

“Highly entertaining, refreshing, and witty—readers will thoroughly enjoy the banter between the wallflower and her captain in this beautifully written, delightful, and faith-filled romance of two endearing hearts.”

GRACE HITCHCOCK, award-winning author of *My Dear Miss Dupré*, *Her Darling Mr. Day*, and *His Delightful Lady Delia*

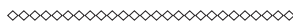
“A heartwarming tale that’s sure to inspire and delight readers. Theodosia’s determination to protect her friend’s daughter makes her an admirable heroine and a worthy intended for Captain Daniel Balfour. They share delightful banter, and Carolyn’s descriptions bring the era and Northumberland setting to life, making this a memorable story to savor.”

CARRIE TURANSKY, award-winning author of *No Ocean Too Wide* and *No Journey Too Far*

“*Dawn’s Untrodden Green* is a sweetly woven romance, with threads of family, faith, and Heyer-esque humor. Carolyn Miller writes with warmth and authenticity, making Theodosia and Daniel’s love story a pleasure to read. I thoroughly enjoyed it!”

MIMI MATTHEWS, *USA Today* best-selling author

PRAISE FOR
REGENCY WALLFLOWERS



“Best-selling author Carolyn Miller is back with a fresh series that will not only thrill readers eager for more of her work, but bring in new fans looking for beautiful writing, fascinating research, deftly woven love stories, and real faith lived out in the Regency period.”

Midwest Book Review

“The Regency Wallflowers series has a message of redemption and forgiveness which is sure to resonate with readers of inspirational romance.”

ALISSA BAXTER, author of *The Earl’s Lady Geologist*

“Fans of Julie Klassen and Abigail Wilson will delight in this newest offering from Regency-favorite Carolyn Miller.”

JOANNA DAVIDSON POLITANO, author of
A Midnight Dance

“Carolyn Miller’s authentic portrayal of real-life struggles, raw pain, and faith in the midst of difficult circumstances will resonate with readers. Heartfelt and satisfying . . . sure to captivate fans of inspirational Regency romance.”

AMANDA BARRATT, author of *My Dearest Dietrich*, *The White Rose Resists*, and *Within These Walls of Sorrow*

“[Miller] brings Regency England to life with a charming and inspiring romance that is sure to warm readers’ hearts.”

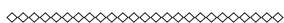
CARRIE TURANSKY, best-selling author of *No Ocean Too Wide* and *No Journey Too Far*

“Miller’s latest captivating romance is rooted beautifully by the threads of redemption and hope.”

ABIGAIL WILSON, author of *Twilight at Moorington Cross*

Dawn's
Untrodden Green

REGENCY BRIDES:
A LEGACY OF GRACE



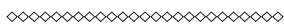
The Elusive Miss Ellison
The Captivating Lady Charlotte
The Dishonorable Miss DeLancey

REGENCY BRIDES:
A PROMISE OF HOPE



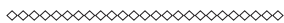
Winning Miss Winthrop
Miss Serena's Secret
The Making of Mrs. Hale

REGENCY BRIDES:
DAUGHTERS OF AYNLEY



A Hero for Miss Hatherleigh
Underestimating Miss Cecilia
Misleading Miss Verity

REGENCY WALLFLOWERS



Dusk's Darkest Shores
Midnight's Budding Morrow
Dawn's Untrodden Green

REGENCY WALLFLOWERS



Dawn's
Untrodden Green

CAROLYN MILLER



KREGEL
PUBLICATIONS

Dawn's Untrodden Green

© 2023 by Carolyn Miller

Published by Kregel Publications, a division of Kregel Inc., 2450 Oak Industrial Dr. NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49505. www.kregel.com.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—for example, electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise—without the publisher's prior written permission or by license agreement. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

The persons and events portrayed in this work are the creations of the author, and any resemblance to persons living or dead is purely coincidental.

Scripture quotations are from the King James Version.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Miller, Carolyn, 1974- author.

Title: Dawn's untrodden green / Carolyn Miller.

Description: Grand Rapids, MI : Kregel Publications, [2023] | Series: Regency Wallflowers

Identifiers: LCCN 2022049120 (print) | LCCN 2022049121 (ebook) | ISBN 9780825446559 (print) | ISBN 9780825468513 (Kindle) | ISBN 9780825476853 (epub)

Classification: LCC PR9619.4.M565 D39 2023 (print) | LCC PR9619.4.M565 (ebook) | DDC 823/.92--dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2022049120>

LC ebook record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2022049121>

ISBN 978-0-8254-4665-9, print

ISBN 978-0-8254-7685-3, epub

ISBN 978-0-8254-6851-3, Kindle

Printed in the United States of America

23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 / 5 4 3 2 1

To all those who dare to dream.

*. . . on the shores of darkness there is light,
And precipices show untrodden green,
There is a budding morrow in midnight,
There is a triple sight in blindness keen.*

John Keats, "To Homer"

Chapter 1

WOOLER
NORTHUMBERLAND
1812

Stapleton Court of Wooler had, in its day, oft been described as a monument to quiet pretension. The Elizabethan farmhouse boasted more chimneys and mullioned windows than humble people thought it ought and was nestled behind antique stone-pillared gates within a picturesque landscape that included the hilly backdrop of the Cheviots. These days, however, the buildings and gardens held an air of weary resignation, or perhaps that was merely evoked by the occupants within.

Theodosia Stapleton eyed a stubborn string of cobwebs as she made her way down Stapleton's grand staircase to the dining room, which was, like everything in this house, presided over by her grandfather, General Theodore Henry Stapleton. The decorated war hero, whose only son had died before Theo could grow of an age to remember him, had surprised the county by showing his largesse in allowing his daughter-in-law, Letitia Stapleton, and her wee children to live with him.

"So kind, so very kind," Letitia had always insisted to her daughters in broken, tear-filled whispers whenever the general's gout was playing up and his manners were less than pleasant. Theo suspected most of the villagers believed his cantankerous ways were the norm rather than the exception. Not for nothing had she overheard comments about "General Contrary" and his parsimonious ways. But Theo knew better, and it was

proven in his agreement to take in the orphaned child of their neighbor . . . even if it was a temporary thing.

Theo drew inside the oak-panelled dining room, nodding to the room's two occupants, and resumed her place at the mahogany dining table, at the right hand of her grandfather, opposite her mother, the table seating she had always known.

"Has the Mannering lass stopped her infernal crying yet?" the general asked, eyes glinting, bushy grey brows lowered, a piece of beef suspended on his fork.

"Yes." Theo sipped from her glass. "She's asleep now. Annie made poor Rebecca some warm milk, and I stayed with her until she drank it and dropped off to sleep." But only after Theo held her hand, whispering prayers of comfort, as the last of winter's winds shrieked and moaned.

"The poor little dear, losing both parents within a year." Mama's faded blue eyes shone with tears. "How dreadful she must feel."

"Indeed." Sorrow twisted within, pressing fresh fingers of pain through her chest, up her throat, to the back of her eyes. Theo blinked, swallowed the hard ball of emotion, and sought to remember Clara Mannering was in a better place now, with her Lord and Savior, and one day Theo would see her neighbor again.

"Such a silly nonsense, carrying on so." The general rested his elbows on the starched tablecloth. "I have never heard the like, caterwauling in that way."

"Not everyone deals with grief in the same manner." Theo's gaze lifted to eye her grandfather squarely. "I think it shows a tremendous deal of heart that she would mourn her mother so. I'm sure it will take many days before she will not feel like weeping, and until then, we should remember she is in many ways a child."

"I dare say you would never have acted in such a way," he muttered, with a sharp, quick look that, if she was in vain frame of mind, she might even consider possessed a trace of pride.

"I'm afraid I cannot remember my papa, so have not known what depths of emotion the loss of a parent might lead to."

Her mother's bottom lip quivered, a sure sign that poor Rebecca would soon not be the only one weeping.

Theo sighed within, ruing her o'er hasty words. But she could not allow the evening to get maudlin, so turned to her grandfather and forced brightness into her tone. "I do think your agreeing to have her stay with us is quite the most charitable thing you could have done. Thank you."

"Yes, well." As if embarrassed by her words, he plunged his fork into his beef, avoiding eye contact and mumbling incomprehensibly into his gravy-stained beard.

"We couldn't let such a waif of a thing live at Mannering House alone." Mama dabbed at her eyes with her napkin.

"Indeed we could not." Not dear Clara's only child. Not their nearest neighbor. And especially not with the house in such a state of disrepair.

"Those dreadful peacocks Mannering insisted on keeping." Mama shuddered. "They always sound like a woman is crying, or dying, or some such thing. Poor child. Can you imagine growing up listening to that every waking hour?"

Theo was glad she need not. "I'm hopeful that in time we shall be able to distract poor Becky with reminders that not everything in this world is so very sad and sorry. But as for us, we should give further thought as to her future."

Grandfather grunted agreement, echoed by her mother's soft affirmative. "Has she given word yet as to who is the next of kin?"

Theo nodded, refraining from pointing out she'd mentioned this before. "Clara had a brother. He is in the army."

His countenance brightened. "And what's his name?"

"A Captain Balfour, I believe."

"Balfour, Balfour." His brow knit in concentration, his fork hovering in the air, as time expanded into a length that would distress more impatient people.

Theo exchanged glances with her mother, then refocused on her meal. Grandfather's recollections of army colleagues and events had often formed the substance of their mealtime conversations. Attempts to redirect discussion to other topics sometimes met with derisive snorts as he struggled to remember exactly which battlefield or London soldiers' club he'd encountered the man or situation.

She sliced her beef, the sputtering candlelight reminding her to speak

to Annie about checking the supply of candles. They might have but recently escaped the drear of wintry darkness, but the weather in this part of England could never be relied upon to recall the relentless turn of the calendar.

"My dear," Mama said, as the general's silent cogitations continued, "do you think we should make over those drapes in dear Rebecca's room? I'm afraid it must seem so outdated for her, poor pet. It has been so long since we've had a young girl in the place," she added with a wistful sigh.

Becky Mannering might, at sixteen, be considered more a young lady than a girl, but she was far more youthful than Theo's own advanced age of one and thirty.

"Perhaps we should wait until we know what her uncle wishes to do." And what the general—and their meagre household allowance—would permit. "But I agree, it would be good to do what we can to make her feel as comfortable as possible."

"Speaking of visitors, do you think Seraphina might be persuaded to a visit?"

She might if her sister's nipcheese solicitor husband wanted to prove solicitous to his wife's family for once. Theo kept such thoughts behind her teeth and murmured a noncommittal "Perhaps."

"I simply long to see her." Mama sighed plaintively. "It has been such an age, and—"

"Are you sure it wasn't Captain Daniel Balfour?" Grandfather interrupted. "Did something heroic. His decisiveness saved a hundred men or some such deed."

Theo's lips tweaked in rueful apology as she shifted attention to her grandfather. She had been too filled with cares and responsibilities to remember every whispered word that Clara had uttered. "I think that was his name, but I'm afraid I cannot recall his exploits."

"You cannot recall?" he asked incredulously, as if he himself had not struggled to do so these past minutes. "You cannot remember that it was his quick wits that shielded his men from enemy fire while on the Peninsular?"

"There are so many stories of heroic exploits—"

"None like his!" the general insisted. "I can never understand why

you don't pay attention to what truly matters," he said gruffly. But from the way his moustache lifted, a smile lurked beneath his beard, hinting of the fondness she had always known behind his oft-brusque exterior.

She swallowed a wry smile—open emotion was never welcomed at the table—and said carefully, "I think what truly matters is that Becky's uncle is informed about his sister's death as soon as possible."

"You will write?"

"Yes. He will be too late for the funeral, of course, but I'll write to him again tonight." Clara's whispered request had led Theo to write, informing him of his sister's illness not so long ago. Her heart sorrowed. How much harder would it be to pen—and read—the newest state of affairs.

"I'll see it gets franked and sent off tomorrow."

"Thank you."

The general shook his head. "A bad business, this."

"Poor little mite. Two parents gone in a matter of months. It is so sad, so very, very sad." Mama's voice wavered again.

"We must do all we can to make her time here as easy and pleasant as possible." Theo eyed her grandfather. "Even if she is inclined at times to be weepy."

"That's enough sauce from you, little puss."

A smile escaped—"little" she had not been these past eighteen years—and she turned her attention to her meal while her heart continued to pray for the poor girl upstairs who had wept herself to sleep.

Dear Lord, send Your comfort to poor Becky. Be with her uncle. Lord, be with us all.



Becky's tears of the first week eased into a general melancholy, something Theo attempted to alleviate by offering the girl distractions. But the delights of puppies and spring lambs and what tired treasures Wooler's small shops offered only boosted Becky's spirits for a short while before the sadness settled again.

As for herself, Theo was at a loss as to know what to do. Until Captain Balfour replied, she was responsible for Becky's welfare, and it seemed

society in general was at once torn between astonishment at her grandfather's willingness for Theo to assume such a role and relief that they need not assume the task themselves.

"But my dear!" Lady Bellingham exclaimed during one of her near-daily visits to Stapleton. "I understand you were close to the girl's mother, and of course, here at Stapleton you are Mannering's nearest neighbors, but how can one expect a young lady of one and thirty to know how to care for a young girl?"

Theo smiled, shrugging off the sting of the thinly veiled advice from the squire's wife. "I may not be the best qualified, but I was young once myself."

"Oh, I know you were—I mean, are! Oh, you cannot try to pretend to not understand what I mean, passing yourself off as if in your decline, wearing the cap like you're an old maid, when every young man in the village would pick up the handkerchief should one be thrown."

Theo's smile grew wry, and she resisted the temptation to touch her marred cheek. "Please spare my blushes, Lady Bellingham."

"Blushes, indeed. You know it is so. And *I* know it is most commendable for you to wish to care for the child. But what does it mean for your future?"

"I do not see this as a burden, nor as something I will do forever. Captain Balfour will return one day, and then we shall know what to do."

"Oh, but what if he is killed?"

"Then Rebecca shall remain with us until she is married," Theo responded calmly.

That's what Mr. Cleever, the Mannering solicitor, had approved and said was most appropriate when he had called to inform them that Rebecca Mannering was a young lady of independent means—or would be when the house was sold and she reached her majority. Such news they and Mr. Cleever had determined to keep to themselves, sure this information would only prove food for those of a mind to fortune hunting and those idle tongues that already wagged too quickly over the poor girl with her famous uncle.

For famous he had turned out to be. Action had seen his name grace dispatches from the front, reported in newspapers the length and breadth

of Britain. The general had, unsurprisingly, been the first to point it out. His unguarded conversation around Lady Bellingham had been enough to prick that lady's ears and cause a gush of high-pitched emotion that had soon propelled him to scowl and mutter about the indecency of visitors whose shrieks drove a man from the comfort of his room.

Not that the squire's wife seemed to notice. Or care. "Truly? Such a hero is our dear sweet Rebecca's only living relative? Oh, how wonderful!"

"One can hardly think either of them feel such a thing at this moment," Theo gently reproved.

"Oh, yes, yes, of *course*. But imagine! We will likely soon be visited by such a man! Oh, I'm sure he must be handsome—all heroes are, are they not, Miss Stapleton?"

"In books, perhaps," she murmured.

Lady Bellingham tittered. "Oh, how very droll you are."

How very levelheaded. She could count on one finger the number of truly handsome men she had met, or at least that matched the image conjured up in forlorn dreams. The men of her village—save for her grandfather—were for the most part farmers, and their bluff manners and weatherworn looks were hardly those of a charming prince. Not that one could always trust a handsome face . . . Her heart twisted.

Enough of the past.

"Regardless of his outward appearance, I think it's most important for dear Becky to feel like she is loved. She is such a sweet, tender-hearted girl, and we are doing all we can to help her through this difficult time."

"I'm sure you are. You and your mother have always been softhearted that way. And after your own poor papa's demise, well, I can imagine you understand something of her pain."

There seemed little point in mentioning that Theo's memories of her father were at naught. "If you would, continue to hold Becky in your prayers, Lady Bellingham."

"Oh, of course. And if there's anything I can do, please let me know."

Theo held her tongue, sure that telling her ladyship that the best thing she could do would be to refrain from further speculation would meet with deaf or, worse, offended ears.

Not long after the squire's wife had departed, Becky crept in, accepting Theo's invitation to sit beside her on the sofa and rest her fair head on Theo's shoulder. "I heard what you said before," she whispered.

"Which part, dearest? I'm afraid I say so many things sometimes it is hard to recall." Her lips curved. "Or perhaps that's just the effect of listening to Lady Bellingham."

"She talks such a lot, doesn't she?"

"She has a good heart. Now, what thing in particular did I say that you took exception to?"

"No, no! I could never take exception to anything you might say, dear Miss Stapleton."

"I think you could if you knew me better, but as you don't, I shan't tease you anymore. What did I say that concerns you, my dear?"

"About my being sweet." Becky's dark eyes glistened. "I'm not sweet. Not at all. You know how much I loved Mama, but sometimes I can't help but feel so very angry with her. Why couldn't she fight harder against the illness? Why did she have to leave me?"

How to explain that the sordid legacy of one's father had led his wife to contract a disease more commonly associated with those ladies who plied their trade at night, a disease that had seemingly eluded him while ravaging poor Clara's body and mind.

Poor Clara. Poor Becky. She smoothed the girl's golden hair. "Oh, darling, you know she loved you very much and had no wish to depart this world. I know it doesn't seem fair."

"No." Becky burrowed into Theo's shoulder. "It *isn't* fair."

As Becky wept Theo prayed for peace to fill Becky's mind and heart, for the weight of grief to lift, for these savage tugs of sorrow to recede.

A shuddery breath, two, and the tears eased. "I'm so sorry, Miss Stapleton. I have made your sleeve damp."

"It is no matter. I have another."

A chuckle pushed through the sniffles. "You are so good to me, Miss Stapleton."

"Theo. Have we not agreed that you are to call me 'Theo'? Theodosia is such a mouthful of a name, is it not? And Miss Stapleton makes me sound far too much like a maidenly aunt that I'm afraid I can never

subscribe to such a thing—and not just because my dear sister has yet to produce any progeny.”

“Well, yes.” Becky’s broken smile quickly faded. “But I do not like to hear of my uncle as being some kind of hero. He is not.”

“I’m afraid nearly all of England would disagree with you, my dear,” Theo said gently. “I’m assured by my grandfather that his actions were such that he saved hundreds of lives.”

“Perhaps he did. But my father could never stand him. Did you ever meet him when he visited when I was a little girl?”

“I do not believe that I did.”

“He and Father had the most awful row. Father said he was a bully, someone who insisted on getting his own way, and would not let a man take care of his own family.”

Theo nodded but kept her lips fastened. From the way Becky talked, he seemed a fearsome monster indeed. But unlike one bound by cords of filial affection, she could imagine the former owner of Mannering would take exception to his own bullying tactics being brought to task. As for the irony of Francis Mannering declaring his interest in family responsibility . . .

“Oh, Miss Stapleton—I mean, Theo—please don’t make me go and stay with him. I could not bear it.”

“To be frank, I do not think it would quite suit him at this time. You are a *little* young, perhaps, to be forced to follow the drum.”

Another sniffling giggle. “But when he writes, he might insist I leave, and I could not bear to leave you.”

“One day you will have to.” Theo drew her own handkerchief from her sleeve and offered it to Becky, who accepted it with alacrity. “Take heart, my dear. One’s memories of a person are rarely borne out as true. You will likely find your uncle much more personable than you recall.”

“I doubt it.”

“Regardless, until your uncle writes, you may rest assured that you are safe and protected here.”

But Theo’s chest tensed, as if protesting her words. It had been weeks now, and still he had not written, which lent weight to Becky’s doubts about the true honor of the supposed hero.

Theo's grandfather had assured her that enough time had passed for her letter to arrive and an answer to be penned and returned. So where was his reply? What had he to say?

She stifled her worries, reminding herself that God was in control. They would find out soon, she was sure.

Her smile faltered. Well, she hoped.



The next week saw the arrival of a letter. The scrawl was very blunt:

Mr. Stapleton,

Thank you for your care and concern for my sister and niece. I intend to send my man of business to visit shortly, as soon as duties permit. Such future plans will be discussed then.

Yours etc.,

D. Balfour

Theo frowned over the opening appellation. Had she been so careless in her previous letter that *Theodosia* could appear as *Theodore*? Mama had always decried her penmanship, as if she blamed that for Theo's unwedded state. Not that it mattered. What mattered was that she had the implied consent of Becky's remaining relative to care for her until such matters may be otherwise arranged.

A sound at the morning room's door drew her head up, and she offered Becky a greeting.

Becky glanced at the paper. "Mr. Siddons said the post had come."

"Indeed it has. And there's something that affects you."

"Is that from my uncle at last?"

"Yes."

"May I see it?"

"Of course." Theo handed over the short missive.

“Hmph.” Becky frowned as she read it, then glanced up. “See? I told you. He doesn’t even wish to see me! He is rude and inconsiderate.”

“Because he wrote a letter in a style so matter-of-fact? Come now, you can’t hold a man’s inferior letter writing skills as indicative of his general character.”

“You’d be surprised,” Becky said darkly.

Theo suppressed a smile. “I would hope that I not be judged simply because I might not be so flowery in my descriptions as some prefer. In fact,” she added thoughtfully, “I feel quite certain my sister is not impressed by my lack of detailing of the gowns I wear or the arrangement of my hair. I am sure my correspondence is forever a sad disappointment to her.”

“You could never be, Miss—Theo.”

“Very good. You will remember to call me as such one day, I hope.”

The wavering smile settled into lines of petulance. “I wish *you* were my aunt.”

“But as that cannot be, we best turn our attention to something more apropos. I know! You might teach me something about your trick with arranging your hair like so. It really is most becoming and suits you so very well.” Theo admired the glossy blonde curls spilling sweetly from Becky’s topknot. “I’m afraid that I have never quite mastered how to make one’s ringlets last longer than an hour. Mine always fall flat within minutes.”

“That’s because your hair is so thick.”

“Only too true, I’m afraid.” Theo sighed. “Sometimes I fear for my comb, that it will get lost forever in my mane. I’m sure there are some pins lost in there for years.”

Becky giggled before protesting, “But it is such a pretty color.”

“It is kind of you to say so, but I’m afraid many would disagree with you.”

“How silly! As if one can be responsible for the color of one’s hair. You cannot be responsible for it being red.”

“No. Though I am assured by my sister that its hue could be diminished by the careful application of lemon juice. She is such a believer in

the power of lemon juice, she believes it might even make my freckles disappear.”

“I think your freckles hardly signify.”

“They do to my sister,” Theo said with wryness. She’d once overheard Seraphina’s pithy description of Theo’s person. *Sadly bran-faced.*

“Forgive me, but I think your sister is very wrong to say such things.” Indignation colored Becky’s words.

“I happen to agree with you. But as I prefer to not think on such misery, let us turn our minds to other things. Perhaps our spirits would benefit from a walk.”

A walk in the fresh air over hills might blow away some of the dusty cobwebs of the soul.



As the carriage clattered over the causeway, Captain Daniel Balfour settled back against the squabs, smiling a little as he thought on his friends, one older, one more new. His visit to Langley House—although the moniker *castle* would be more apt—had proved a chance to get to know James and Sarah Langley far more than he’d anticipated, with all kinds of drama proving that the battlefield was not the only place where danger lurked.

He’d enjoyed meeting James’s wife. Had marveled at the transformation of his friend. How wonderful that such a sinner could see salvation, that God could choose to reform a rake. But that same impulse that had propelled Daniel to hasten his arrival at Langley House, thus witnessing the doctor’s unfortunate fall and protecting his friend from the noose, now also urged him further north. He withdrew the crumpled paper, flattening it against his thigh. The handwriting and direction in the upper left corner were unfamiliar, but the scrawled words inside he could almost recite.

It is with profound regret that I write on behalf of your sister, Clara Mannering, to inform you that she has recently fallen extremely ill. Whilst all is being done for her, I would strongly encourage you to visit

Wooler at your earliest convenience. Please be assured that both Clara and your niece, Rebecca, are being cared for at Stapleton Court.

*Yours truly,
Theodore Stapleton*

Clara.

Regret crossed his heart. He should have tried harder to stay in touch over the years, but with war and his career, and after that last visit when he'd been told in no uncertain terms just how poorly his brother-in-law, Francis, thought of Daniel's low connections, he had made little effort over the years, save to answer the rare letter from his sister.

Of course, that might have been as much about protecting his sister and niece from another unfortunate scene. During their last encounter, Daniel had not held back from succinct observations about his brother-in-law's commitment to his marriage vows, a fact Francis had not appreciated. Still, Daniel should have made more of an effort. Especially after Francis's death. He could only hope he wasn't too late now.

Glimpses of countryside flashed by, and his mind turned to his recent time in London. He was a military man, and not cut out for the parties and social intercourse his awards apparently demanded he participate in. Friends like Lieutenant Musgrave excelled in societal discourse, but Daniel's overly developed sense of irony kept him from drawing quite so much pleasure.

He had simply been doing his duty, after all. There was no need for phrases like those uttered by his superiors and repeated by the King about "invincible bravery" and "determined devotion to the honor of His Majesty's arms." After the King's commendation at St. James, he had been hounded by people, inundated with invitations to parties galore.

Duty had forced attendance at a few such functions, but he'd been sickened by the show. Those claiming an acquaintanceship, those offering extravagant dinners that would feed his men for a week, he had little wish for. He'd grown only too aware of those that had much and those who did not. Few, if any, of these people would give him a moment's thought if it wasn't for King George's medal glinting on his chest.

"But everyone wants to meet the great hero," Lieutenant Jeremy Musgrave had entreated during one particularly loathsome London event when Daniel had protested and made his feelings known. "The young ladies are all agog with excitement. You need only throw the handkerchief and take your pick."

"What a coxcomb such a picture suggests."

"I did not mean you were, only that you could."

"I could be a coxcomb? Why, thank you. I think."

Musgrave chuckled. "Always so quick to take a miff, aren't you? That must be how you have got on so well these past years."

"A secret I am loath to share."

His subordinate grinned. "But in all seriousness, may I ask how long you plan to remain in London? I know you can hardly bear to tear yourself away from such joys as these festivities, as well as the young ladies wishing to know the famous captain and perhaps be considered Mrs. Balfour."

Daniel cut him a look.

Musgrave's amusement sounded again. "But I should very much like to show you off to my family back in Leicestershire. And come to think of it, I do have a younger sister who is dying to meet you."

"While I appreciate your interest in my matrimonial prospects, I assure you I have no immediate plans to embark on such a pleasant task. I have family matters to attend to in Northumberland."

"That great distance?"

"That great distance." He'd written at first to say his man of business would attend but, after sending the missive, had realized the callousness of such an action, and thus he'd determined to visit, a decision affirmed when he'd received the legal summons to speak on James Langley's behalf in Northumberland. Wooler was only a day or so's carriage drive away from Langley House. He would visit, see his sister and niece, attend to whatever needed doing, and within a week return south to London.

"Better you than me." The lieutenant's blue eyes had lit. "Perhaps on your return from your visit to the north, you will find need to stop in and see us at Thorpe Acre. We are not so very far from the North Road."

"Perhaps I will. But only if you promise not to have your sister thrown at my head."

Musgrave raised his brows. “Mariah? It isn’t likely. She’s only fourteen after all. You need a wife of greater years and sense than that.”

Daniel acquiesced, but inside his heart protested. He was wedded to the military and had no desire to marry. Felicitations to friends like James Langley and Adam Edgerton, who had found wives and settled down, but such was not for him.

The moor and treeless landscape beyond the window spoke clearly that he wasn’t in the tamed pastoral setting of his youth. The area here possessed a kind of wildness, something remote, something that seemed to call to him, much like Spain and Portugal had done, drawing him into adventure, into territory unexplored.

He was a loner, someone whose quick wits and sense of duty meant a quiet domestic life held no charm. He wanted to be doing, not wooing, and was happy in his life.

Such thoughts proved he did not need a wife at all.