

Chapter One

There is something particular about the English landscape: claustrophobic, damp, silent. A contained savagery, a cramped stage where for centuries man and nature have grappled for ascendancy. The willow whispering her secrets down into the silent river, the red-tongued brambles creeping over unfrequented bridleways to render them impassible, the endless trickles of water which tell tales of escape from farms, canals, reservoirs. Ancient oaks bear mute witness to the devastation of rape fields, gnarled fingers of ivy strangle furious statues. Dark-eyed kites soar over bleached motorways, settling now and then on blue roadsigns advertising fried chicken. The dead give up their bodies to devouring worms in cemeteries filled with crooked gravestones stained with lichen.

In this clearing, surrounded by thorned hedges and despairing willows, a young woman lies awkwardly on the grass. She is wearing jeans, and one leg is bent behind her in an unnatural pose. She has a white cotton top and her blonde hair is spread out upon the neat, short grass. Her long fingers lie calmly upon the ground, palms facing up to the canopy of branches overhead. The scene is so still, so quiet and the only movement, barely perceptible, is the steady flow of blood from her eye down her cheek, nestling stickily into the stark white of her collar.

And then, from the other side of the clearing, a scream.

Chapter Two

Darius Frome approached the heavy iron gates that stood just back from the narrow road. The light was beginning to fade on this early summer evening and the tranquillity of the late June air was for him filled with anxiety. He had felt it uncomfortably in his stomach as they had walked the two miles from the station at Marlow. The closer they had come to this entrance, the further they had climbed up the long Quarry Hill road through the darkening woods, the more he had smelled the disturbance in the air. He hadn't expected it. Perhaps it wasn't a smell; it was a deeper sense than that, which communicated itself to him directly.

Now as they stood in front of the tall gates held on both sides by heavy stone pillars, he felt it sharply. All his senses were alive to it and it seemed for a moment that there were sounds in the air too, sounds of agitation. He heard the breeze whisper in the trees. A blackbird began to call.

He lifted up the rusty gate lock. He pushed at the wrought iron which shrieked from corroded hinges in the still evening air.

– Is this really it? The woman's voice was light, curious.

– This is it, Tink, said Darius.

– It's funny, she said, and her laugh created an island in the dense summer evening.

Darius looked down at her and smiled.

– That's good, he said.

He took her hand and they walked through the gateway. He pushed the metal behind him as they passed, and the gate clanged loudly, echoing down ahead of them into the gloom.

– You really lived here? she said.

They began to walk slowly, hand in hand, down the driveway away from the gates. He was taller than her, and carried a bulky rucksack on his shoulders. The straps dug into the T-shirt he wore over his broad shoulders, and his long dark hair reached the top of the canvas. One of his bare arms was covered in tattoos. His eyes glowed wide in the evening light, which was just strong enough still to see the tanned brown skin of his face. She wore a purple dress which brushed the cracked tarmac of the drive and green sneakers which made no noise as she walked. In the twilight her dyed silver hair was ruffled gently by the summer breeze.

He looked at her. She was searching ahead into the disappearing light and he could see the delicate line of her cheekbones. Her body arched, seeking to find what might be ahead and she seemed somehow both to reassure him and by her very presence to emphasise the disjunct of this return.

– Yes, I did. A long time ago.

On either side of the driveway, elms reared up out of the earth, their branches reaching out to entwine with one another above them, a canopy of twisting limbs and leaves which blocked out the last of the fading light. In between the tree trunks, grey lawns stretched out into the far distance on both sides. A monochrome movement caught his eye, a flicker of black on the grass.

He raised his arm and pointed.

– Rabbits, he said.

He looked back at the entrance gates as they continued their slow progress, and could still see the cold grey stone of the single-storey coachhouse they had passed. The shutters were all closed and a bird, heavy enough for an owl maybe, spread its wings and lifted itself from the roof. Fly away, he thought. Fly away from here.

– Are you OK, Darius?

– I'm OK. He squeezed her hand. You must be tired. I'm sorry I made us walk from the station. It used to be my walk home from school.

– I liked it. It's not Cornwall though, is it?

– It's another world.

He thought of the valley in Cornwall they had left that morning. The buildings scattered around, the old barn, the vegetable allotments where they all grew communal food, the brightly painted walls of the cottages. He missed the smell of salt water in the air. Couldn't he have brought that with him to overcome this sensation, this tangle of worry that sat in the pit of his stomach? Or had he just brought his concerns with him? Was that what he was feeling?

– Maybe Cornwall is over, Tink.

He could see her shake her head in the gloom and then she looked up at him.

– No, Darius, it's not. Not if you don't want it to be.

The others would be there now: someone would be making supper, the chickens would be being shut in for the night. He thought of the big skies that soared above their valley and out to the sea.

– I'm not sure what I want, he said.

She took his arm.

– Stop thinking. Just for once. Were you a little boy here?

– I guess.

– I can see you, she said, straining her eyes to look past the elm trees bordering the drive. You're running on the grass. You're laughing. You look happy, Darius.

He frowned.

– I don't think so.

She tugged at his sleeve.

– Oh but you are. I can see you!

She let go of his hand and stepped in front of him briefly, her eyes shining up at him, then she swept her arms around her, encompassing the darkening parklands.

– You are a happy little boy! she laughed, her voice ringing out in this still summer silence.

His deep, strong voice sounded tired:

– I was, Tink. Once. When I was a kid, before it all happened. I've never really told you about it. I've never really told anyone about it. I will. Now we're here, I will have to,

I know.

He frowned again.

– On top of everything else, he said.

She touched his cheek and her smile looked sad to him now.

– Sorry, he said and they carried on walking down the driveway as it curved past the outline of a broken statue on a plinth. He reached down and picked up an arm with a jagged edge where it had broken off.

– I remember this, he said. Why is it broken?

– You’ll have to remember lots of things, Darius.

He would, he knew. He would need to remember.

It was just four days ago, the previous Sunday, that he had found the envelope on the doormat in the little cottage in the valley where he had lived on and off for the last ten years. He had found the valley first. It had lain uninhabited for years, and the scattered farm buildings were falling apart. It was no more than about four or five acres in all, with one untarmaced road going in and out. Ten years ago it was a wilderness of gorse and fallen trees and broken glass. He and two friends had bought it cheaply at an auction and had begun the slow process of rescuing the land and buildings, gradually making the broken down cottages habitable, the land fit for growing.

Darius’s grandfather, Sir Zachary Frome, had been the leader of a political party in the 1940s called Level Ground which had fought for common ownership and the end of private property, and in honour of him Darius had proposed that they named the valley Level Ground too. He and his friends had wanted to create a new way of living, a communal place where people would share and grow together. It was more a vision of living with nature than it was a political endeavour but now, with what had happened over the last two months, it looked like that vision was dying and he felt despondent about its future.

He’d taken the white envelope into the kitchen and laid it on the table while he began making coffee. Once he’d sat

down, he ripped the envelope open. Inside was a card, stiff and cream-coloured, with these words printed in one line:

Down There. 4pm, 25th June 2017. You are invited.

He’d known the significance of the date immediately. It was a week away, but the date itself had its own particular meaning: Sunday the 25th June would be exactly twenty-five years since it happened.

Now, four days’ later, as he and Tink walked slowly and patiently down the long driveway, he went over it again in his head.

Only four people in the world knew about Down There. Him, his brother Francis, Francis’s wife Belinda, and his father, Sir Richard Frome. Any one of them could have sent him that card – or all of them. He hadn’t spoken to any of them for years. Occasionally Belinda would write with news, carefully written letters which kept him informed of family matters – the birth of her two children, his father’s dementia, her work and the work of his brother Francis – without imposing any demands on him. Occasionally he would send a postcard in reply, but the last time he’d done that must have been a couple of years ago.

– Tell me again, Tink: what did my brother say to you when you phoned him the other day?

Tink was silent for a moment, then:

– Well, I wasn’t really sure why I was phoning him, she said.

– Because I didn’t want to, he said. And I didn’t have his phone number. You were being nice to me.

– Tink is always nice to Darius, she said, and he felt her squeeze his arm again. What I most liked, she said, was getting the number from Directory Enquiries. When they said there was a number for Francis Frome at The Range near Cookham Dene, I said, it’s not pronounced Frome as in Rome, but Frome as in Room.

Darius smiled.

– It’s important, I said to the girl. These things are important. Anyway, she gave me the number, and I phoned,

and your brother answered, saying, Francis Frome – and he pronounced it like room, so I knew it was your brother.

– And then what?

– I said, my name is Tink and I am making a telephone call on behalf of one Darius Frome.

– What did he say?

– He said, I've been expecting this.

– Of course he was expecting it. He sent me the card.

– He didn't say that. He was quite rude. He just said, when is he coming, and I said we would probably turn up at some point on Thursday 22nd. And then he said fine, and then he put the phone down.

– And that was it?

She crossed her arms and stopped.

– What do you mean, that was it? I think Tink performed her task quite admirably.

Darius laughed, and was aware of the feeling of release which Tink's humour gave him.

– Tink is always admirable! I just meant, my brother didn't say anything else?

– Nothing at all. He doesn't have your aura, Darius. It is missing from him.

– Well, I couldn't say. I haven't spoken to him for fifteen years. Maybe it was a mistake coming early. We should have just come on the 25th, just come and gone on the same day. I don't know why I thought we should come earlier.

– You said you had a feeling, she said.

– I know.

– You always trust your feelings, Darius. They're the only things we can trust.

He knew that was true. But once again he sensed the lack of harmony about him, this persistent discordancy. He was starting to feel overwhelmed.

They continued to walk, Tink back beside him. Ever since he'd received the note on the 18th, she hadn't asked him what Down There represented. That was her way, not to probe or ask questions. Darius admired her natural

opposition to attachment, had admired it since they had met a few months before. It contrasted with his own determination to control, to manage, to overcome.

What did Down There represent to him? Everything and nothing. Everything that was primitive and essential and savage and beautiful about nature, about the world, about life itself. But nothing too. Because since it happened twenty-five years ago, he had never been back, and he had banished it from his mind. He had escaped Down There. Until now.

– By the way, Down There is a place, he said. It's on this estate. I'll show you before Sunday.

Tink didn't answer, because at that moment, the crowding elms ended their hold over the driveway, and the two of them emerged into open space. Ahead, a huge house stood quietly about a hundred yards away. As they stood, the moon broke free of some clouds overhead and a silver light suddenly played down over the lawns in front of them and illuminated the building.

The house was white and presented a long low facade to them, about a hundred and fifty feet from one end to the other. Bold lines of white stone ran horizontally between three floors, each with twelve sets of latticed windows separated by a dark render. The window frames were all painted white, and they glowed all along the front of the building in the moonlight. The overall effect was extraordinary, as though this were not a static building but a moment caught in time, an architectural capture of the fluidity of a powerful river. In the sudden moonlight, thick streams of ivy could be seen clinging to the walls, tentacles creeping out onto window ledges and up onto the tiled roof. The walls looked stained here and there where pieces of render had come away, as though the house itself were bruised. On either side of the low, wide building, huge rhododendrons, fat with green leaves and pink flowerheads, hemmed the structure in. Four tall sets of chimney pots along the ridge of the dark roof thrust up into the night air, seeking escape.

Chapter Three

– Blimey, said Tink.

Darius suddenly felt unprepared for this return, his first visit back to the Range, his family home, for twenty-five years. He stared at it, horrified.

– You’re serious? Tink continued. You lived here?

He nodded, not able to say anything. As though drifting towards a whirlpool, he felt his senses accelerating madly: he could smell new scents in the night air, he could feel the movement of the rhododendron leaves up ahead as they marked his arrival, he could sense beneath him the workings of the earth: the moles, the worms, the ancient chemistry of plants. His face now was caught in the moonlight: his brown eyes wide beneath a creased brow, his olive skin taut at the cheekbones. He swept a hand through his tangled dark hair.

Tink put a hand on his arm.

– It’s all right, Darius, she said quietly.

He realised his muscles were tight; a bead of sweat ran down his strong bicep, down towards a clenched fist.

– Breathe, she said.

He nodded, and began to take deep breaths, filling out his stomach and lifting up his chest, breathing out slowly into the still night air. He closed his eyes, and he let the noise in his head rage for a little until it began to quieten and he was able to imagine a familiar landscape in his head, the green of the Level Ground valley. He kept his focus on that for a few seconds, seeing the line of trees that stood on one ridge of the valley and then following the slope down to the familiar cottages and the barns and allotments. Then in his mind he saw a small boy standing still and looking back at him and he realised it was him, thirty or more years ago, playing here on the lawns at the Range. To the left, an old woman watched him: his beautiful grandmother, who first told him about his grandfather’s vision and how it all began, back then. Down There.

He opened his eyes again and stared at the silent house. Then he looked at Tink.

– It’s OK, he said.

Sir Zachary Frome was that rare beast which the English aristocracy produces every so often: a member of the landed gentry with passionately revolutionary views. Taking on the Baronetcy and possession of the Range on the death of his father in 1931, he was determined, at the age of just twenty five, to devote his life to the cause of social justice.

His father had commissioned the house from Sir Edwin Lutyens in 1903 as a gift to his wife, who had given birth to their son, Zachary, in the first floor bedroom suite three years later. The Fromes, given their Baronetcy by Queen Victoria at the start of her reign in recognition of services in India, had always embraced modernity, whether that meant building the Indian railways or taking membership of the Liberal party and supporting the suffragettes.

Yet Sir Zachary’s victory speech on winning the Parliamentary seat of Plymouth Devonport in 1936 gave little indication of the road he was subsequently to take. Standing up on a windy hill overlooking the naval dockyards running alongside the Tamar, with his new wife Felicity at his side, he cut a curious figure: tall, angular, his oiled black hair already beginning to recede from a prominent forehead, his eyes darting behind the thick lenses of round metal glasses.

– As a proud member of the Liberal party, I am humbled by your faith in choosing me as your Member of Parliament. I promise to serve the people of this city to the very best of my ability, with every ounce of passion and devotion I can muster. I will support you in your endeavours to support your families through your hard work and your dedication to your great city. I will take the side of the working man in his reasonable quest for fair wages for fair work. I will offer

a helping hand to the hard-pressed mother who has to feed her young ones and maintain a home. I will work tirelessly to improve the services and facilities of the city to ensure that sanitation and proper health services are available to all, not just the few. I hope you will come to feel vindicated in the faith you have placed in me and will see me as your true voice in Parliament.

His clipped, patrician tones received some scattered applause from the motley crowd in front of him: dockyard workers in thick suits with ties and caps, a group of schoolchildren fidgeting under the eye of their teacher, weary female cleaners on their way back from shifts. The diarist in the local paper referred sardonically to the Troublemaking Toff, in reference to the disquiet amongst some local business people at Frome's advocacy of workers' rights during his election campaign.

Later that day, on the train back to London in order to take up his seat in the Commons the following day, Zachary talked excitedly to his wife over dinner in the Pullman car.

– We've done it, Felicity! We're on the way. I think they received me as one of their own, don't you? My new constituents. How grand that sounds!

– You were tremendous, my love. You were towering.

– I'm going to make a difference, my dear. I respect our friend Orwell in going out to Spain to fight, but there is a bigger fight to be had here, in my opinion. There is great work to be done.

As he talked enthusiastically about his plans for alleviating the overcrowding in Plymouth's slum districts, Felicity gazed at him with a deep well of love and affection. Lady Felicity Frome – her title bestowed upon her six months before on their wedding day in Westminster – was two years older than her husband. At the age of thirty two, she had already achieved success and some fame as a novelist, in particular for her novel *Antonia's War* about the tragic story of a World War One nurse in Flanders.

She looked at Zachary now, sipping her glass of wine

and nodding as he spoke almost breathlessly about sewage improvements and antenatal care, and she felt filled with pride. Her blonde good looks, her bold crimson lipstick and amused smile had deterred many a potential suitor in the past, particularly once she began to appear in the newspaper diary columns as celebrated author Felicity Drummond. But Sir Zachary Frome had had an otherworldly quality to him when they were introduced at a cocktail party in Belgravia a year ago, as though he didn't really notice quite how high up the desirability scale Felicity lay. He had been delightfully open from the start, not hiding the fact that he had never heard of her or of *Antonia's War*.

– I shall visit Hatchards in the morning and purchase a copy, he had said at the party, on learning of her work. I don't have much time for leisure, but I shall make a point of reading your novel, which I am sure is excellent.

There was almost a childlike innocence about him which was hugely attractive to Felicity: a complete lack of guile, and a straightforward sincerity about his sense of purpose.

– I intend to stand for Parliament, he had told her at that first meeting. My father always planned to do so, but he left it too late. He would have made a fine Liberal Member of Parliament. I intend to make it my life's work, to further his own political views but to take them further, to redress the inequalities and the suffering which our country's obsession with class – an obsession held by some of my own family, I regret to say – has brought about.

This was all new to Felicity Drummond. The daughter of a Midlands industrialist, her family had never mixed in aristocratic circles, and certainly never discussed workers' rights over dinner. Intelligent, forceful, creative, she had had the confidence to joust in the London literary world of the 1920s and had swiftly built a reputation. Before meeting Zachary for the first time, she had just returned from a summer holiday in the south of France, staying at a villa with a rather cynical literary set – Cyril Connolly had stood on the table at a restaurant in Antibes and sung his own

lascivious version of the Marseillaise to the annoyance of the patron. It was 1935, the clouds of war were gathering over Europe, and the mean barbs of the artists and writers of her own set suddenly seemed feeble in comparison with the challenges faced by the world. She was enthralled by this serious young man who seemed determined to face them.

Zachary came up to her two weeks later at a rally close to Parliament Square where he was due to speak from the platform on the subject of Combating Fascism at Home. He had touched her arm as she was talking to someone, and held out a copy of her novel.

– I would be honoured if you would sign my copy, Miss Drummond, he had said, his eyes blinking behind those thick lenses. I have been carrying it with me all week in the hope I might spot you. I congratulate you on the verisimilitude you have achieved in the depiction of life in the trenches. It is most impressive.

They were engaged a month later and now, married on the train back to London after his own great success, she recalled her first visit to his house outside of London. She had stayed in plenty of grand houses over the years, so it did not strike her as odd that this curiously charismatic young man should own such an enormous building as the Range. He told her he had inherited it together with the Baroncy on the death of his father five years before.

– You live here alone? she asked, as they wandered through the echoing corridors of the three floors, looking into dark rooms where furniture lay draped in sheets, the shutters of the windows clamped shut.

– I live in a few rooms on the ground floor, he said. I have a housekeeper who lives in Cookham. I have no need of butlers or maids – I am perfectly capable of boiling an egg. And my work gives me little time to spend on the administration of a house like this, so for the time being, I keep the majority of it as you see, slumbering.

– Show me the rooms where you live, she commanded. She was bold, but inside, hidden from his view in the dark

empty spaces of this mansion, she felt an overwhelming attachment to the place. She sensed how it energised him, and she was aware herself of the power it contained. There was something – what was it? – something very alive, very visceral about the house, despite its current draped and shuttered-up condition. She could almost hear the house talking to her as their footsteps echoed down the long corridors. No that wasn't quite it: it was as though the house were talking to itself, carrying on its own conversation in total disregard of their presence. Each of the figures portrayed in the paintings hung on the walls seemed not to look at her, but at each other. She was not remotely intimidated by this; rather, she felt she understood.

They descended one of the staircases back down to the ground floor and he opened a door.

– This is my study, he said, a little sheepishly. I don't keep it in much of a state for visiting authors.

The room was square, with a huge desk at one end, covered in piles of paper. Two walls were lined with books, with more of them stacked on the floor beside the two sofas. A silk paisley dressing gown was draped over a chair, and there were ashtrays filled with stubs on the floor. Another bold Lutyens flourish, an overhall fireplace with parallel lines of crystal shooting up from a mantelpiece dotted with invitation cards, dominated the main wall opposite the door.

Felicity walked over to the bookcase and inspected the titles. Biographies of nineteenth century political figures, hefty economics tomes, a battered copy of Marx's *Das Kapital*, bound series of left wing magazines.

– All very serious, she said. Not a novel in sight.

– I warned you, he said. I don't really have much time for entertainment. I teach three days a week at the school in Marlow, but now that I plan to challenge for the seat in Plymouth, I have even less time. It's difficult enough keeping up with the new thinking as it is, now I have to immerse myself in the inequalities of the city I hope will adopt me.

– But you must read fiction sometimes, she cried, settling

down on one of the sofas and taking out a cigarette. You must have a favourite novel, everyone does.

He reached down and lit her cigarette, then his own. He looked a little awkward, then strode over to one of the corner bookcases and pulled out a slim volume. He came over and handed it to her.

Felicity looked at the title and laughed.

– *Wind in the Willows*? A children’s book?

As soon as she saw the look of pained embarrassment on his face, she regretted her frivolity.

– Tell me what you like about it. I have to confess, I have not read it, so you have the advantage over me.

He sat on the arm of the sofa opposite her, still looking uncomfortable. Then he seemed to take a decision, as though suddenly, she could be trusted.

– As you can tell from my very poor analysis of your own excellent novel, *Antonia’s War*, I am no literary critic.

She smiled.

– I for my part am very grateful for that, otherwise you might with all justification point out the many injudicious phrases and awful clichés with which it is littered, she said.

– I doubt that, he said, with all seriousness. However, I have been taking an interest in some of our country’s writers, mainly with my own political views in mind. What I have discovered is that writers such as Mr Grahame – he held up the book to show her the cover again – and others such as Thomas Hardy and William Morris and Lewis Carroll have all been fascinated by the same speculation which dominates my mind with ever increasing force.

– And that is? she asked.

He leaned forwards.

– The transformative power of landscape over the national psyche. All countries, all civilisations, have their poets. One thinks of Don Quixote in Spain, Goethe in Germany, Mark Twain in America. But what binds this collection of English writers of the last fifty years is what I have identified as their common aspiration to create a spiritual vision of

Englishness. A country of byways and hills and woods and rivers where the inhabitants were gifted by Nature herself with an understanding of Oneness, of the equality of all things under the sun.

He stood up and marched back over to the bookcase, returning with another book. He showed her the cover: *Jude the Obscure*, by Hardy.

– You will know this book, he said, his eyes now shining. You will have read it and understood it far better than I. But what I admire most about it is the author’s depiction of our landscape, and his sympathy for young Jude Fawley who walks all the way to Christminster only to find the company of man a bitter disappointment. A disappointment made all the more difficult for him after his own sense of wholeness and contentment in his county of Wessex.

He paused for a moment, staring at the two books in his hand.

– It is all a part of what I think I am on the verge of discovering, he said at last. A new politics for our country, but one not based upon just logic or economics or even justice itself. Of course those must be at the heart of any truly democratic and revolutionary movement. But what I am working on is a politics of belief. A politics which can give a man a spiritual world in which he feels at one both with his fellow man and with everything around him.

He stubbed his cigarette out forcefully.

– At heart, I wish to create a movement in this country which takes as its guiding principle the natural equality of all people, of all living creatures, of the natural world itself. A movement where no man has rights over another, just as no salmon in the river Thames down below this house may stake a claim over his neighbour for ownership of the water through which they both glide.

Now he was silent, and Felicity looked at him. He was extraordinary.

– Read me something, she said gently. From *The Wind in the Willows*. Read me your favourite passage.

Zachary looked up and seemed embarrassed.

– You must forgive me, he said. I sounded deranged, no doubt.

– You sounded no such thing, she said fiercely. Read to me.

He opened the volume, looked through the pages, and then with a satisfied Ah!, he said:

– There are so many passages in this book which I admire. I used to have it with me often when I rowed my little boat here on holidays back from Eton. But let me read you from the most remarkable chapter in the book, Chapter Eight, *The Piper At The Gates of Dawn*. Then tell me if you think it is a children's book!

He cleared his throat.

– It is the chapter where Mole and Rat set out to find the lost baby otter, and after searching all night in their rowing boat, they come across an island they had never found before.

He began to read.

Then suddenly the Mole felt a great Awe fall upon him, an awe that turned his muscles to water, bowed his head, and rooted his feet to the ground. It was no panic terror – indeed he felt wonderfully at peace and happy – but it was an awe that smote and held him and, without seeing, he knew it could only mean that some august Presence was very, very near. With difficulty he turned to look for his friend, and saw him at his side, cowed, stricken, and trembling violently. And still there was utter silence in the populous bird-haunted branches around them; and still the light grew and grew.

Perhaps he would never have dared to raise his eyes, but that, though the piping was now hushed, the call and the summons seemed still dominant and imperious. He might not refuse, were Death himself waiting to strike him instantly, once he had looked with mortal eye on things rightly kept hidden. Trembling he obeyed, and raised his humble head; and then, in that utter clearness of the imminent dawn, while Nature, flushed with fulness of incredible colour, seemed to hold her breath for the event, he looked in the very eyes of the Friend and Helper; saw the backward sweep of the curved horns, gleaming in the growing daylight;

saw the stern, hooked nose between the kindly eyes that were looking down on them humorously, while the bearded mouth broke into a half-smile at the corners; saw the rippling muscles on the arm that lay across the broad chest, the long supple hand still holding the pan-pipes only just fallen away from the parted lips; saw the splendid curves of the shaggy limbs disposed in majestic ease on the sward; saw, last of all, nestling between his very hooves, sleeping soundly in entire peace and contentment, the little, round, podgy, childish form of the baby otter. All this he saw, for one moment breathless and intense, vivid on the morning sky; and still, as he looked, he lived; and still, as he lived, he wondered.

“Rat!” he found breath to whisper, shaking. “Are you afraid?”

“Afraid?” murmured the Rat, his eyes shining with unutterable love. “Afraid! Of Him? O, never, never! And yet – and yet – O, Mole, I am afraid!”

Then the two animals, crouching to the earth, bowed their heads and did worship.

As she looked at her husband now, still talking about his plans for Plymouth on the train back to London following his election, Felicity remembered the sense of wonder she had felt in that room in the Range nine months before as he had read from *Wind in the Willows*.

– I have never heard that, she had said quietly, when he had finished. It is remarkable. Pan himself. I had no idea.

He had looked up at her from the pages of the book.

– You see it, don't you? he had said.

And now, with his election, with their marriage, with their future together at the Range, she felt too as though they were blessed, as though they were on the verge of something great, something which could change the world in which they lived forever.