted. ‘We want a say in how our own lives are run. We will not be controlled by you or your sons any longer.’

His words were followed by a chorus of agreement.

Two shots rang out almost simultaneously. Warren, shot through the chest by Jasper, slumped to his knees. Cameron’s brains and spectacles, both shattered by the near point-blank shot from Greg’s pistol, splattered onto his daughters, their own spectacles saving their eyes from the flying glass.

Damian continued to fire as the remaining members of the community ran off, screaming. His final shot was directed at Mary-Claire. He missed, and by the time he reloaded she had disappeared from view.

Before the fleeing men, women and children could reach the safety of their quarters around Lawn Court, Warren’s niece Charlene and Diana’s daughter Melanie had also been killed. Paul’s daughter Bridget lay writhing on the grass, crying pitifully. Paul tried desperately to reach her, but was forced back by a volley of shots from Damian.

‘Breakfast will be at the usual time tomorrow morning,’ Nigel yelled to the frightened figures cowering beneath the windowsills in the buildings surrounding Lawn Court.

‘Don’t be late,’ Damian shouted.

The revolt was over.