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Opening extract from

Farm Boy

Written by

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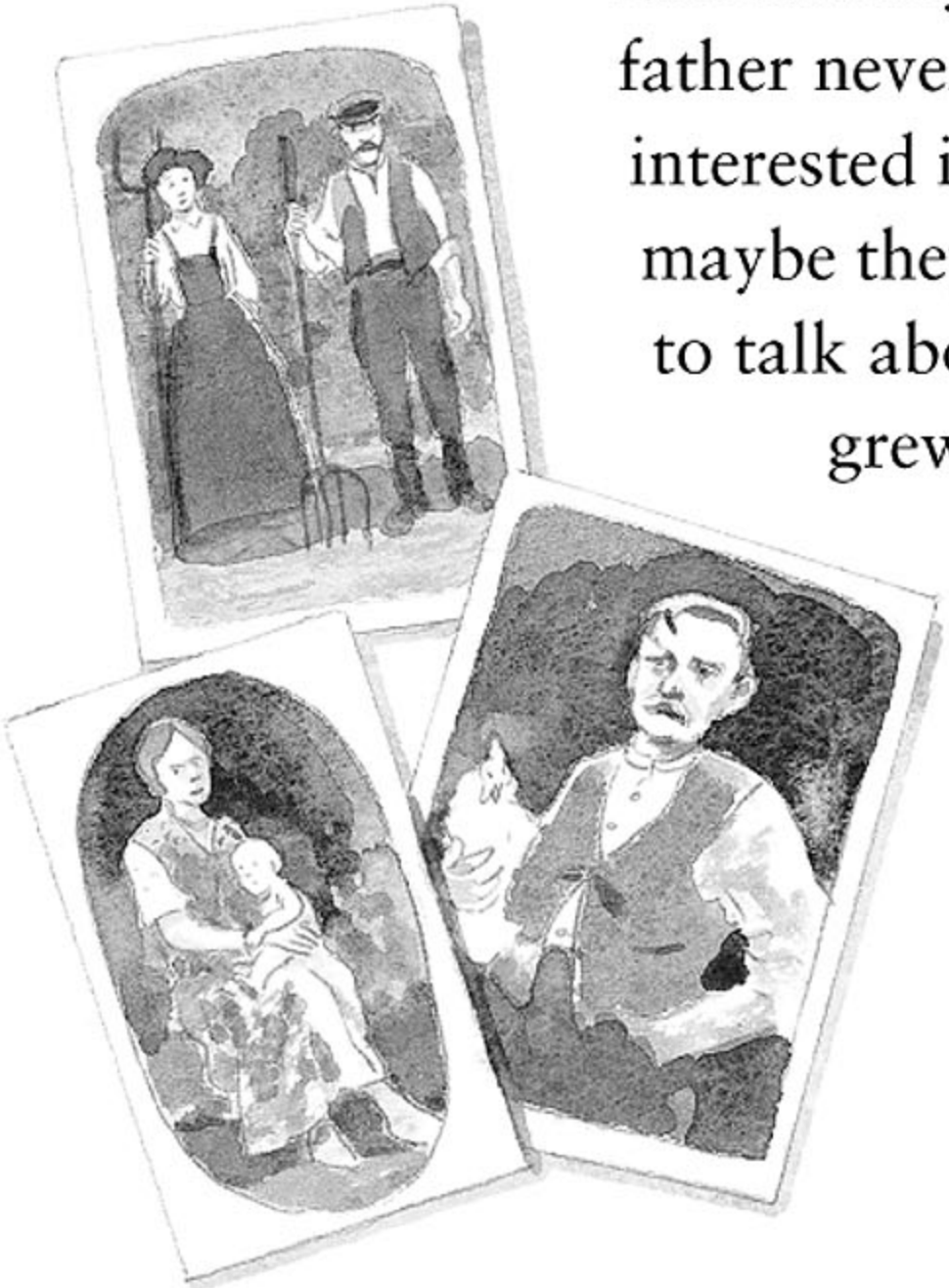
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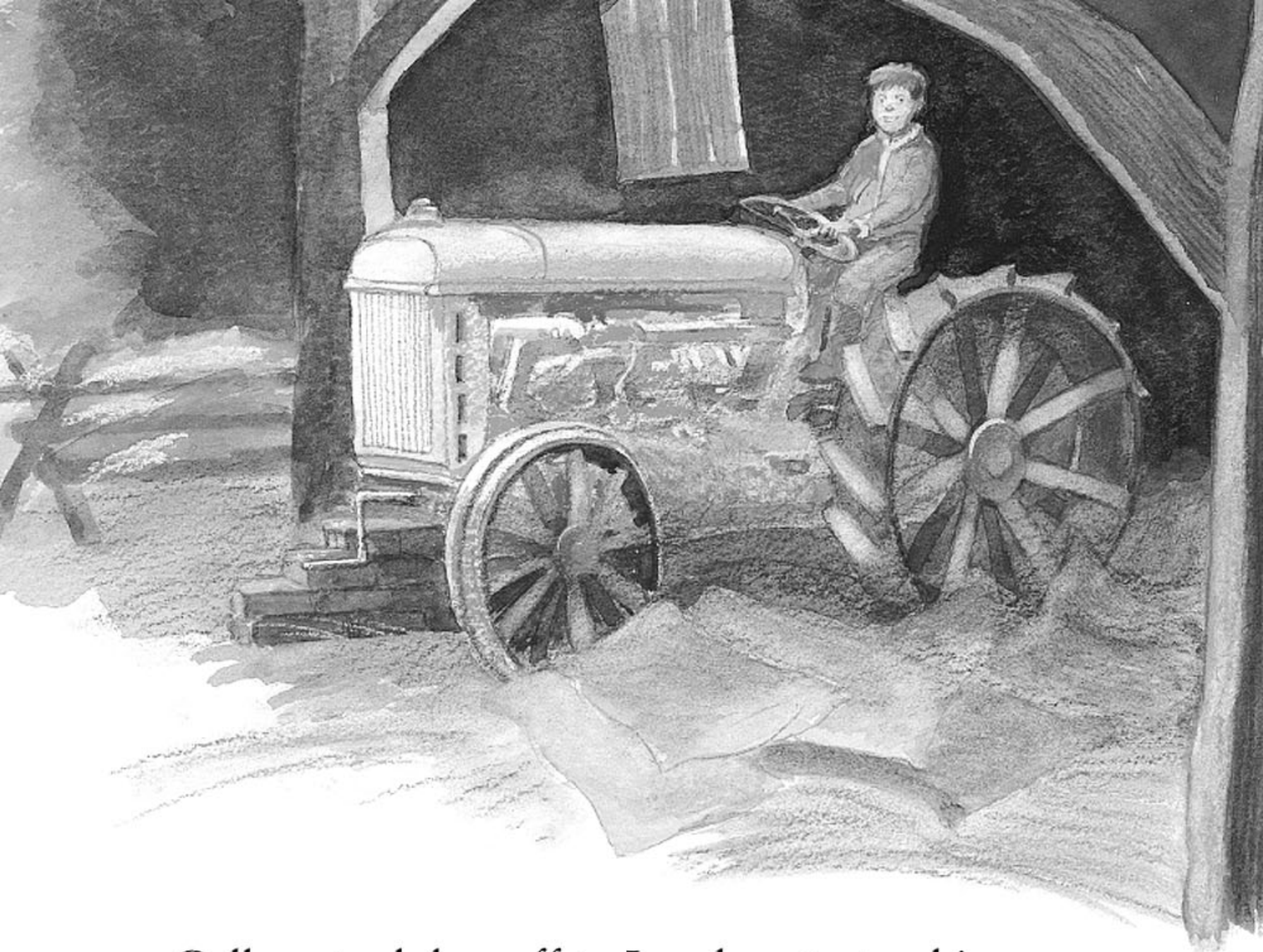


There's an old green Fordson tractor in the back of Grandpa's barn, always covered in cornsacks. When I was very little, I used to go in there, pull off the cornsacks, climb up and drive it all over the farm. I'd be gone all morning sometimes, but they always knew where to find me. I'd be ploughing or tilling or mowing, anything I wanted. It didn't matter to me that the engine didn't work, that one of the iron wheels was missing, that I couldn't even move the steering wheel.

Up there on my tractor, I was a farmer, like my Grandpa, and I could go all over the farm, wherever I wanted. When I'd finished, I always had to put the cornsacks back and cover it up. Grandpa said I had to, so that it didn't get dusty. That old tractor, he said, was very important, very special. I knew that already of course, but it wasn't until many years later that I discovered just how important, just how special it was.

I come from a family of farmers going back generations and generations, but I wouldn't have known much about it if Grandpa hadn't told me. My own mother and father never seemed that interested in family roots, or maybe they just preferred not to talk about them. My mother grew up on the farm. She was the youngest of four sisters, and none of them had stayed on the farm any longer than they'd had to. School took her away to college.





College took her off to London, to teaching first, then to meeting my father, a townie through and through, and one who made no secret of his dislike for the countryside and everything to do with it.

'All right in pictures, I suppose,' he'd say, 'just as long as you don't have to smell it or walk in it.' And he'd say that in front of Grandpa, too.

I have always felt they were a little ashamed of Grandpa and his old-fashioned ways, and I never really understood why – until recently, that is. When I found out, it wasn't Grandpa I was ashamed of.



I always loved going down to Devon, to Burrow, his old thatched house at the bottom of a rutty lane. He was born there. He'd never lived anywhere else, nor had any desire to do so. He's the only person I've ever met who seems utterly contented with his own place on earth, with the life he's lived. That's not to say that he never grumbles. He does – about the weather, about his television reception – he loves detective series, whodunnits, police dramas. He'll curse the foxes when they tip over his dustbins, and shout abuse at the jets when they come screaming low over the chimney pots. But he never ever complains about his lot in life. Best of all, he never pretends to be someone he isn't, and what's more he doesn't want me to be anyone I'm not. I like that in him, I always have. That's maybe why I've spent so many of my school holidays with him down on the farm in Devon.