Warwick Deeping

DOOMSDAY

Warwick Deeping

Doomsday

Historical Romance Novel

e-artnow, 2021
Contact: info@e-artnow.org

EAN: 4064066387471

Table of Contents

PART I - BEAN FLOWER AND HAY TIME

- Chapter I
- Chapter II
- Chapter III
- Chapter IV
- Chapter V
- Chapter VI
- Chapter VII
- Chapter VIII
- Chapter IX
- Chapter X

PART II - THE ORCHID HOUSE

- Chapter XI
- Chapter XII
- Chapter XIII
- Chapter XIV
- Chapter XV
- Chapter XVI
- Chapter XVII
- Chapter XVIII
- Chapter XIX
- Chapter XX

PART III - DOOMSDAY

- Chapter XXI
- Chapter XXII
- Chapter XXIII

Chapter XXIV
Chapter XXV
Chapter XXVI
Chapter XXVII
Chapter XXVIII
Chapter XXIX
Chapter XXX
Chapter XXXI
Chapter XXXII
Chapter XXXIII
Chapter XXXIV
Chapter XXXV

PART I
BEAN FLOWER AND HAY TIME

Table of Contents

CHAPTER I

Table of Contents

1

Someone had asked Mary Viner as a child why she so disliked going to school, and had received the pregnant reply: "'Cos one does the same thing every day"; and at the age of three-and-twenty Mary was still resenting repetition. Only more so, because life had become more busily full of it, a circus of dreary tidyings and cleanlinesses, of washings up and washings down, of moments that smelt of yellow soap, and tea leaves and paraffin.

Moreover, it could not be helped. And the turning of the domestic wheel demanded the obedient hands of the dutiful daughter. Mary's alarum clock set the welkin ringing at half-past six. It was winter, January and cold. She had cause to know how cold it could be in that cardboard box of a bedroom with its walls of tile and plywood sheeting. The very clock seemed to make a bouncing sound like a pea rattling in a box. The room remained quite dark, and the day's duties offered her no compensations for the loss of her warm bed, so she lingered there, guiltily snug, the clothes pulled up to her chin, her pretty, slim legs tucked up.

Thank heaven she had not to struggle with half a yard of black hair. A bobbed head had its advantages when your hands got colder and colder. The house was very still, but across the landing there travelled a faint sound of harsh, asthmatic breathing. Captain Hesketh Viner was still asleep, but soon she would hear the little twittering voice of her mother, like the voice of a rather futile and busy bird.

O, this house—this "Green Shutters," where everything was heard, from the stirring of the kitchen fire to the brisk

functioning of a toothbrush! And her father's cough! She flung out of bed suddenly with a rush of fastidious despair that fought with an inarticulate compassion. What a life for the three of them, cooped up in this jim-crack cottage in a little world of other jim-crack cottages! No wonder that Carslake, solid Georgian Carslake, referred to the Sandihurst Estate as "Cinder Town."

She lit her candle and scuffled into her clothes, intent upon making that morning dash downstairs to light the fires in the kitchen and living-room. Yes, damn Colonel Sykes for exploiting this patch of clay and sand in Sussex, and for persuading the new poor to put up cottages and bungalows. Cinder Town! She slithered down the steep and narrow stairs and into the kitchen, jarring a slim ankle against the coal-scuttle that was standing where it should not have stood. And that, too, was her fault! Resenting this, she jabbed at the thing with her foot, and by way of retort it tipped a rattling stream of coal upon the floor.

Putting her candle on the kitchen table, and bending down to recover the lumps of coal, she signalized her submission to the tyranny of trifles by a sudden rush of tears. There was anger in her tears, and self-pity, and the rebellion of her youth against life's aimless and inevitable repetitions. But how foolish! And like a child she brushed the blurring wetness away with her fingers, forgetting the coal dust upon them. She put a match to the kitchen fire, wondering whether it was going to prove sulky, and while it was deciding that it would burn she collected the cans for the morning's hot water. And how she yearned for gas! To be able to slip down and turn a tap, and perhaps slip back to bed again.

The hands of the grandfather clock stood at twenty past seven when Mary crossed the little hall between the kitchen and the living-room. There was that second fire to be laid and lit; the kitchen fire she had laid the night before, and if there was one thing she loathed it was cleaning out a grate

on a cold winter morning. A beastly job, remaining eternally beastly! Picking out pieces of slag and cinder and dropping them into the housemaid's box! She pulled on her gloves, and kneeling, was about to start on the grate when she heard the spring-bell attached to the front door burr loudly.

It startled her. No one was to be expected at this hour but that very red-nosed boy with the milk, and he always came to the back door.

She went to investigate, drawing back the plain black bolts and turning the key of the cheap lock. She opened the door and saw a man there. A milk-can kept him company on the doorstep. He made no remark. He looked at one of her gloved and empty hands as though he had expected to see a jug in it.

"Oh, the milk."

She stared and he seemed to stare still harder, for she had black smudges all over her face. And then she realized somehow that this was Furze, of Doomsday Farm, and that he was in a hurry, and that something must have happened to the red-nosed boy.

"I'll get a jug."

Returning, she was aware of him in the dim light as something big and brown and silent, with a pair of very dark eyes set deeply under the brim of his hat. His face had ruggedness. It was clean-shaven, but she could see that he had not shaved this morning. His lips were very firm. The breadth of the face seemed to match the breadth of the man, the loose-limbed, easy breadth of the worker. When he took the jug from her she noticed the fineness of his hands, delicate even in their roughened strength. He bent down to fill the jug.

"What has happened to the boy?"

"Laid up."

His voice was deliberate and deep, and his eyes seemed to match his voice. He was looking at her again, a pretty, dark thing in an old cherry-coloured jumper and black skirt.

Those smudges of coal dust on her face might have amused him had he been the sort of man who was easily amused, but his glances went deeper. A pretty girl—and a gentlewoman—cleaning a grate on a January morning! Why shouldn't she? He handed her the jug.

"Will that do for the day?"

Her eyes were on his big brown hands. Standing there under the flimsy rustic porch, he seemed to fill the whole of the sky with a significance that puzzled her. He did not belong to Cinder Town; he was part of that other world that had preceded and would outlast a little collection of bungalows and rustic porches.

"I think it will do. I expect you are busy."

"I am."

He picked up the milk-can, half lifted his hat, and with another of those deep and curiously silent glances, he swung away down the cinder path. He closed the white gate behind him and turned to the right towards the Jamieson's cottage—Oak Lodge. Mary hated the Jamiesons, and especially the Jamieson children.

She closed the door, carried the milk-jug into the kitchen, and completed the resuscitation of the sitting-room fire.

2

Mary placed the can of hot water on the mat outside her people's door. She knocked.

"A quarter to eight."

Her father began to cough, and she could picture his poor bald, birdlike head growing pink on its thin neck. These spasms of coughing seemed to shake the flimsy little house, and with it the whole futile world of her daily endeavour. Her mother's voice, twittering like a robin's, caused her to pause.

"Mary, dear, your father will have his breakfast in bed."

A tray to be laid as well as a table! Well, what of it? If drudgery were your lot, complete submergence did not matter. She carried her own can of hot water into her bedroom, and pulling up the blind, discovered to herself in place of a dead white surface a panel picture of surprising beauty. It was strange and unexpected, and it hurt her, and she wondered why it hurt. She stood and looked at a red winter sun and a smoking mass of blue grey clouds, and dark hills, and woods spiring up. She could see the great knoll of beeches purpling the sky above "Doomsday," the mysterious and black stateliness of the "Six Firs," and beyond them the aery tops of a larch plantation. It was very beautiful and sad and strange, with colour tossed about, and that red sun edging the clouds with gold. It hurt her. It made her yearn for all sorts of unimaginable things, escape, romance, dreamy happenings, a world other than her own. Her sensitive youthfulness stretched out its quivering hands to beauty, and felt the choke of it in its throat.

She looked into her mirror.

"Heavens!"

No wonder the man with the milk had stared. She was all smudged under the eyes with coal dust. She saw herself as a flustered little drab, a seven o'clock in the morning slattern too hurried to be clean. She went red in the face of her own reflection. Beauty—and that smudged skin! A kind of rage seized her. She splashed the hot water into her basin, and soaped and gloved and towelled herself before rushing downstairs with a red nose and eyes, and a sense of being driven to do a dozen things at once. More coal had to be put on the fires, the frying pan greased, the kettle filled, the cloths laid on tray and table; cups and saucers, spoons, plates, mustard, bread, butter, marmalade to be collected. And while she hurried about, and was aware of the clatter of her harried handling of all these articles, she remembered that an hour hence she would be washing up the greater number of them and putting them back in their places.

O,—that washing up, that eternal getting out and putting away! Repetition, endless repetition! The woman's part! And she seemed to feel in the core of her consciousness the passionate impulse to escape from it. Yes, from that tyranny of trifles that seemed to her to be the whole end and tragedy of a woman's life.

She heard a door open. Her mother was coming downstairs, that little brown chaffinch of a mother with her "pink-pink" voice and her little beak of a nose.

"Mary, dear."

"Yes, mother."

"Your father will have a lightly boiled egg—this morning. And some—toast."

"Yes,—some toast."

So there would be toast and a lightly boiled egg as well as the bacon! And while she bustled about, her mother sat on a stool in front of the living-room fire, rubbing her red knuckled and thin little hands. Mrs. Viner was subject to chilblains. She had a stagnant circulation and a habit of inertia which did not fit her birdlike appearance, and yet it was a cheerful, twittering inertia. She perched there just like a young old bird waiting for the breakfast worm, intent upon rubbing her cold hands, while her daughter did all the work, and wondered why she did it. Their tacit acceptance of the situation was the most depressing part of the whole business; her parents took everything for granted; they were so patient and sweet and unseeing. They exercised their claims upon her with such complete confidence that sometimes she wished that she had been born with her sister Clare's temper and her determination to get out of the devoted niceness of it all. While she—with that fatal softness—and a sensitive desire to please—and an uncomfortable habit of self criticism—!

She thrust the prongs of the toasting-fork—another thing to clean by the way—into a slice of bread, and crouched in front of the kitchen fire. She was a slim thing, with long legs

and a willowy neck, large dark eyes set wide apart, a wavy and poignant mouth, and one of those noses with a delicate breadth at the nostrils which somehow give an expression of pathos to a woman's face. She could flush quickly and look scared. In repose she was inclined to droop her shoulders and sit with her arms wrapped about her knees, as though life was a cold and dreary business and her brown eyes saw nothing but woe. But, as a matter of fact, she was a strong young wench, supple and healthy, with plenty of red blood, only there was nothing to set it moving as a young thing's blood should move. Her starved, beggar-maid look was due to the fact that two old people were contentedly sucking her vitality.

The toast grew brown and she thought of Clare; flaxen haired, restless, mercurial Clare. Yes, Clare had been selfishly wise. She had insisted on self, and none too gently either. Hence a husband, and a house at Weyfleet in Surrey, and tennis and bridge-parties and dances, and shoppings and matinées in town, and two servants, and early tea brought to you in bed. Clare appeared to have ascended into a suburban heaven. Her letters were full of happenings.

The toast fell off the fork into the ash tray under the grate.

"O,—damn!" said the girl.

She recovered it, and with a sigh of momentary moral slackness she replaced it on the fork.

"Mary,—dear."

"Yes, mother—"

"Is there any honey? Your father—"

"There is no honey. I'll order some. I shall have to bike up to Carslake presently."

At last, breakfast was served both upstairs and downstairs, though Mary could never bring herself to look with any pleasure at Captain Hesketh Viner in bed. He wore a grey flannel nightshirt, and his poor old chin would be all silver stubble. There were times when she felt deplorably

sorry for her father, even when his coughing kept her awake. Her mother was very talkative at breakfast; she rattled things and was very busy with her knife and fork. She had a high colour, and pretty grey crinkly hair, and brown eyes that were much smaller than Mary's, eyes that never seemed to see anything larger than pin-heads.

And who was that at the door this morning? Had not she heard a man's voice.

"Yes,—Mr. Furze with the milk."

And what had happened to the milk boy?

"Laid up."

"Influenza—I suppose," said Mrs. Charlotte, tapping away cheerfully, "and what is Mr. Furze like? I thought his voice sounded almost gentlemanly."

Mary heard her father's stick rapping on the floor of the room above.

"I expect I have forgotten something."

And she went up to see what it was.

3

Arnold Furze of "Doomsday" had paused for a moment where the Melhurst and Rotherbridge roads join each other at an acute angle and become the road to Carslake, for though his day's work began before dawn and went on after dusk he was one of those men who can spare his soul five minutes. A hundred yards farther up the Carslake road his farm lane emerged north of the bank where the Six Firs grew, and on reaching the lane he left his empty milk-can by the hedge, and climbed up beside the trunk of one of the six old trees. Far above his head their outjutting green tops swayed very gently against the cold blue sky. Rabbits had been nibbling the short grass.

Furze stood there, seeming to look at nothing in particular, as much a part of the country as the trees. The

rising sun lay behind him. It sent forth a yellow finger and laid it upon that splodge of chequered colour, those abominable little dwellings that dotted the Sandihurst Estate. There were thirteen of them, strung on each side of the cinder track that Colonel Sykes had had made between his red and white bungalow and the road to Melhurst. They looked just like a collection of big red, white, yellow, green and brown fungi, excrescences, each squatting on its quarter acre or so of land, and surrounded by lesser excrescences that were tool-sheds, chicken-houses, and here and there a little tin-roofed garage. Furze knew every one of the thirteen dwellings, though he had not walked up the cinder road more than six times in his life. He supplied the colony with milk and eggs and cordwood and an occasional load of manure. His bills went in once a month.

"What a collection," he thought.

They were of all shapes and all sizes, and they agreed in nothing but in their flimsy newness. Colonel Sykes' red brick and rough cast bungalow headed the formation like a field officer mounted and leading his company up the hill. Oak Lodge, a mock oak and plaster cottage in the Tudor style, contained the Jamiesons, who manufactured jam up at Carslake. Next to it stood "Green Shutters," the home of the Viners, half brick and half tile and pink as a boiled prawn. Following south came the "Oast," a pathetic improvisation contrived out of a circular steel shelter with an old railway-coach attached to it, the whole painted a bright green, and inhabited by one-eyed ex-lieutenant Harold Coode. In his hurry to recoup himself after his speculation in land, Colonel Sykes had sold the plots without troubling himself about building restrictions. Next to the "Oast" the Perrivales had built themselves "Two Stories" in yellow brick. "The Pill Box," a cement block structure, looking like a white box with four red chimney pots placed on it, belonged to Mr. John Brownlow—a retired schoolmaster. The Engledews lived in the "Lodge," by the Melhurst road. On the west side of the

cinder canal the buildings were even more amateurish and ephemeral. Lieut. Peabody had placed two Nissen huts side by side, painted them red, joined the fronts with a white veranda, and christened the creation "Old Bill." The Vachetts —literary people and very desultory at that, inhabited a red and white bungalow, "Riposo." The Clutterbucks had had to be content with a big corrugated iron hut that resembled a football pavilion or a mission hall. Commander Troton owned "The Bungalow," brown stained weather board and pink pantiles. Lieut. Colonel Twist had put up a chalet and called it what it was. The Mullins' had shown a sense of humour in calling their cement box "Pandora," for it was full of children and prams, and rag dolls and trouble.

Furze's very deep blue eyes seemed to question the significance of this colony. He considered it as a native might speculate upon some sudden growth of alien haste, and, as he scrambled down into the lane and picked up his milk can, his thoughts remained with Cinder Town. He saw in it one of those improvisations flung up by the confused flux of the post-war period. The new poor! The relics of a superfluous generation dumped down among Sussex clay. Impoverished gentlefolk drawn together in a little world of makeshifts, and keeping up appearances—of a sort. Rootless people, withering, waiting to die. It was rather pathetic. What on earth did they do with themselves in those little transitory houses on their quarter-acre plots, without a decent tree on the estate, and the very road a squdge of clay and clinker? Keep a few chickens, and grow starved vegetables, and train nasturtiums up flimsy trellises? One or two of them had hired land and were chicken farming. Chicken farming! Lieut. Peabody had planted fruit trees on a south-west slope full in the blue eye of the Sussex wind! And that girl with the smudgy face, and the soft coal-dust eyes who had taken in the milk? Deputizing as a maid of all work? Well, anyway, she worked,

did a woman's work, though it might be because she could not help it.

Passing on up the farm lane between high hedges of thorn and ash and maple, with the Ten Acre on his right, and the Ridge Field on his left, Arnold Furze returned to a world that seemed solid and real. He paused—as he often did—just above the pond—to see the greyish brick chimney stack of the farmhouse showing above and through the bare poles of the larch plantation. From this point above the pond where the lane began to dip and the hedges were lower, he could command the greater part of his farm. Immediately below him stretched the pond and the two old ilexes at the end of the larch plantation, and beyond them lay the yard, and the stone farm buildings their grey walls and rust coloured roofs patched with yellow lichen. Rushy Pool and Rushy Wood were hidden by the larches and the house, but above the swelling brownness of the Sea Field, the beeches of Beech Ho seemed to carry the sky on their branches. Eastwards, along the slope of the valley the greenness of the Furze Field met the deeper green of a wood of Scotch Firs. Southwards at the heel of the Gore, and lying in the deep trough of the valley, the oaks of Gore Wood stood embattled at the end of the Long Meadow. The old cedar beyond the orchard raised three dark plumes above the roof of the house, and further still the spruces at the south-east corner of the Doom Paddock would flash like spires in the sunlight.

To Furze it was very beautiful with all its changing contours, its high woods, and the swelling steepness of its grass and arable. Never did it look the same, but was eternally changeful above the green deeps of its valley where the brook ran down to Rushy Pool. Difficult—yes—but he never grudged it its difficulties; for a beauty that is loved is born with in all its moods and mischiefs. For five years now he had been able to call "Doomsday" his. He had fought it, loved it, wrestled with it, and there had been times

when it had threatened to tear the guts out of him. But that was life. Better than finnicking about in an office, and putting paper over your shirt cuffs.

He went on and down to the path above the yard. A middle-aged man with very blue eyes and a moustache the colour of honey was forking manure out of the cowhouse.

"Will."

"Sssir—"

"We'll cart that wood up from the Gore. I'll be with you in ten minutes."

The blue-eyed labourer thrust his fork into a pile of smoking dung, and went with long trailing steps towards the stable, turning to glance over his shoulder at Furze who was disappearing behind the yew hedge screening a part of the garden. But there was no garden there now, only coarse grass and a few old unpruned roses. Arnold Furze had no time for life's embroideries.

CHAPTER II

Table of Contents

1

A part of Doomsday Farmhouse had been built by a Sussex ironmaster in Elizabeth's day, and to this man of iron it owed the stone walls of its lower story, its stone mullions, and its brick chimneys. The second story warmed itself with lichened bricks and tiles. The spread of its red-brown roof with its hips and valleys had an ample tranquillity. The parlour, jutting out queerily towards Mrs. Damans' sunk garden, had a roof of Horsham stone, but Mrs. Damaris had been dead a hundred and seventy years or more, and her sunk garden had become a sunny place where hens clucked in coops and yellow chicks toddled about over the grass. Many of the windows still held their lead lights, but in the living-room and the parlour they had been replaced by wooden casements. As to its setting, nothing could have been more charmingly casual and tangled and unstudied. On the east the branches of the old pear and apple trees of an orchard almost brushed its walls and held blossom or fruit at the very windows. Behind it lay the vegetable garden backed by the larch plantation, and full of lilacs and ancient rambling currant and gooseberry bushes, and groves of raspberry canes, and winter greens, and odd clumps of flowers. The tiled roof of the well-house was a smother of wild clematis and hop. South lay Mrs. Damaris' little sunk garden, its stone walls all mossy, and the four yews—left unclipped for many years—rising like dark green obelisks. Beyond the orchard the big cedar looked almost blue when the fruit blossom was out. West of it, the cow-houses, stable, barn, granary, and waggon sheds were grouped

about the byres and rick-yard. The sweet, homely smell of the byres would drift in on the west wind. Everything was old, the oak of the fences, the posts of the waggon sheds, the big black doors of the barn, even the byre rails and the palings of the pig-sties. Silvered and green oak, grey stone, the mottled darkness of old brick and tile. The gates leading into the lane and the Doom Paddock were new, for Arnold Furze had made and hung them on new oak posts. The gates he had found there had been tied up with wire and lengths of rope, and patched with odd pieces of deal.

From the window of the parlour you looked over Mrs. Damaris' little sunk garden and the Doom Paddock to an immense thorn hedge that hid the Long Meadow, and the brook beyond it. Rushy Pool glimmered down yonder towards the rising sun. The high ground on the other side of the brook rose like a green, tree-covered cliff in which were cleft blue vistas of woods and shining hills, and white clouds low down on the horizon by the sea. The sea was fifteen miles away, but when Arnold Furze was hoeing turnips up in the Sea Field he could lean upon his hoe and see the grey hills flicker between him and the old memories of France and the war. The birds in these Sussex woods had heard the rumble of the guns in those days, guns at Ypres, guns on the bloody, white-hilled, red-poppied Somme. Furze had been with the guns, the captain of a 4.5 Howitzer battery. It seemed very long ago.

A year as a learner on a farm in Hampshire, and five years at Doomsday! Five notable, terrible and glorious years, full of sweat and hate and love and weariness, and a back that had refused to break, and a stomach that would digest anything. Lonely? O, yes, in a way, but when a man has beasts and sheep and pigs, and two horses, and a dog, and a cat, and a number of odd hens and ducks to look after, his hands are full of life. And there were the birds, and the crops, and the trees, and the yellow gorse, and the wild flowers, all live things. No, a man had no time to be lonely,

with Will Blossom and Will Blossom's boy and himself to work a hundred and twenty acres, though twenty acres of it were woodland. And difficult land at that. Heavy—some of it, and steep.

Five years!

He came up the stone steps to the door, with a great red winter sun setting behind him over the roof of the waggon shed. His boots were all yellow clay, and there were spots of it upon his face. He shaved himself twice a week. Bobbo the sheepdog flummoxed in at his heels, and making for the log fire on the great open hearth under the hood of the chimney, lay down to share it with Furze's black cat. The floor of the living-room was of red tiles, which made it safe for Arnold Furze to keep a wood fire burning and to pile upon it three or four times a day billets of oak and the butts of old posts and the roots of trees. In the winter this fire never went out, for in the morning two or three handfuls of kindling thrown upon the hot heap of wood ash would break into a blaze. He kept his logs and billets in the living-room, a great pile of them stacked in a corner.

Here—too—an iron kettle was usually simmering on the hook. Tea-making was a simple process. The breakfast tea leaves were shaken out of the teapot upon the fire, more tea was added from a canister on the shelf, the kettle seized with an old leather hedging-glove, and the teapot filled. Milk, a loaf, butter on a white plate, and a pot of jam waited in the cupboard beside the fireplace.

Furze had his tea by the fire. He sat on an oak stool of his own making, like some Sussex peasant of the iron days before man had realized cushions and comfort. He too was of iron, one of those lean big tireless men with his strength burning like a steady flame. You saw it in his eyes; it waxed and waned; it might die down like a flame at the end of the day, but with the dawn of the next day it was as bright as ever. He needed it, but he needed it a little less than he had

done, for he had his feet well set in the soil, and could draw his breath and look about him.

Before filling his pipe he poured out a saucer of milk for Tibby the black cat. The dog, a devoted and lovable beast, cuddled up beside him like a shaggy second self, his muzzle resting on Furze's knee, while his master sat and smoked, and allowed himself one of those short interludes that were like the five minutes' halt on a long march. The fire flung the shadows of him and his animals about the bare, old room with its brown distempered walls and beamed ceiling. He had a way of holding the stem of his pipe in his left fist as though he could not touch a thing without gripping it.

The fire was good, like all primitive phenomena to a man who is strong, and Furze's life at Doomsday was very primitive, and not unlike a colonist's, a concentration upon the essential soil and its products, an ignoring of individual comfort. He had come to Doomsday with a claw-hammer, a spanner, and a saw, his flea-bag and camp equipment, and a hundred pounds in cash, all the capital that was left him after the purchase of the farm. War gratuity, savings, the thousand pounds an aunt had left him, Doomsday, derelict and lonely, had swallowed them all. A Ford taxi, chartered from Carslake station, had lurched up the lane, and deposited Furze and all his worldly gear on the stone steps of the old, silent house. He had slept on his camp bed, washed in a bucket, used a box as a table, and another box as a seat, camping out in one room of the rambling and empty house.

From that day the struggle had begun. And what a struggle it had been, that of a lone, strong, devoted man who had that strange passion for the soil, and who combined with his strength, intelligence and a love of beauty. There had been hardly a sound gate on the farm; the hedges had been broken and old and straggling into the fields like young coppices. The Furze Hill field had been a waste of gorse; the Wilderness a tangle of brambles,

bracken, thorns, broom, ragwort and golden rod, and it was a wilderness still. The coppice wood had not been cut for seven years in either Gore or Rushy Woods; elms had been sending up suckers far out in the Ten Acre; weeds had rioted, charlock and couch and thistles. Dead trees had lain rotting; a beech, blown down in Beech Ho, had never been touched. The stable roof had leaked. The gutters had been plugged, so that water had dribbled down the walls. The byre fences had sagged this way and that; the roof of one of the pigsties had fallen in. Nettles had stood five feet high round the back of the house.

What a first six months he had had of it, working and living like a savage, but a savage with a sensitive modern soul! An occasional stroller along the field path that crossed Bean Acres and Maids Croft and ran along the edge of Furze Hill to Beech Ho had seen him as a brown figure in old army shirt and breeches, swinging axe or mall, or lopping at an overgrown hedge, or cutting over the tangled orchard, or ploughing with his one horse and second-hand wheel plough. Wandering lovers had discovered him scything or hoeing in the dusk; only the birds had seen him in the dawn, with dew upon his boots and a freshness in those deep-set blue eyes. The lovers had marvelled. They had talked about him at Carslake in the shops and the pubs. "Mad Furze"—"Fool Furze"—"Mean Furze." Mean because he had had to set his teeth and calculate before buying anything. He had never missed a sale, and had brought away old harness to be pieced and patched, old tools, a machine or two, just as little as he could do with. All his shopping had been done up at Carslake on Saturday nights, and the tinned food, the jam and the tea and the sugar, and his week's tobacco, and an occasional piece of butcher's meat, had been carried home in an old canvas kit-bag. For a year all the ready money that had come to him had been provided by the milk of two rather indifferent cows and the sale of a couple of litters of pigs. He had eaten the eggs laid

by his dozen hens, and helped himself to live by the few vegetables he had had time to grow. So grim had been the struggle that he had had to sell some of his timber, fifty oaks in Gore Wood, and it had hurt him.

He stared at the fire and stroked Bobbo's head.

My God—how tired he had been sometimes, ragingly tired. He could remember hating the place for one whole winter month with a furious and evil hatred. It had had its claws in his soul's belly, twisting his guts. Beaten—no—by God! He had trampled on in his muddy boots, without time to cook or wash, sleeping like a log in the flea-bag on his camp bed. Lonely? Well, he supposed that he had not had time to feel lonely. Holidays? Perhaps seven days off in three years.

Half playfully Furze blew smoke at the dog—and stretched himself on his box in front of the fire. He had made his roots; they were not as stout as he intended them to be, but they were there. Twenty good shorthorns, thirty sheep, two horses—fine dapple greys—six black pigs, fifty or so fowls, and a dozen ducks. And manure stacking up, and Rushy Bottom, the Long Meadow, Doom Paddock, and the Gore growing good grass with clover in it, and his winter wheat showing well in the Ridge Field, and a hundred-ton crop of mangels clamped, enough for all his stock. He had had a bumper hay crop. He had a man and a boy now to help. This spring he would be able to buy a new mower, and a new horse cultivator, and in the autumn perhaps a corn crusher, a decent tumbril.

He knocked out his pipe on the toe of his boot.

"Come on, Bobbo. Work."

He lit a lantern, and as he went down the steps and along the path with the shadows swinging from the light, he heard the chug-chug of a chaff cutter. A good sound that. He sniffed the sweet smell of the byres, and looked up at the stars.

A minute later he was in the big cowshed, helping Will with the sliced roots and the hay. The place steamed; it was full of the sweet breath of the beasts and the sound of their breathing and feeding. Rows of gentle heads and liquid eyes showed in the long, dimly lit building, and the warm, milky, bestrawed life of it sent a whimper of pleasure and of pride through Furze's blood. He was fond of his beasts, and as he passed down the building, his hand caressed the placid creatures—"Well, Mary—well, Doll—old lady." The dog kept close to his heels, and the cows, accustomed to Bobbo being there at feeding time, were not troubled by his nearness.

Will Blossom, with a dusting of chaff on his honey-coloured moustache, went through the cow house, holding his lantern shoulder high.

"That thur wood be ready loaded f'tomorrer, sir."

"Right, Will. Good night."

"Good night, ssir."

Blossom went out with his lantern, but Arnold Furze remained for a while in the cow house, watching the cows feeding, and feeling the warm contentment of the big brown creatures.

2

Afterwards, having looked into the stable at the two "greys" and locked up for the night, Furze put out the lantern and wandered up the lane. There were times now when he could stand and draw breath, and let the tenseness of his self relax, and raise his head and look about him at the waiting beauty of this world of his. For years the singing of birds had been no more than a little chant going on while he laboured, heard dimly but without attention. The soil had held him grappled, and every sense had been absorbed into the struggle, but now he had eyes and ears and nostrils, and a

consciousness that could pause and enjoy. Often he would walk the lane at night or wander about the Doom Paddock like a captain whose ship sailed steadily under the stars. To-night it was very still, and yet he knew that the air was moving, for he felt it on his left cheek, and last year's oak leaves on some saplings in the hedge made a dry twittering. He paused to listen to the whisper. Presently, he went on as far as the Six Firs on the mound. They too seemed to send a murmur from the towering darkness, a sound as of breathing; and climbing the mound Furze laid his head against one of the trunks. Yes, he could hear the faint, slumberous breathing of the tree.

Down yonder he saw lights, little yellow points, the lights of Cinder Town, and he stood watching them for a while as though he were the master of a sailing ship out at sea. These six tall trees towering like masts seemed set so high above those puny little residences. He felt sorry for them. Poor little places, no more than bathing huts set up along the edge of the great sea of man's effort.

Well, well, he had no quarrel with Cinder Town. It had been of some use to him, and had opened a little market at his very door at a time when he had felt like murdering every butcher and corn-factor and milkman in the neighbourhood. Poor little places! Feeding them upon the rich milk of his shorthorns was rather like giving milk in a bottle to motherless lambs.

The dog had followed him and had been at his heels all the while, but with so devoted and self-effacing a silence that he had been no more than a shadow. They returned together to the house where the light of the fire wavered through the casements. Bobbo slipped in at his master's heels, and as Furze closed and bolted the door upon the darkness he had a feeling that something had slipped in after him as silent as the dog. An emotion; a subtle and shadowy impression, the wraith of a mood or a manner of feeling.

Hitherto the big room had satisfied his wants, for it was parlour, bedroom, and workshop all in one; he still slept in his camp bed, and used a dining-table that he had made out of deal boards with four fencing posts for legs. A second table over by the orchard window displayed a collection of harness, leather, a pair of boots that were waiting to be soled, a boot-last, tools, a harnessmaker's awl and thread, odd boxes of nails and screws. There was only one chair in the room, an old basket thing covered with faded green cretonne. At his meals Furze sat on the home-made oak stool.

He hung his hat on a peg and crossed the room, slowly and thoughtfully, and pushed the arm-chair forward with his foot. He sat down in it by the fire, took off his muddy boots, and reached for the plaid slippers by the cupboard door. His thoughtful look deepened; he stared at the fire, but once or twice he threw a quick and considering glance over a shoulder at his barrack of a room. He found himself wondering what Will Blossom's wife thought of it when she came up once a week to clean and wash and cook him a joint. It was like a room in a backwoodsman's hut.

Yes, he ought to be able to afford something better before long, but not before he had bought every machine and tool that the beloved and exacting soil demanded. He had got along very well all these years. The furniture, and the pretty-pretties could wait.

Yet, a desire for something else had slipped into the room with him, and he was aware of a vague unrest. Almost it reminded him of those longings during the war when a man sat in the mud under a tin sheet, and thought of Piccadilly Circus, and the Savoy, and girls in pretty frocks, and tables laid for dinner, and a room with a carpet and white sheets, and a bath. Yes, he had had to cut out the æsthetics, but even if he were to fill the place with club-chairs, and Turkey carpets and old oak and china—what then?

He left that question unanswered, perhaps because he was subconsciously aware of the voice that was asking it, a voice that he had met with deaf ears. Why explore your own subconscious, or drag it up to the level of the painfully conscious? Better to turn your back and avoid it.

Presently, after a supper of bread and cheese and ale, he lit a pipe, and opened the door leading into Mrs. Damaris' parlour. Empty, panelled in white, and with its old black Georgian firegrate, it always suggested to Furze the memory of a woman. It had a faint perfume, a faded daintiness, something that was not male. Sitting in the deep window seat you looked down into Mrs. Damaris' sunk garden, and could imagine a peacock spreading its tail upon the stone wall. It was in this room that Furze kept the one extravagance that he had allowed himself, a baby-grand piano in a rosewood case, bought at a sale in Carslake.

Leaving the door open so that the firelight played into Mrs. Damaris' dim white parlour, he sat down on another stool of his own making, uncovered the keyboard and played Schubert. He played well, with a firm touch and a richness of feeling, and in that empty house the music sounded ghostly.

3

There was in Mary Viner a gentleness that consented, and a young idealism that rebelled.

In the matter of the week's washing Cinder Town divided itself into the washers and the washed. "Simla"—as befitted the head of the estate—sent its soiled linen to a washerwoman, and the Vachetts and the Perrivales and the Twists conformed to this convention. At the other end of the scale and the colony, poor, fat, fair and frowsy Mrs. Mullins, helped by a strong girl, decorated on each Monday the back lawn of "Pandora" with innumerable garments, nighties and

towels and stockings and blouses and little etceteras, and her husband's blue and white striped pyjamas bellying in the wind. The display annoyed Lieut.-Colonel Twist very considerably. He was a pernickety, iron grey, yellowish man, with scornful nostrils and pale blue eyes. Matters between the "Chalet" and "Pandora" were not quite neighbourly.

As for "Green Shutters," it made a virtue of necessity, and hung its bunting above the patch of grass behind the cottage and close to the Jamieson's fence, where it fluttered against blue March skies, or drooped idly against the green of June. To Mary Viner, Monday was always a day of pain. If to hate doing your own washing and hanging out to dry was snobbery, then she confessed herself a snob, though next door ex-Lieut. Harold Coode kept her in countenance by hanging out his shirts. True, he appeared to have only two of them, the one with a patch, and the one that had no patch. They alternated on the six feet of clothes line behind the "Oast," hanging there with a pair of grey socks and a vest, keeping the flag flying. That was the sort of man Coode was, eager and bright and thin, a noble fellow, but not quite a man, and he was a trouble to Mary. He tended towards worship over the four-foot fence, and she was sorry for him, an uncomfortable emotion, for Coode, like many noble fellows, had no tact. He appeared when he should not have appeared.

On the other side were the Jamieson children, two tow-haired savages with lapis lazuli eyes, and faces that looked as though they had been dipped in their father's strawberry jam. Irreverent children, they poked their tow heads above the fence, and giggled and were rude, and sometimes a clod of clay left a mark in the middle of one of Mary's sheets or towels.

She was tired and touchy on Mondays, and apt to be quick of colour. The whole business humiliated her.

"You little wretches."

Chortles from the dear little children.

Mary had complained to Mrs. Jamieson who sent her washing out, and who had stared at her with her round, milkmaid's eyes.

"I'm sorry, Miss Viner. They are such young Turks. But it is tempting, isn't it?"

Mary had flushed.

"O, no doubt. But I don't see the humour."

But the culminating Jamieson joy screamed when the clothes line broke, which it did on occasions, and the whole string of bunting collapsed upon the grass. The little red faces exulted. And the line broke upon this particular morning early in March, with a cold and blustering wind blowing. One of Captain Hesketh's shirts and a couple of handkerchiefs had made direct for the cinder path and drabbled themselves there, when she heard a voice behind her.

"You—are—busy. Do come and look at my new car."

On the grass behind her stood pale-haired Winnifred Twist, an only child and precious as Ming china. She had a soft, drawling voice and an air of very intelligent languor. The Twists might live in Cinder Town, but they made it obvious that they were not obliged to live there. Winnifred's father emphasized his potential mobility and freedom by always talking of "Selling the damned place."

Mary, with the two ends of the broken line in her hands, and aware of the other girl's leather coat and fur gauntlets felt a sudden rage which she was careful to subdue. It was human of Winnifred to show off, but it was not kind of her to show off to Mary, with that washing draggled on the grass and the heads of the Jamieson children visible above the fence.

"Oh, it's come. I heard you were having one."

"Do come and look. She's just outside. I have been up to Carslake and back. And I nearly ran into a cart. Made the horse shy."

Mary was voiceless.

"The man with the cart cut up quite rough about it. That Furze man who sells us milk. He's a bit of a boor. I shall advise the mater to change her milkman."

Mary, sleeves rolled above the elbows, reknotted the rope, and felt herself being overpowered by her friend's chattering enthusiasm. She supposed that she would have to go and see the precious child's new toy, and put a good face upon it, and appear brightly and nicely envious. After all, why should she grudge Winnifred Twist a car? It was rather petty and beastly of her. But always the good things seemed to come to the wrong people.

Going out to inspect the car she found half Cinder Town gathered about it. Colonel Twist was there, and the Vachetts who always looked so sorrowful, and Mr. Stephen Perrivale, and Phyllis his red-headed daughter, and Commander Troton booming cheerfully, and the Brownlows, and poor Coode, who fixed his one pathetic eye on Mary and watched her as she stood between the Twist father and the Twist daughter. Why did not someone give Mary a car? Why could not he give her a car? That sorry old bicycle of hers with the rusty handle-bars and the rattling mudguards always made him feel a little thick in she throat.

"What a beauty!" said Miss Viner.

She smiled. They all smiled, save the Vachetts in whom sorrow had turned sour. The car smirked and glistened, and sleeked itself in its new blue coat. It was only a little car, but in Cinder Town a car was a notable possession.

"New balloon tyres—I see," said Coode—and was smothered by the Troton fog-horn.

"Very pretty, very pretty. Call her the Blue Bird—I suppose? Twist, you will be paying fines. That's the penalty."

Mary was looking at the Perrivale girl whose pale face was all screwed up under her beautiful flaming hair. Yes, to Phyllis the thing was unspeakable, bitter, mocking. Poor little Phyllis, so quick, and hot hearted, and hot headed, and generous and passionate even in her envy.