



# The Bride's Farewell

Books Reviewed:

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Reviewer:

[Geoff Fox](#) [3]

~~Editor's Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

5

Pell has grown up in the village of Nomansland on the northern edge of the New Forest. The novel's first sentence finds her creeping from her bed to flee a home brutalised by a father who divides his ferocious energies between drinking, womanising and hell-fire preaching. She slips away in the small hours of her wedding morning; her bridegroom, a man she likes but does not love, has proudly offered her a future home 'bursting with children'. Not for her the 'grinding disappointment, the drudgery, the changelessness of life' endured by her mother. As Pell leads her horse Jack into the rainy night, Bean 'a small mute boy brought home without explanation by her father' stands waiting in her path to join in her escape.

Pell needs work. All her life, she has loved and cared for horses; she has the knack of calming the wildest of them. So, she sets off with Bean for Salisbury horse fair in search of employment. 19th-century railways and industrial cities lie beyond this novel's horizons. The horse is still essential for transport, work and pleasure; and surely the author's own expertise and passion for horses informs the whole novel. This is no nostalgic rural idyll, however. The mysterious gypsy woman who offers food, shelter and company to Pell and Bean has a bitter score to settle, and will not flinch from murder. Typhus rips away Pell's three brothers, her parents die in a blaze which is deliberately set. Most of the men she encounters are no less predatory than her father; a young woman roaming the countryside is fair sport. The workhouse which Pell searches for her orphaned sisters is more cruel than that suffered by *Oliver Twist*. So when she does find kindness, it is all the more striking in its generosity.

Like so many novels for this readership, this deftly plotted story reflects a transition into adulthood; but Pell's experiences are far from the self-absorbed adolescent journeys of much contemporary fiction. She finds her own place only by letting go those she has loved and cared for (Bean, a sister, even her horse), for they must find their own places. The solitary poacher with whom Pell finally shares bed and board is drawn with a complexity to match her own; time and exploration are needed before trust can grow between them.

Running Order:

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**Links:**

[1] <http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/childrens-books/the-brides-farewell>

[2] <http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/180>

[3] <http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/member/geoff-fox>