# A Woman of Substance

Barbara Taylor Bradford

Published by HarperCollins

Extract

CHAPTER ONE

# *The Party*

*'The ambience in the dining room was decidedly romantic, had an almost fairytale quality . . . The flickering candlelight, the women beautiful in their elegant gowns and glittering jewels, the men handsome in their dinner jackets, the conversation brisk, sparkling, entertaining . . .'*

Voice of the Heart

The Bradfords' elegant fourteen-room apartment occupies the sixth floor of a 1930s landmark building overlooking Manhattan's East River. The approach is via a grand ground-floor lobby, classical in style, replete with red-silk chaise longues, massive wall-recessed urns, and busy uniformed porters skating around black marbled floors.

A mahogany-lined lift delivers visitors to the front door, which, on the evening of the party, lay open, leaving arrivals naked to the all-at-once gaze of the already gathered. Fortunately I had been warned about the possibility of this and had balanced the rather outré effect of my gift – a jar of Yorkshire moorland honey (my bees, Barbara's moor) – by cutting what I hoped would be a rather sophisticated, shadowy, Jack-the-Ripper dash with a high-collared leather coat. If I was successful, no one was impolite enough to mention it.

One is met at the door by Mohammed, aptly named spiriter away of material effects – coats, hats, even, to my chagrin, gifts. Barbara arrives and we move swiftly from reception area, which I would later see spills into a bar, to the drawing room, positioned centrally between dining room and library, and occupying the riverside frontage of an apartment which must measure all of five thousand square feet.

The immediate impression is of classical splendour – spacious rooms, picture windows, high ceilings and crystal chandeliers. These three main rooms, an enfilade and open-doored to one another that night, arise from oak-wood floors bestrewn with antique carpets, elegant ground for silk-upholstered walls hung with Venetian mirrors, and, as readers of her novels would expect, a European mix of Biedermeier and Art Deco furniture, Impressionist paintings and silk-upholstered chairs.

This is not, as it happens, the apartment that she draws on in her fiction. The Bradfords have been here for ten years only. Between 1983 and 1995 they lived a few blocks away, many storeys higher up, with views of the East River and exclusive Sutton Place from almost every room. But it was here that Allison Pearson came to interview Barbara in 1999, and, swept up in the glamour, took the tack that from this similarly privileged vantage point it is 'easy to forget that there is a world down there, a world full of pain and ugliness', while at the same time wanting some of it: 'Any journalist going to see Barbara Taylor Bradford in New York,' she wrote, 'will find herself asking the question I asked myself as I stood in exclusive Sutton Place, craning my neck and staring up at the north face of the author's mighty apartment building. What has this one-time cub reporter on the *Yorkshire Evening Post* got that I haven't?' It was a good starting point, but Allison's answer: 'Well, about $600 million,' kept the burden of her question at bay.

Before long the river draws my gaze, a pleasure boat all lit up, a full moon and the clear night sky, and even if Queens is not exactly the Houses of Parliament there is great breadth that the Thames cannot match, and a touch of mystery from an illuminated ruin, a hospital or sometime asylum marooned on an island directly opposite. It is indeed a privileged view.

Champagne and cocktails are available. I opt for the former and remember my daughter's advice to drink no more than the top quarter of a glass. She, an American resident whose childhood slumbers were disturbed by rather more louche, deep-into-the-night London dinner parties, had been so afeared that I would disgrace myself that she had earlier sent me a copy of Toby Young's *How To Lose Friends & Alienate People*.

I find no need for it here. People know one another and are immediately, but not at all overbearingly, welcoming. In among it all, Barbara doesn't just Europeanise the scene, she colloquialises it. For me that night she had the timbre of home and the enduring excitement of the little girl barely out of her teens who had not only the guts but the *joie de vivre* to get up and discover the world when that was rarely done. She is fun. I would have thought so then, and do so now, and at once see that no one has any reason for being here except to enjoy this in her too.

It is a fluid scene. People swim in and out of view, and finding myself close to the library I slip away and find a woman alone on the far side of the room looking out across the street through a side window. Hers is the first name I will remember, though by then half a dozen have been put past me. I ask the lady what can possibly be absorbing her. I see only another apartment block, more severe, brick built, stark even. 'I used to live there,' she says. 'My neighbour was Greta Garbo . . . until she died.' This, then, was where the greatest of all screen

goddesses found it possible finally to be alone, or might have done had it not been for my interlocutor.

'Where do you live now?' I venture.

She looks at me quizzically, as if I should know. 'In Switzerland and the South of France. New York only for the winter months.'

Then I make the faux pas of the evening, thankful that only she and I will have heard it: 'What on earth do you *do*?'

Barbara swoops to rescue me (or the lady) with an introduction. Garbo's friend is Rex Harrison's widow, Mercia. She does not *do*. Suddenly it seems that I have opened up the library; people are following Barbara in. I find myself being introduced to comedienne Joan Rivers and fashion designer Arnold Scaasi, whose history Barbara peppers with names such as Liz Taylor, Natalie Wood, Joan Crawford, Candice Bergen, Barbra Streisand, Joan Rivers of course, and, as of now, all the President's women. Barbara and movie-producer husband Bob are regular visitors to the White House.

It is November 2002 and talk turns naturally to Bob Woodward's *Bush at War*, which I am told will help establish GB as the greatest president of all time. I am asked my opinion and once again my daughter's voice comes like a distant echo – her second rule: no politics (she knows me too well). Barbara has already told me that she and Bob know the Bush family and I just caught sight of a photograph of them with the President on the campaign trail. They are Republicans. When I limit myself to saying that I can empathise with the shock and hurt of September 11, that I had a friend who died in the disaster, but war seems old-fashioned, so primitive a solution, Barbara takes my daughter's line and confesses that she herself makes it a rule not to talk politics with close friend Diahn McGrath, a lawyer and staunch Democrat, to whom she at once directs me.

Barbara is the perfect hostess, this pre-dinner hour the complete introduction that will allow me to relax at table, even to contribute a little. There's a former publishing executive, one Parker Ladd, with the demeanour of a Somerset Maugham, or possibly a Noel Coward (Barbara's champagne is good), who tells me he is a friend of Ralph Fields, the first person to give me rein in publishing, and who turns out – to my amazement – still to be alive.

So, even in the midst of this Manhattan scene I find myself comfortable anchorage not only in contact through Barbara with my home county of Yorkshire, but in fond memories of the publishing scene. It was not at all what I had expected to find. I am led in to dinner by a woman introduced to me as Edwina Kaplan, a sculptor and painter whose husband is an architect, but who talks heatedly (and at the time quite inexplicably) about tapes she has discovered of Winston Churchill's war-time speeches. Would people be interested? she wonders. Later I would see a couple of her works on Barbara's walls, but for some reason nobody thought it pertinent until the following day to explain that Edwina was Sir Winston's granddaughter, Edwina Sandys. Churchill, of course, is one of Barbara's heroes; in her childhood she contributed to his wife Clementine's Aid to Russia fund and still has one of her letters, now framed in the library.

The table, set for fourteen, is exquisite, its furniture dancing to the light of a generously decked antique crystal chandelier. The theme is red, from the walls to the central floral display through floral napkin rings to what seems to be a china zoo occupying the few spaces left by the flower-bowls, crystal tableware and place settings. Beautifully crafted porcelain elephants and giraffes peek out from between silver water goblets and crystal glasses of every conceivable size and design.

There are named place-cards and I begin the hunt for my

seat. I am last to find mine, and as soon as I sit, Barbara erupts with annoyance. She had specially chosen a white rose for my napkin ring – the White Rose of Yorkshire – which is lying on the plate of my neighbour to the right. Someone has switched my placement card! Immediately I wonder whether the culprit has made the switch to be near me or to get away, but as I settle, and the white rose is restored, my neighbour to the left leaves me in no doubt that I am particularly welcome. She tells me that she is a divorce lawyer, a role of no small importance in the marital chess games of the Manhattan wealthy. How many around this table might she have served? Was switching my place-card the first step in a strategy aimed at my own marriage?

I reach for the neat vodka in the smallest stem of my glass cluster and steady my nerves, turning our conversation to Bob and Barbara and soon realising that here, around this table, among their friends, are the answers to so many questions I have for my subject's Manhattan years. I set to work, both on my left and to my right, where I find Nancy Evans, Barbara's former publisher at the mighty Doubleday in the mid-1980s.

By this time we have progressed from the caviar and smoked salmon on to the couscous and lamb, and Barbara deems it time to widen our perspectives. It would be the first of two calls to order, on this occasion to introduce everyone to everyone, a party game rather than a necessity, I think, except in my case. Thumbnail sketches of each participant, edged devilishly with in-group barb, courted ripostes and laughter, but it was only when she came around the table and settled on me, mentioning the words 'guest of honour' that I realised for the first time that I was to be the star turn. I needn't have worried; there was at least one other special guest in Joan Rivers and she more than made up for my sadly unimaginative response.

Barbara tells me that Joan is very 'in' with Prince Charles:

'She greeted me with, "I've just come back from a painting trip . . . with Prince Charles." A friend of hers, Robert Higdon, runs the Prince's Trust. Joan is very involved with that, giving them money. So she was there with Charles and Camilla and the Forbses at some château somewhere. She always says, "Prince Charles likes me a lot; he always laughs at my jokes." But Joan is actually a very ladylike creature when she is off the stage, where she can be a bit edgy sometimes. In real life she is very sweet and she loves me and Bob.'

Joan is deftly egging Arnold Scaasi on as he heaps compliments on Barbara from the far end of the table. At the very height of his paean of praise, the comedienne rejoins that Arnold's regard for his hostess is clearly so great that he will no doubt wish to make one of his new creations a *gift* to her. The designer's face is a picture as he realises he has walked straight into a game at his expense, in which the very ethos of celebrity Manhattan is at stake. The table applauds his generosity, while Arnold begins an interminable descent into get-out: Alas, he does not have the multifarious talents of Joan to allow such generosity, he cannot *eat* publicity, etc., etc.

I felt I was being drawn in to Bob and Barbara's private world. When we first met I had said to Barbara that I would need to be so, and she had begun the process that night. After cheese and dessert, coffee and liqueurs were served in the drawing room and one after another of her guests offered themselves for interview.

The evening reminded me of the glittering birthday party in the Bavarian ski resort of Konigsee in *Voice of the Heart*. The table setting was remarkably similar – the candlelight and bowls of flowers that 'march down the centre of the table', interspersed with 'Meissen porcelain birds in the most radiant of colours', the table itself 'set with the finest china, crystal

and silver . . . The flickering candlelight, the women beautiful in their elegant gowns and glittering jewels, the men handsome in their dinner jackets . . .', and the conversation 'brisk, sparkling, entertaining . . .'

In *Act of Will* the Manhattan apartment is added to the mix. As guests of Christina Newman and her husband Alex in their Sutton Place apartment, we, like Christina's mother, Audra Crowther (née Kenton, and the fictional counterpart of Barbara's mother, Freda Taylor), are stung by the beauty of 'the priceless art on the walls, two Cézannes, a Gauguin . . . the English antiques with their dark glossy woods . . . bronze sculpture by Arp . . . the profusion of flowers in tall crystal vases . . . all illuminated by silk-shaded lamps of rare and ancient Chinese porcelains'.

Barbara's passion for antique furniture and modern Impressionist paintings was born of her own upbringing in Upper Armley, Leeds. 'My mother used to take me to stately homes because she loved furniture, she loved the patinas of wood. She often took me to Temple Newsam, just outside Leeds [where the gardens also found a way into the fiction – Emma Harte's rhododendron walk in *A Woman of Substance* is Temple Newsam's], and also to Harewood House, home of the Lascelles family . . . to Ripley Castle [Langley Castle in *Voice of the Heart*], and to Fountains Abbey and Fountains Hall at Studley Royal.' These were Barbara's childhood haunts, and it was Freda Taylor who first tuned her in to beautiful artefacts and styles of design, as if preparing her for the day when such things might be her daughter's: 'I always remember she used to say to me, "Barbara, keep your eyes open and then you will see all the beautiful things in the world."'

In *A Woman of Substance* the optimum architecture is Georgian, and Emma Harte's soul mate Blackie O'Neill's

dream is to have a house with Robert Adam fireplaces, Sheraton and Hepplewhite furniture, 'and maybe a little Chippendale'.

In *Angel*, Johnny dwells on the paintings and antiques in his living room – a Sisley landscape, a Rouault, a Cézanne, a couple of early Van Goghs, 'an antique Chinese coffee table of carved mahogany, French bergères from the Louis XV period, upholstered in striped cream silk . . . antique occasional tables . . . a long sofa table holding a small sculpture by Brancusi and a black basalt urn . . .' Costume designer Rose Madigan's attention is caught by a pair of dessert stands, 'each one composed of two puttis standing on a raised base on either side of a leopard, their plump young arms upstretched to support a silver bowl with a crystal liner', the silver made by master silversmith Paul Storr. There are George III candlesticks also by Storr dated 1815.

In *Everything to Gain*, Mallory Keswick feasts her eyes on a pair of elegant eighteenth-century French, bronze doré candlesticks, and her mother-in-law Diana buys antiques from the great houses of Europe, specialising in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century French furniture, decorative objects, porcelain and paintings.

For a dozen or so years leading up to publication of her first novel, Barbara wrote a nationwide syndicated column in America three times a week, about design and interior decor. She also wrote a number of books on interior design, furniture and art for American publishers Doubleday, Simon & Schuster and Meredith, long before the first commissioned *A Woman of Substance*. So, this design thing is, if not bred in the bone, part and parcel of her being.

But these mother and daughter trips out into the countryside had a more fundamental effect: they introduced Barbara to the landscape and spirit of Yorkshire, in which her fiction is

rooted. In *A Woman of Substance*, Barbara sets Fairley village, where teenager Emma Harte lives with her parents and brother, Frank, in the lee of the moors which rise above the River Aire as it finds its way down into Leeds. 'It was an isolated spot,' she wrote, 'desolate and uninviting, and only the pale lights that gleamed in some of the cottage windows gave credence to the idea that it was inhabited.'

Today she will say: 'Fairley village is Haworth, but not exactly; it is the Haworth of my imagination.' It could be anywhere in the area of the Brontës' Haworth, Keighley or Rombalds moors. Barbara knows the area well. It lies within the regular expeditionary curtilage of her childhood home in Leeds.

*The hills that rise up in an undulating sweep to dominate Fairley village and the stretch of the Aire Valley below it are always dark and brooding in the most clement of weather. But when the winter sets in for its long and deadly siege the landscape is brushstroked in grisaille beneath ashen clouds and the moors take on a savage desolateness, the stark fells and bare hillsides drained of all colour and bereft of life. The rain and snow drive down endlessly and the wind that blows in from the North Sea is fierce and raw. These gritstone hills, infinitely more sombre than the green moors of the nearby limestone dale country, sweep through vast silences broken only by the mournful wailing of the wind, for even the numerous little becks, those tumbling, dappled streams that relieve the monotony in spring and summer, are frozen and stilled.*

*This great plateau of moorland stretches across countless untenanted miles towards Shipley and the vigorous industrial city of Leeds beyond. It is amazingly feature-*

*less, except for the occasional soaring crags, a few blackened trees, shrivelled thorns, and abandoned ruined cottages that barely punctuate its cold and empty spaces. Perpetual mists, pervasive and thick, float over the rugged landscape, obscuring the highest peaks and demolishing the foothills, so that land and sky merge in an endless mass of grey that is dank and enveloping, and everything is diffused, without motion, wrapped in unearthly solitude. There is little evidence here of humanity, little to invite man into this inhospitable land at this time of year, and few venture out into its stark and lonely reaches.*

Near here, at Ramsden Ghyll (Brimham Rocks in the film), 'a dell between two hills . . . an eerie place, filled with grotesque rock formations and blasted tree stumps', Lord of the Manor Adam Fairley seduces Emma's mother, Elizabeth. There, years later, Adam's son Edwin Fairley makes love to teenage virgin Emma Harte, the Fairley Hall kitchen maid who conceives their illegitimate child, Edwina, this episode the impetus behind a succession of events that will realise Emma's destiny.

*The heather and bracken brushed against her feet, the wind caught at her long skirts so that they billowed out like puffy clouds, and her hair was a stream of russet-brown silk ribbons flying behind her as she ran. The sky was as blue as speedwells and the larks wheeled and turned against the face of the sun. She could see Edwin quite clearly now, standing by the huge rocks just under the shadow of the Crags above Ramsden Ghyll. When he saw her he waved, and began to climb upwards towards the ledge where they always sat protected from the wind, surveying the world far below. He did not look back, but went on climbing.*

*'Edwin! Edwin! Wait for me,' she called, but her voice was blown away by the wind and he did not hear. When she reached Ramsden Crags she was out of breath and her usually pale face was flushed from exertion.*

*'I ran so hard I thought I would die,' she gasped as he helped her up on the ledge.*

*He smiled at her. 'You will never die, Emma. We are both going to live for ever and ever at the Top of the World.'*

When Edwin abandons Emma she wreaks vengeance on the Fairleys, at length razing Fairley Hall to the ground. Meanwhile, the geography moves some miles to the north. Emma's centre in Yorkshire becomes Pennistone Royal, with its 'Renaissance and Jacobean architecture ... crenellated towers ... mullioned leaded windows' and 'clipped green lawns that rolled down to the lily pond far below the long flagged terrace'. The model is Fountains Hall on the Studley Royal Estate, Ripon, gateway to the Yorkshire Dales and another of Barbara's childhood haunts, while Pennistone Royal village is neighbouring Studley Roger.

Why should an author who left North Yorkshire as soon as she could, found success and glamour in London as a journalist on Fleet Street, married a Hollywood film producer and moved lock, stock and barrel to a swish apartment in New York City, return to her homeland for the setting of her first novel, a novel that featured a character whose spirit seems at first sight more closely in tune with the go-getting ethos of Manhattan than the dour North Yorkshire moors? The answer to that is, broadly, the text of this book.

Barbara's novels are novels principally of character. The dominant traits are the emotional light and shade of the landscape of her birth. When she came to write the novels, she had

no hesitation in anchoring them there, even though she was, by then, cast miles away in her Manhattan eyrie.

The county is blessed with large tracts of wide-open spaces – breathtaking views of varied character – so that even if you are brought up in one of the great industrial cities of the county, as Barbara was, you are but a walk away from natural beauty. There is a longing in her for the Yorkshire Dales which living in Manhattan keeps constantly on the boil. Like Mallory Keswick in *Everything to Gain*, 'I had grown to love this beautiful, sprawling county, the largest in England, with its bucolic green dales, vast empty moors, soaring fells, ancient cathedrals and dramatic ruins of mediaeval abbeys . . . Wensleydale and the Valley of the Ure was the area I knew best.'

The author's sense that landscape is more than topography may first have been awakened when Freda introduced Barbara to the wild workshop out of which Emily Brontë's Heathcliff was hewn. 'My mother took me to the Brontë parsonage at Haworth, and over the moors to Top Withens, the old ruined farm that was supposed to be the setting for *Wuthering Heights*. I loved the fact that this great work of literature was set right there. I loved the landscape: those endless, empty, windswept moors where the trees all bend one way. I loved Heathcliff.'

There are many allusions to *Wuthering Heights* in Barbara's novels. For example, *Voice of the Heart* tells of the making of a film of it. Shot in the late 1950s, the film stars heart-throb Terence Ogden as Heathcliff and dark-haired, volatile, manipulative Katharine Tempest as Catherine Earnshaw. *The Triumph of Katie Byrne* is about an actress whose first big break is to play Emily Brontë in a play-within-the-novel about life in Haworth parsonage. In *A Woman of Substance* the principal love story between Emma and Edwin Fairley, though Edwin is no Heathcliff, draws on Brontë's idea of Cathy's

sublimation of her self in Heathcliff and in the spirit of the moor: 'My love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath . . .' Brontë wrote. 'Nelly, I AM Heathcliff.' When Emma makes love with Edwin literally within 'the eternal rocks beneath' the moor – in a cave at Ramsden Ghyll – 'Emma thought she was slowly dissolving under Edwin, becoming part of him. Becoming him. They were one person now. She *was* Edwin.'

There is scarcely any landscape description as such in *Wuthering Heights*, but Emily Brontë (1818–48) was the greatest of all geniuses when it comes to evocation of place. Charlotte, her sister, worried what primitive forces Emily had released from the bleak moorland around Haworth, 'Whether it be right or advisable to create things like Heathcliff, I do not know,' she wrote, 'I scarcely think it is.' She compared her sister's genius to a genius for statuary, Heathcliff hewn out of 'a granite block on a solitary moor', his head, 'savage, swart, sinister', elicited from the crag, 'a form moulded with at least one element of grandeur . . . power'. The mark of genius was the writer working an involuntary act – 'The writer who possesses the creative gift owns something of which he is not always master – something that at times strangely wills and works for itself . . . With time and labour, the crag took human shape; and there it stands colossal, dark, and frowning . . . terrible and goblin-like . . .'

Readers of *A Woman of Substance* will know just how central this 'element of grandeur . . . power' is to the character of the woman of substance. Are we to understand that it is hewn from the same granite crag whence *Wuthering Heights* came? The natural assumption is that Barbara takes from the imagery of that 'nursling of the moors' and transports it to the boardrooms and salons of Manhattan, London and Paris. Certainly, wherever the settings of Barbara's novels take us,

her values are Yorkshire based, but hers is a moral focus on the *history* of place, and the spirit of Yorkshire speaks to her through its history as much as through Nature's demeanour.

She owes to her mother Freda's expeditions the sense of drama she shares with mediaeval historian Paul Murray Kendall from 'this region of wild spaces and fierce loyalties and baronial "menies" of fighting men, with craggy castles and great abbeys scattered over the lonely moors . . . a breeding ground of violence and civil strife'. Freda saw to that; she took her to castles – Middleham and Ripley – and to ruined abbeys – Kirkstall Abbey in Leeds and Fountains Abbey on the Studley Royal Estate in Ripon.

Centuries before Emily trod the Brontë 'heath, with its blooming bells and balmy fragrance', and created Heathcliff out of its darker aspects, a real-life personification of power came forth in Wensleydale, the most pastoral, gentle and green of all the Yorkshire Dales, and appealed to Barbara's imaginative sense that the spirit of place is the spirit of the past. For her, Yorkshire is a living ideological and architectural archive of the past, a palimpsest or manuscript on which each successive culture has written its own indelible, enduring text.

Wensleydale lies less than a half-hour's drive from Ripon, the tiny city north of Leeds where Freda was brought up. The dale has two centres of power, Middleham and Bolton castles, and it is the former that commanded her attentions. Middleham was the fifteenth-century stronghold of the Earl of Warwick, one of the most dynamic figures in English history. 'The castle at Middleham is all blown-out walls and windows that no longer exist,' Barbara told me, 'but Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick, who was raised there and lived there, was devastating as a young man, devastating in the sense that he was very driven and ambitious . . . and a great warrior.' Within 'the roofless halls and ghostly chambers' of Middleham Castle,

Freda introduced her daughter to the story of the Earl of Warwick, the 'reach' of his ambitions and many of the traits that would define her woman of substance. 'She told me all about Richard Neville, the Kingmaker . . . He put Edward IV on the throne of England, and he was one of the last great magnates. He held a fascination for my mother.'

Warwick's tireless constitution was rooted in the hard-bitten culture of the North. When Richard was a boy he lined up next to his father to repel attempts to wrest their lands away from them. At eighteen he won his spurs and was hardened further by action in skirmishes to avenge rustling and looting of villages within family territories. He was instinctively the Yorkshire man, but he was also someone who, like the woman of substance herself, was not bound to his home culture. The vitality of his character awakened him to recognise and seize his moment in the wider world when it occurred.

It was in the Wars of the Roses (1455–85), the struggle between the houses of York and Lancaster for the throne of England, that he really came to the fore. His role in changing the English monarchy in the fifteenth century affected England for two centuries afterwards, but his relevance is for all times, as his biographer Paul Murray Kendall records: 'The pilgrimage of mankind is, at bottom, a story of human energy, how it has been used and the ends it has sought to encompass . . . Warwick's prime meaning is the *reach* of human nature he exemplifies and – type of all human struggle – the combat he waged with the shape of things in his time.'

For Barbara the spirit is all, and in Warwick, as in Middleham Castle itself, it is powerfully northern. Born on 28th November 1428 to Richard, Earl of Salisbury, and his wife Alice, 'on his father's side he was sprung from a hardy northern tribe who had been rooted in their land for centuries . . . The North was in Richard's blood, and it nourished his first experi-

ences with the turbulent society of his day,' Kendall writes in *Warwick the Kingmaker*. And yet Richard would hold sway over lands so far distant – more than fifty estates from South Wales across some twenty counties of England – that he, like Barbara, could never be said to have been anchored down by the northern culture in which he was raised.

Neither Kendall nor Barbara go along with the Warwick that Shakespeare gives us in the three parts of *Henry VI* – a 'bellicose baron of a turbulent time'. Kendall's Warwick is 'an amalgam of legend and deeds', a figure whose character and actions attracted heroic levels of adulation and gave him mythic status throughout the land, as he rode in triumph through his vast estates; a figure who, like Barbara herself and her charismatic heroines, seems to have been marked with a strong sense of destiny from the start. Warwick, writes Kendall, never doubted for one moment that he could achieve what he set out to do: 'He refused to admit there were disadvantages he could not overcome and defeats from which he could not recover, and he had the courage, and vanity, to press his game to the end. In other words, he is a Western European man, and in him lies concentrated the reason why that small corner of the earth, in the four centuries after his death, came to dominate all the rest.'

From an early age he gave the impression of a man awaiting his moment, of a 'depth of will' as yet untapped but equal to any challenge that truly merited his time. And when the moment came, when the dream promised to become the man, he recognised it, gave up his subordinate role without second thought, seized it and won it, not with sleight of hand, subterfuge or trickery, but with valour, the occasion the defeat of the King's troops in the city of St Albans in 1455.

His role had been as back-up to the dukes of York and Salisbury against forces raised by Somerset from a full quarter

of the nobility of England. They had approached the city making clear their intention to rescue the King from the clutches of Margaret of Anjou, beautiful and feisty niece of Charles VII of France and now wife of King Henry and *the* divisive force in the land. When battle commenced in the narrow lanes that led up to Holywell, York and Salisbury found themselves in serious difficulties and it was then that Warwick took it upon himself to lead his men forward on the run, dashing across domestic gardens and through private houses to attack Somerset's men from the rear. From the moment his archers burst into St Peter's Street shouting 'A Warwick! A Warwick!' his reputation flew. With 'Somerset's host broken,' as Kendall describes, 'Warwick, York and Salisbury approached the peaked King, standing alone and bewildered in the doorway of a house, his neck bleeding from an arrow graze. Down on their knees they went, beseeching Henry the Sixth for his grace and swearing they never meant to harm him. Helplessly, he nodded his head. The battle was over.'

There is in Kendall's Warwick the same unifying robustness to which the nation rises when the England rugby team presses its game to the end, seizing the Webb Ellis trophy against a background of fans clad in the livery of St George. What Kendall is identifying is what attracts Barbara to Winston Churchill and Maggie Thatcher: the character that won us an Empire and coloured what is understood to be our very Englishness.

It is a spirit often given to excess, bigotry, even fanaticism, so that Barbara can say defensively and with evident contradiction: 'There was no bigotry in our family. The only thing my father said was, "Nobody listens to Enoch Powell."' But there is no hint of fanaticism in Barbara's ideals. It is not in her character to support it, and through husband Bob, a German Jew, dispossessed by the Nazis as a boy, Barbara is alert to

the danger more than most. She would probably avoid politics altogether if she could, and draws any political sting in the novels by introducing a crucial element of compassion in her heroic notion of power.

In the young Warwick, Barbara found the epitome of the person of substance for whom integrity is all. In her novels, power is 'the most potent of weapons', and it only corrupts 'when those with power will do anything to hold on to that power. Sometimes,' she tells us in full agreement with the Warwick legend, 'it can even be ennobling.'

The character of Warwick that got through to Barbara encompassed more than soldier values. The fierce loyalties of those times were, in young Warwick's case, not forged in greed, nor were they all about holding on to, or wresting, power from an opponent for its own sake. Long before he fell out with his protégé Edward and, embittered, took sides against him; long before he 'sold what he was for what he thought he ought to be', as Kendall put it, his purpose really was to defend the values which true Englishmen held as good.

Freda made sure that Barbara picked up on this heroic aspect. As a child, her mother 'instilled in her a sense of honour, duty and purpose', the need for 'integrity in the face of incredible pressure and opposition' and 'not only an honesty with those people who occupied her life, but with herself'. These noble values arise in *Act of Will* and *A Woman of Substance*, but they first found impetus in Freda's expeditions into Wensleydale; they are what Barbara always understood to be the values of the landscape of her birth. The seed took root when Freda led her by the hand up the hill through Middleham into the old castle keep, even if she was unable to articulate and bring it to flower until she sat down many years later to write *A Woman of Substance*.

In the novel, Paul McGill recognises the woman of substance

in Emma with reference to Henry VI – 'O tiger's heart wrapp'd in a woman's hide'. The heroic values Barbara garnered in her childhood as a result of Freda's influence – the sense of honour, duty and purpose – ensures a strong moral code. 'Emma has such a lot of inner strength,' as Barbara says, 'physical and mental strength, but also an understanding heart. She is tough, but tough is not hard,' an allusion that brings us from Shakespeare to Ernest Hemingway, who once said, 'I love tough broads but I can't stand hard dames.'

Emma is tireless, obsessive, ruthlessly determined and dispassionate. She has a 'contained and regal' posture, there is an imperiousness about her, but she is also 'fastidious, honest, and quietly reserved'. She wears a characteristically inscrutable expression and cannot abide timidity where it indicates fear of failing, which she says has 'stopped more people achieving their goals than I care to think about.' She is physically strong and has a large capacity for hard work. 'Moderation is a vastly overrated virtue,' she believes, 'particularly when applied to work.' Emma is 'tough and resilient, an indomitable woman', with 'strength of will' and 'nerves of steel'. To her PA, Gaye Sloane, she is 'as indestructible as the coldest steel'.

To Blackie's wife, sweet Laura Spencer, with whom Emma lodges, 'there was something frightening about her', the feeling that 'she might turn out to be ruthless and expedient, if that was necessary. And yet, in spite of their intrinsic difference, they shared several common traits – integrity, courage, and compassion.' While 'understanding of problems on a personal level, [she] was hard-headed and without sentiment when it came to business. Joe [Lowther, her husband] had once accused her of having ice water in her veins.' But granddaughter Paula admires Emma's 'integrity in the face of incredible pressure and opposition', and while she can be 'austere and somewhat stern of eye' and there is a 'canny Yorkshire

wariness' about her, when her guard is down it is 'a vulnerable face, open and fine and full of wisdom.'

References to Middleham are legion in the novels. In *Angel*, research for a film takes us there. In *Where You Belong* Barbara chooses it as the site for the restaurant, Pig on the Roof, and there's a lovely Yorkshire Christmas there. In *Voice of the Heart*, Francesca Cunningham guides Jerry Massingham and his assistant Ginny to the castle in search of film locations. Key scenes in the film of *A Woman of Substance* were shot in the village, and when you climb up the main street towards the castle you will see to your right the iron-work canopied shop, which, though placed elsewhere in Barbara's imagination, became the film location for Harte's Emporium (Emma's first shop in her empire).

When I visited Middleham with Barbara, an army of horses clattered down the road from the castle to meet us, descending from the gallops and tipping me straightaway into the pages of *Emma's Secret* and *Hold the Dream*, where Allington Hall is one of the greatest riding stables in all England. Barbara, however, was back in her childhood with Freda: 'We'd get the bus to Ripon and then my mother had various cousins who drove us from Ripon to Middleham . . .'

In *Hold the Dream*, past and present find a kind of poetic resolution in this place. Shane O'Neill believes that he is linked to its history through an ancestor on his mother's side. It is 'the one spot on earth where he felt he truly belonged', and at the end he and Emma's granddaughter Paula come together there. This sense of belonging plays an important role in the author's own imaginative life: 'I have very strange feelings there. I must have been about eight or nine when we first went. I thought, I know this place, as if I had lived there. I want to come back'

No matter whether it is Middleham Castle, Studley Royal

or Temple Newsam, Barbara readily enters into an empathic relationship with Freda's favourite places, feeling herself into their history, and it is a strangely intense and markedly subjective relationship. Talking to me about Temple Newsam in Leeds, she said, 'I can't really explain this to you – how attracted I was to the place, my mother and I used to go a lot. It was a tram ride, you'd go on the tram to town and then take another tram . . . or was it a bus? I loved it there, I always loved to go and I felt very much *at home*, like I'd been there before. Yes, déjà vu. Completely.'

'Can you think why that was?' I asked her.

'No. I have no idea.'

'Did you say anything about it to your mother at the time?'

'No, she just knew I loved to go.'

When I drove Barbara to Middleham Castle, we had a similar conversation while exploring what remains of the massive two-storey twelfth-century Keep with Great Chamber and Great Hall above, 'the chief public space in the castle', I read from a sign. 'The Nevilles held court here. Walls were colourful with hangings and perhaps paintings. Clothes were colourful and included heraldic designs . . .'

Barbara interrupted me: 'I have always been attracted to Middleham and I have always had an eerie feeling that I was here in another life, hundreds of years ago. I know it; why do I know it all? *How* do I know it all? Was I here? I know this *place*, and it is not known because I came in my childhood.'

From outside came the sound of children playing. We made our way gingerly up steps nearly one thousand years old, the blue sky our roof now, held in place by tall, howling, windowless walls that supported scattered clumps of epiphytic lichen and wild flowers. Barbara stood still in the Great Hall, taking it all in with almost religious reverence. Then, inevi-

tably, the larking children burst in. She turned, her look silencing them before even she opened her mouth: 'Now look, you've got to stop making a lot of noise. You're disturbing other people. This is not a place for you to play!' It was as if they had desecrated a church. We descended to areas which were once kitchens and inspected huge fireplaces at one time used as roasting hearths, and discovered two wells and a couple of circular stone pits, which a signpost guide suggested may have been fish tanks.

'It was much taller than this, it has lost a lot,' she sighed, and then asked, 'Would it have been crenellated?'

I said I thought that likely, adding, 'It is gothic, dark,' before my eyes returned to the wild flowers in search of a lighter tone. 'Look at the harebells,' I said, but Barbara was not to be deterred. She had come from New York to be there, she wanted me to grasp a point.

'I don't understand why I have this feeling. I don't understand why it is so meaningful to me.'

'There *is* a very strong sense of place here,' I agreed.

'For *me* there is.'

I felt a compulsion to test the subjectivity of Barbara's vision. 'I think *anyone* would find that there is a strong sense of place here,' I said.

She leapt back at me immediately: 'No, no, I *know* this, I have been here, not in this life.' Then, as suddenly, the spell was broken: 'And then you see, you can go down here . . . I had the feeling as a child, I thought I knew it. I had this really strong pull, and I don't know why. I feel I was here in that time, in the Wars of the Roses. I feel that I lived here in the time of Warwick.'

An ability to empathise with the spirit of place is a characteristic of all writers grouped together in the nineteenth-century Romantic movement, not least William Wordsworth, whose

poem, 'I wandered lonely as a cloud . . .' was one of Freda's favourites and crops up time and again in Barbara's novels. The verses tell of an empathic moment in the woods beyond Gowbarrow Park, near Ullswater in the Lake District, where the poet and his sister, Dorothy, come upon the most beautiful daffodils they have ever seen: 'Some rested their heads upon these stones as on a pillow for weariness and the rest tossed and peeled and danced and seemed as if they verily laughed with the wind that blew them over the lake . . . ever glancing, ever changing,' Dorothy recorded in her diary. But Barbara's déjà vu experiences are different in an important respect from those of the Romantics. For her, sympathetic identification with Middleham Castle or Temple Newsam or Studley Royal always carries with it a conviction not only that the past is contained in the present, but of *herself* as part of it. The Romantic notion of empathy is absolutely the opposite of this: it is the disappearance of self. Empathy between Keats and the nightingale was contingent on the poet *becoming* the immortal spirit of the bird. Barbara's feeling that she has been to a place before, in another life perhaps, comes from somewhere else. The 'experience' carries a sense of *belonging*. She seems on the verge of finding out more about herself by being there. It has something to do with identity.

Also inherent in what she terms déjà vu (literally 'already seen') is a feeling of *disassociation* with what is felt to have been experienced before; a sense of loss, a sense that there is a past which was hers and has been lost to her. Such a sense of loss can be a powerful inspiration for an author. For instance, Thomas Hardy's novels were inspired by the loss he felt deeply of the land-based, deep-truth culture into which he had been born at Bockhampton in Dorset in the nineteenth century, and we will see that only after Barbara made her return in imagination to the landscape of her birth, and drew on the

values that she associated with it, could she write the novels that made her famous.

But unlike Hardy, Barbara was *not* born into the culture or spirit of the times that inspired these values, and there was nothing that she could give me about her past to suggest that something in her identity had been lost to the passing of the times of which Middleham, Temple Newsam or Studley Royal belonged. I was, however, strongly aware that these experiences occurred and had been repeated on many occasions in the company of her mother. The image came to mind of Freda standing hand-in-hand with her daughter in the Keep at Middleham. Everything seemed to lead back to Freda. Why had Freda thought it so important to take Barbara to these places? Was it a committed mother's desire to share their history, or can we see in the intensity of feeling that the trips engendered something more?

Interestingly, Wordsworth's 'Daffodils' poem is used in Barbara's novel *Her Own Rules* to demonstrate that Meredith Stratton has a problem of identity – a terrible feeling of loss, of being robbed, of being incomplete, which is resolved in the novel when she discovers who her mother is. Meredith hears the poem and thinks she has heard it before – but not here, not in this life. It is the first of many so-called déjà vu experiences linked to Meri's true identity, her secret past. '*Her Own Rules* is about a woman who doesn't know who she really is,' as Barbara confirmed.

Was this how it was for Freda? Was she, like Meredith Stratton, drawing something from the spirit of the place that answered questions about her own identity? Was she sublimating the sense of loss, which her daughter noticed in her but could never explain, in the noble spirit of places like Middleham, Temple Newsam, Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal? And did the intensity of the experience encourage her

daughter Barbara, with whom she was 'joined at the hip', to identify with their history and experience this déjà vu?

Freda's very being was redolent of the sense of loss which permeates not only the narrative but also some of the best imagery of Barbara's novels, as when the winter sets in 'for its long and deadly siege' and the landscape is 'brush-stroked in grisaille' – a technique to which Barbara alludes not only in *A Woman of Substance* but also in *The Women in His Life* and *Act of Will* invariably to describe a beauty pained by loss.

Barbara, who knew no more about Freda's problems than I did at the time of our trip to Middleham, allowed only that her mother did definitely want her to have a fascination for the history of the places they visited. But she herself had connected these déjà vu experiences with Meredith Stratton's search for her roots of existence, and, as I mulled over our trip to Middleham, I remembered her appraisal that the fundamental theme of all her novels – including *A Woman of Substance* – is one of identity: 'to know who you are and what you are'.

It would be some time, however, before the burden of the theme could be laid at Freda's door.